Inventing the Catholic Worker Family

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"The Catholic Worker movement is evolving in ways its founders didn't anticipate," declared a recent article in the *National Catholic Reporter*, explaining that the movement has evolved from a community of single people to a network that includes many family-centered houses of hospitality. Such media perceptions are widely shared by Catholic Worker families. "In 1933," explained Julia Occhiogrosso of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, "Dorothy [Day] didn't give us models for families who want to minister to the poor, Catholic Worker style."[1] These claims demand a more sustained historical analysis. Just how new are Catholic Worker families? What historical factors contributed to their emergence? Who *did* create the models for the dozens of families that today are feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, visiting the prisoners, and bending swords into plowshares?

My own analysis, which draws on archival materials, Dorothy Day's writings, articles in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, and interviews with a cross section of Catholic Worker families, suggests that Catholic Worker families have deeper roots than they realize.[2] As

1. Margot Paterson, "Finding Family at the Catholic Worker," *National Catholic Reporter*, 7 March 2003; and Julia Occhiogrosso, cited in Sharon Abercrombie, "Catholic Worker: Can it Work as a Family Activity?," *National Catholic Reporter*, 29 October 1999.
2. My research on the contemporary experience of the Catholic Worker movement is presented more fully in *Touching the World: Christian Communities Transforming Society* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2007). As part of that research, I have visited Catholic Worker houses of hospitality or farms in Duluth, Minn.; Winona, Minn.; Des Moines, Iowa; LaCrosse, Wisc.; Boston, Mass.; Worcester, Mass.; Hartford, Conn.; Marlboro, N.Y.; New York, N.Y.; and Baltimore, Md. My practice in conducting interviews has been to allow each person to decide whether to be quoted by name or anonymously, and to review all quoted material prior to publication. I have also benefited from the excellent oral histories published by Rosalie Riegle Troester (now Rosalie Riegle) in *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1993); and *Dorothy Day: Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003), as well as several oral histories available at the Dorothy Day–Catholic Worker Collection at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisc. More general studies of the movement and of Dorothy Day include Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origins of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1982); William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973); Patrick G. Coy, ed., *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the*

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early as 1936 Day had affirmed that the "reconstruction of social order" relied less on trade unions, cooperatives, and communes than on "the re-creation of the Catholic family, that microcosm of society and type of the Mystical Body."[3] Though she did not encourage families to live full-time at the New York house of hospitality, she consistently invited them to participate in the Worker's "lay apostolate" in other places and in other ways. Particularly in the decades after World War II, a wide variety of families responded to that invitation by inventing their own ways of combining family life with the vocation of the Worker. These models in turn inspired a new generation of Catholic Worker families who, since the 1960s, have argued that the Catholic Worker offers a compelling solution to the contemporary crisis of American family life.

I. Catholic Families and the Catholic Worker

The Catholic Worker movement was born at a paradoxical moment for American Catholic families. Immigration from southern and eastern Europe had been largely cut off a generation earlier, and the children of immigrants were beginning to move from the working to the middle class when the Great Depression hit. This shared experience of deprivation helped break down the barriers between Catholics and their Protestant and Jewish neighbors, and lent new relevance to the Church's advocacy for social justice. The tradition of Catholic social teaching, inaugurated in 1891 with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and reinvigorated in 1931 with Piux XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, encouraged lay Catholics to take an active role in promoting social justice, and non-Catholic politicians like Franklin Delano Roosevelt were more than eager to incorporate Catholic ideas like the "living wage" and the "industrial council" into their economic programs. During these years, moreover, a rising divorce rate and declining birth rate fueled widespread concern about family values among both Catholic and Protestants, leading to the formation of a wide range of initiatives and organizations on both sides of the denominational divide.[4]

Catholic Worker (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1988); William J. Thorn, Phillip Runkel, and Susan Mountin, ed., *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 2001); William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper San Francisco, 1984); and Jim Forest, *Love Is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994). Readers interested in encountering Catholic Worker life more directly may wish to contact one of the roughly two hundred communities listed at www.catholicworker.org.

