

The Church Alive

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 21, 2009 NCR Today

This past weekend I attended the annual Midwest Catholic Worker gathering in eastern Iowa. Summoned from across the country, over one-hundred and fifty Catholic Workers from twenty-seven different houses of hospitality came to share their experiences, find companionship, and join worship amid the rolling Iowa farmland.

Among this community I found a vision of the church that was stunning in its authenticity, vigor, and sense of renewal.

Sitting together we spoke of the different types of hospitality we provide in our neighborhoods: some host and staff soup kitchens; some care for homeless or migrant families; some provide places for those visiting imprisoned family members to stay; one even runs a free bike shop that teaches of the lives of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

In this crowd there were equal numbers of young and old. A constant sound carried in the wind of the fresh air was that of children ? laughing in the fields, drawing with chalk on the pavement, swinging innocently in the playground.

Food was potluck, and bountiful. Each community brought its own to share freely ? vegetables grown in backyard gardens, sweets and breads baked in home kitchens, goods donated and enjoyed despite the expiration stamp.

At night most of us sat together around a campfire, listening to new and old friends play guitar, violin, banjo, drum.

During the day we freely discussed whatever current issues were raised, expecting to learn from one another, and to find truth in our own experiences.

It felt almost out of time, as if in this gathering I was finding the eternal Christian life: one of charity, justice, and, as the Eucharistic prayer puts it, ?the work of human hands.?

What a wonderful vision of the church alive!