3. Day, "The Family vs. Capitalism," *Catholic Worker* 3:8 (January 1936): 4.
4. Jeffrey M. Burns, *American Catholics and the Family Crisis 1930–1962* (New York: Garland, 1988), 1–9.

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All of these factors invited Catholic families to reach beyond the parochial ghetto. Yet when it came to the specifics of family policy, official church teachings drew a sharp dividing line. In an era when Protestant ministers were in the forefront of calls for family planning and even eugenics, Pius XI's encyclical *Casti Connubi* reaffirmed the traditional view that "the child holds the first place" among the blessings of marriage and strictly forbade all forms of artificial birth control.[5] In the years following *Casti Connubi*, a new circle of "Catholic sociologists" challenged lenient divorce laws, government intervention in family life, and the mainstream sociological emphasis on personal fulfillment as the purpose of marriage. Between 1920 and 1962, Paul Hanly Furfey (a close friend of Dorothy Day), Edgar Schmiedeler, Jacques Leclercq, John Kane, John Thomas, and Alphonse Clemens all produced major studies of the Catholic family, and most presented traditional Catholic teaching as the antidote to a family crisis caused by liberalism and industrialism.[6] All of this created a delicate challenge for ordinary Catholic families: they were invited to participate fully in an urban, industrial society without sacrificing patterns of family life rooted in the church's rural past.[7]

For Dorothy Day and her co-founder Peter Maurin, the solution to the dilemma was clear: Catholics could break out of the ghetto not by acquiescing to industrial culture but by joining in a radical struggle to "build a new society within the shell of the old." One did not need to join a religious order or renounce married life to participate in this struggle, for (as the liturgical movement insisted) all Catholics were part of the "mystical body of Christ." Indeed, the work of social reconstruction was a "lay apostolate" in which laypeople (both single and married) were to take the leading role, with priests and religious providing support. Thus, if it was difficult to raise a large family in the city, the solution was not to practice birth control, but to move to a farm. Drawing on the agrarian variant of Catholic social teaching known as Distributism, Day and Maurin believed that farming communes could simultaneously provide an alternative to industrial civilization and a context in which families could live out the ideals of

5. Pius XI, *Casti Connubi*, paragraph 11.
6. Burns, *American Catholics*, 10–105.
7. For general treatments of American Catholic families in the twentieth century, see Christine Firer Hinze, "Catholic: Family Unity and Diversity within the Body of Christ," in *Faith Traditions and the Family*, ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 53–72; and Sally Cunneen, "The American Catholic Family: Reality or Misnomer?," in *The Catholic Church in the Twentieth Century: Renewing and Reimagining the City of God*, ed. John Deedy (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2000), 57–71.

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Casti Connubi.[8] From the beginning, these farming communes or "agronomic universities" were at the heart of the Catholic Worker vision; houses of hospitality and roundtable discussions (the other two elements of Peter Maurin's three-point program) were intended in part as strategies for recruiting people to join the agronomic universities.

Families, in short, were close to the center of Catholic Worker theory. But the way Day and Maurin translated this theory into practice was shaped by another paradox. Neither was involved in conventional family life: Maurin was an ex-seminarian who never married, while Day was a single mother who had abandoned her common-law marriage at the time of her conversion to Catholicism. They stood outside the typical lay Catholic experience in other ways as well: in an era when most American Catholics were children or grandchildren of immigrants and thus products of the immigrant ghetto, Day was a convert from a bourgeois Protestant background and Maurin was himself an immigrant who had been raised in the French countryside. Much as Day valued the agrarian ideal of self-sufficient family farms, moreover, she could not fully envision a place for herself within agrarian society: by vocation, she was a journalist who thrived on the grit and energy of the big city. All of these tensions contributed to the ambivalent messages Day gave to families in the Worker.

II. Dorothy Day's Mixed Messages

Contemporary Worker families regularly recalled those ambivalent messages when they discuss their experiences. "In my readings of and about Dorothy Day, it seems she was not very 'family friendly,'" reflected Larry Purcell in a newsletter published for Catholic Worker houses in the 1990s. "Perhaps her early, awful experiences with families on the farm or her lack of a husband/father, or her own decision to ship her child out are part of her position; but she really does not seem to verbally (or in writing) strongly support families among the staff of the Catholic Worker houses. I would love to be wrong about this perception."[9] Purcell's perception was repeatedly echoed in the articles prepared for a 1999 gathering of Catholic Worker families and published in what was intended as the first issue of a newsletter on

8. For an overview of Distributism as it influenced the Catholic Worker, see Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist, 2005), 156–76.
9. Larry Purcell, *Catholic Worker Grapevine*, 11 July 1993, in folder 6, box 1, series W–54, Dorothy Day–Catholic Worker Collection (hereafter DD–CWC), Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisc.

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Family Life in the Catholic Worker Movement. "From the beginning of the movement sixty-five years ago," summarized gathering convener Julia Occhiogrosso, "family life has been in tension with the Catholic Worker model. Generally speaking there were two options; you either lived on a Catholic Worker farm or you sent your child to boarding school as Dorothy Day did. Certainly children have been raised in other Catholic Worker models but often with difficulties and in some cases where the children carry enormous burdens."[10] A number of scholarly studies have echoed the judgment that Day's influence has given the movement a significant "anti-family bias."[11]

Such judgments are not so much wrong as one-sided, failing to recognize the unsystematic and often contradictory character of her advice on a wide range of topics. "Dorothy did swing back and forth on this issue. . . . She did have an arbitrary streak to her," explained her long-time associate Tom Cornell, himself the father of a Catholic Worker family. "It's dangerous," he added, "quoting Dorothy."[12] The dangers of quoting Dorothy Day are especially evident in two early documents that often provide the starting point for discussions of Day's attitude toward families.[13] In the first of these, a circular letter sent to all Worker houses on August 10, 1940, Day declared that "Our workers have taken it upon themselves to try to follow the counsels of perfection. . . . Many can only go part of the way, what with family obligations, health consideration, even a different point of view. If they wish to work with us, we are glad and thankful to have them, but they cannot be said to be representing The Catholic Worker position." The second memo, written in 1948 but apparently never distributed, is even more strident, implying that families are the primary cause of conflict within the movement: "Ever since the work started, the single

10. Julia Occhiogrosso, "Reflections of a Catholic Worker Mom," *Family Life in the Catholic Worker Movement* 1 (May 2001): 24. Perhaps as a reflection of the multiple demands placed on Catholic Worker parents, no additional issues of this newsletter were published.
11. Marilyn L. Klein, "Families in the Catholic Worker Movement" (masters thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1991), 4, in folder 2, box 4, series W–7.1, DD–CWC; see also Elizabeth Flynn, "Catholic Worker Spirituality: A Sect Within a Church" (masters thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1974), 84, folder 9, box 3, series W–7.1, DD–CWC; and Frederick George Boehrer III, "Christian Anarchism and the Catholic Worker Movement: Roman Catholic Authority and Identity in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2001), 163.
12. Interview with Tom Cornell, October 3, 2004.
13. These memos, for example, are central to Marilyn Klein's excellent thesis, which rightly cautions "that both of these writings are in response to specific situations that arose in the community; caution should be used towards interpreting Day's responses as absolutely paradigmatic of her views." Unfortunately, in my view, Klein does not dig deep enough in searching for countervailing tendencies in Day's writings. See Klein, "Families in the Catholic Worker Movement," 51–52.

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people have gone along with it and all was peace and quiet until the problem of marriage and family has come up."[14]

Clearly, such inflammatory quotations demand a contextual analysis. The context for the first memo was probably the most serious crisis in the history of the Worker movement, and that crisis had much more to do with the Worker's pacifism than with families. Since the time of the Spanish Civil War, the *Catholic Worker* had taken a strong editorial stance against all violence and war, but in the wake of Pearl Harbor this position became controversial within the movement as well as beyond. One of the Worker houses in Chicago had its own newspaper, which supported the just war tradition, and several other houses began distributing this newspaper in place of Day's New York *Catholic Worker*. In Los Angeles, Workers even went so far as to burn copies of the New York paper. The primary purpose of the 1940 letter, thus, was to protest such actions and reiterate the movement's commitment to pacifism.[15]

Unfortunately, Day's response was not without ambiguity. She began by urging readers to "register with us their position as conscientious objectors," then acknowledged the "members of Catholic Worker groups throughout the country who do not stand with us on this issue." Next she drew a crucial distinction between those who "wish still to be associated with us" and are thus willing to distribute the newspaper from those who "take it upon themselves to suppress the paper and hinder its circulation." The latter group, she insisted, must "dissociate themselves from the Catholic Worker movement and not use the name of a movement with which they now are in such fundamental disagreement."

Day's comment about persons who "cannot be said to be representing The Catholic Worker position" comes immediately after this ultimatum. Seen in this light, her inclusion of Workers who can "only go part of the way" because of "family obligations" may be an offhand attempt to soften a hard message. Her intent, Day seems to be saying, is not to excommunicate antipacifist dissidents, but to identify a variety of reasons why some people or groups might *choose* not to affiliate with the Worker movement. She thus concludes this section

14. Dorothy Day to "Fellow Worker," 10 August 1940, box 1, series W–11, DD–CWC; Dorothy Day, Memorandum, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1948, box 1, series W–4.2, DD–CWC.
15. Day mentioned the burning of the papers in an interview with James Finn, *Protest: Pacifism and Politics: Some Passionate Views on War and Nonviolence* (New York: Random House, 1967), 375; and two Los Angeles Workers, John Hollow, Sr., and E. Virginia Newell, mentioned it in letters written to Dorothy Day, ca. September 1940, and 22 October 1940, box 1, series W–41, DD–CWC.

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with a tone of suggestion rather than command: "Perhaps it would be better in these cases for the House to disassociate themselves from the Catholic Worker movement. They can continue as settlements for the works of mercy, but not as Catholic Worker units." She even added that it would be to their advantage to do so, since official Catholic Workers were likely to face "hindrance from the Government" as long as the war lasted.

It is not clear that Day had seriously contemplated the possibility that families were unwelcome in the movement prior to writing this letter, but the effect was to make their status—as well as the status of individuals who were not pacifist but were willing to distribute the paper—uncertain. Were they expected to withdraw voluntarily, or simply to consider doing so? When Day wrote, later in the letter, that "there is no reason why we should not be associated together as friends and fellow workers, but there is every reason for not continuing to use The Catholic Worker name," was she thinking specifically of the houses that had suppressed the paper, or more generally of all the people who "can only go part of the way"?[16]

At least one Worker understood her to mean the latter and concluded that a movement that shunned families was destined to become just another religious order. "I am convinced," wrote Jimmy Flannery of the Pittsburgh house,

> that there are many who, because of obligations to that first unit of a Christian society, the family, cannot possibly follow the counsels of perfection, have done as much or more toward spreading and aiding the Catholic Worker movement as have any who live in the Houses. . . . Your ideals will stop with the exclusive few, living in Poverty at the Hospices, [becoming] a "lay-Franciscan" order, and eventually a clerical order, with the members performing the works of mercy solely for their own spiritual edification.

Being a Catholic Worker, Flannery added, should not be understood as a vocation, "except in the sense that one would say being Catholic is a vocation."[17]

Flannery failed to realize that this was precisely the sense in which Day understood the vocation of the Catholic Worker. His misunderstanding was understandable, for in 1940 the overwhelming majority of American Catholics assumed that a vocation was a call to the

16. Dorothy Day to "Fellow Worker," 10 August 1940.
17. Jimmy Flannery, Pittsburgh, to Dorothy Day, ca. August 1940, folder 1, box 4, series W–4, DD–CWC, cited in Klein, "Families in the Catholic Worker Movement," 53. Flannery's letter is one of about twenty in the Catholic Worker Collection responding to the circular letter; all of the others focus on the question of pacifism and make no response to Day's comments about families.

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priesthood or a religious order, and identified the "counsels of perfection" with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience that were binding on members of religious orders but not on laypeople. Day's own usage, however, was shaped by the ideas of liturgical reformer Virgil Michel, O.S.B., who appealed to the ancient doctrine of the "mystical body of Christ" to support a more ambitious understanding of the "lay apostolate."[18] In a series of circular letters that preceded that of August 1940, Day repeatedly suggested that the Catholic Worker was not merely a response to the problem of homelessness, but an attempt to revitalize the lay apostolate by asking laypeople to take the counsels of perfection as seriously as those in religious orders. When she mentioned the counsels of perfection, she cited Scriptures rather than the standard formula of poverty, chastity, and obedience and chastised those who are too quick to "distinguish between counsel and precept." "The counsels of perfection," she quoted Thomas Aquinas, "are . . . expedient for everybody."[19] Peter Maurin cited a recent papal encyclical to even more pointed effect: "We cannot accept the belief / that this command of Christ / concerns only / a select and privileged group. . . . The law of holiness / embraces everyone / and admits / of no exception."[20]

Given this history, Day's reference to the counsels of perfection cannot be seen as an attempt to remake her movement into a religious order. It was just the opposite: a reminder—for those who understood—of the vital importance of building up the lay apostolate. In this light, Day's suggestion that families "can only go part of the way"

18. For an overview of the theology of the lay apostolate in the twentieth century, see David O'Shea, "The Lay Movement in Roman Catholicism—Developments in the Lay Apostolate," *Religion in Life* 31:1 (winter 1961–62): 56–67. On Virgil Michel's influence on Dorothy Day, see Zwick and Zwick, *Catholic Worker*, 58–74.
19. Dorothy Day, *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 109–11.
20. Peter Maurin, "The Law of Holiness," in *Easy Essays* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1977), 137–38. This quote also appears in an editorial, "Pacifism Is Dangerous, So Is Christianity," *Catholic Worker* 8:3 (January 1941): 4. During the early 1940s, Day's clerical allies John Hugo (who regularly led retreats for the Worker) and Paul Hanly Furfey helped her clarify her view that all Christians are obliged to strive for a "maximum" standard of perfection, and that the "counsels" are means to that end that can be adapted to the different life situations of celibate and married persons. She also made a point of reprinting any magisterial statements that supported this understanding. See Day, "Counsel and Precepts," *Catholic Worker* 8:9 (July–August 1941): 2; Day, "Day After Day," *Catholic Worker* 10:1 (December 1942): 6; Furfey, "Maximum—Minimum," *Catholic Worker* 3 (May 1935): 5; John J. Hugo, "In the Vineyard VIII: The Two Rules," *Catholic Worker* 9:7 (May 1942): 1–2; Archbishop of Moncton, "Holiness for All," *Catholic Worker* 13:1 (February 1946): 4; and Stephen Thomas Krupa, "Dorothy Day and the Spirituality of Nonviolence" (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1997), 354. Ready access to Day's columns and other writings in the *Worker* is available online at http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/.

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is puzzling, but not entirely incomprehensible. It was, I believe, an awkward attempt to reiterate another theme that Day had sounded previously: that while the counsels of perfection are addressed to all, the specific way in which they are to be lived out may vary greatly from person to person. More specifically, Day took care in the previous circular letters to stress that one could be part of the movement simply by taking personal responsibility for performing the works of mercy in one's own circumstances. Not all Workers needed to be at houses of hospitality; indeed, even if a hostile government were to shut down all Catholic Worker houses, "our cells could never be suppressed or stopped from the works of mercy program laid down by Christ." Families could, for example, set aside one bedroom as a "Christ room" for a stranger who needed it. "The thing for us all to remember," Day wrote at Christmas 1938, "is the necessity of remaining *small* and progressing along the *little way* laid down by St. Therese." A few months later she announced the opening of several new houses, but then added that "we must never cease emphasizing the fact that the work must be kept small. It is better to have many small places than a few big ones."[21]

Day's intent in August 1940, thus, was surely not to force families out of the movement entirely. Instead, she may have hoped to liberate families from the sort of either-or thinking that assumes one is either entirely within the movement or entirely outside it. Family responsibilities might indeed prevent someone from living at a house of hospitality, just as ideological differences might prevent someone from distributing the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. But nothing should get in the way of the lay apostolate—of taking personal responsibility for responding to the call of the gospel. This flexible approach was confirmed in a letter sent just a few days later, inviting Catholic Workers to participate in the movement's annual retreat. That letter clearly assumed that people not living in hospitality houses might choose to participate, but it also stressed that they might need to take more financial responsibility by staying in nearby hotels if the farm was overcrowded. "Those who are living in the houses," Day wrote, "have first call on us for hospitality."[22]

III. The Easton Farm Crisis

Day's understanding of the lay apostolate also provides the general context for interpreting the memorandum of 1948. The more specific

21. Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers in Christ," Christmas Season 1938, box 1, series W–1, DD–CWC; and Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers in Christ," 21 February 1939, box 1, series W–1, DD–CWC.
22. Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers," 15 August 1940, box 1, series W–1, DD–CWC.

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context for that document was a crisis at the farming commune in Easton, Pennsylvania—the first of several farms sponsored by the New York Catholic Worker community. This farm was home to several families, each of which had been allotted a certain portion of the common land. But from the perspective of the families, who had been deeply influenced by the "distributist" ideas of Peter Maurin and Eric Gill, they had first claim on all of the farm's resources, because the family is the natural "unit" of society and because farming families are the only antidote to the evils of modern technology. This extreme belief was coupled with an idiosyncratic ritualism and a harshly patriarchal attitude toward women (who were, according to William Miller, "forbidden to speak unless spoken to" and "compelled to knock on the doors of even their own kitchens if men were present"). Such attitudes clashed sharply with Day's belief, articulated with increasing clarity after 1944, that the farm's primary role was as a place of respite for the urban poor and of retreat for Catholic Workers from across the nation. Soon the dissident families took to disrupting the retreats, confiscating furniture and food while assuring the retreatants that Day had betrayed the vision of Peter Maurin. Eventually, she simply handed part of the farm over to the dissidents (who remained there for several decades), sold the rest, and purchased a new farm and retreat center at Newburgh, New York.[23]

The 1948 memorandum, written near the opening of the Newburgh farm, was Day's attempt to clarify her vision for the new farm and prevent a recurrence of the unfortunate events at Easton. Given the troubling idiosyncrasies of some of the Easton families, she might have treated the situation there as an aberration, but instead she generalized, writing that in a number of situations (including that of her own daughter's growing family) "the problem of the family and farm came up, and who was to have control, where the authority lay, what money was coming to them, and always the family pointed out that they came first, that the family was the unit of society, that their temporal welfare had to be considered, that we are supposed to be making a place for the families on the land, the family community." Day responded to such attitudes by appealing to Peter Maurin's legacy, in much the same way that subsequent Workers would eventually appeal to her: "If people would go over the back issues of the Catholic Worker, they would find again and again that Peter was talking of workers and scholars on the land. He never went into the issue of families."[24]

23. Miller, *Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 202–4, 209–10.
24. Dorothy Day, Memorandum, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1948.

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In fact, a review of back issues of the *Worker* reveals that Day had proposed at the founding of the Easton farm that families would "have small houses built for them," while another writer suggested that each family be given two or three acres so that "the man and his wife will be lords on their own little domain."[25] But the underlying problem was more financial than ideological. Day knew, far better than the Easton families, that contributions to the Worker came primarily from people who wanted to help the poor, and she felt responsible for honoring those intentions. Since it cost more to maintain a family than a single volunteer, a predominance of families on the farm threatened the apostolate to the poor. "The literal fact," she wrote, "is that there is not enough money to support families [on the farms] and finance Mott Street [the urban house of hospitality]." Her proposed compromise was not to exclude families from the Newburgh farm, but to give them small plots of land so long as they committed to building their own houses and supporting themselves financially, through outside work if necessary. (This principle was accompanied with bitter recriminations against Easton families that allowed Peter Maurin and other single men to do their work while they "lay on the couch and listened to the radio.") The retreat house itself, she insisted, "must be managed by the single, and the deed to the farm as a whole should be in the hands of the unmarried."[26]

This privileging of the unmarried might suggest that the Worker movement was evolving into a celibate religious order, were it not for the fact that the memorandum began with a ringing reaffirmation of Day's commitment to the ideal of the lay apostolate. Before making any specific recommendations about families and their place in the movement, Day cited a letter from a cloistered nun who had said that "you are blazing a trail, indeed, in this work for God's poor," then added that "we are blazing a trail in the work of the lay apostolate, and not in just the care of the poor." The church had always cared for the poor, she noted; what was new with the Worker was Peter Maurin's emphasis on "personal responsibility" and the obligation of every person to directly meet the needs of others. She also took pains to "reassur[e] all of you who read this once and for all here in writing: that neither Peter Maurin nor I have had any intention of turning the work into a religious order."[27] These words echoed her assertion, in an earlier newspaper column, that "when people talk of our work

25. Dorothy Day, "To Christ—To the Land!," *Catholic Worker* 3:8 (January 1936): 1; and Cyril Echele, "An Idea of a Farming Commune," *Catholic Worker* 3:8 (January 1936): 2.
26. Dorothy Day Memorandum, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, Mary, 1948.
27. Ibid.

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turning into a religious community, I am impatient at this lack of understanding. This is work for *lay people to initiate and to manage.*" [28]

Indeed, far from intending to transform the Worker into a religious order, Day feared that the Easton families, with their willingness to subsist on the donations of others, might turn the movement into a religious order minus the celibacy. This fear led her to place a strong emphasis on the distinct responsibilities of the "married apostolate," noting that the majority of young couples who have met through the Worker "have recognized that in taking a wife and bringing forth children their status in the lay apostolate has changed, that their first obligation has to be to take care of their own and not to ask others to support them, no matter how hard they might have to work, but to go out and to earn the cash that ought to enable them to live as a private unit." Similarly, in the concluding paragraph of the memorandum she warned against the self-righteous tendency to draw too sharp a line between those who practice the lay apostolate at a Worker house or farm and those who contribute to such ventures: "We are in the lay apostolate, and we are supposed to be apostles *to the world*. . . . We can never get away from the fact that we are supported by the money of people living in the world, so we cannot be too self-satisfied about having left the world and industry or industrial capitalism."[29]

Given Day's vision of the Worker as a lay apostolate, William Miller was not quite right to conclude that "the message [of the memorandum] was clear: if you marry within the framework of the Catholic Worker, then you had better leave because your primary obligation is to your family."[30] Worker families, for Day, had no right to live on donations intended for the poor, but that did not mean they had to remain outside a lay movement committed to the corporal works of mercy. It simply meant that they were to take personal responsibility for being in it in a manner appropriate to their family situation. Unfortunately, Day's bitterness toward the Easton families—and toward previous families that had seen the poor as "rotting lumber" and "freeloaders"—prevented her from including positive examples of Worker families, apart from one reference to a "family in our midst"

28. Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 13:5 (June 1946): 8. She had not always been quite so clear. In a 1938 editorial, for example, she commented that "For a long time, Peter Maurin has talked about the need for an order of lay people, married and unmarried to live a life pledged to prayer, poverty and labor who will have the strength which comes from banding together": "Jesus the Worker," *Catholic Worker* 6:6 (December 1938): 4.
29. Dorothy Day, Memorandum, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1948.
30. Miller, *Dorothy Day*, 394.

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who "by means of such self-discipline and thrift, recognizing the needs of the family, have bought themselves a farm."[31]

These two documents, in short, reveal some bitterness but no systematic hostility toward families in the Worker. The bottom line, implied but never fully expressed in the two memos, was that while families had a limited role in houses of hospitality and on farms that rely on donations, they had a vital role in the larger movement to revitalize the lay apostolate (and to connect that apostolate more fully with the counsels of perfection). Indeed, it might not be too much to say that in pushing families out of the houses and farms, Day was pushing them into the vanguard of a movement that aspired not to institution-building but to the cultivation of smallness. This desire to see families at the heart of the movement, if not at the heart of the New York community, perhaps explains why, just weeks after writing the 1948 memorandum, Day was exulting in the family-friendly atmosphere of the Newburgh retreats. "We are the only Catholic retreat house in the United States," she wrote in a journal entry that was published in her book *On Pilgrimage*, "where mother and father and all the children can come and camp out with us for a few days to partake of refreshment for body and soul. Over the Labor Day retreat there were twenty-two children and eleven couples."[32]

If today's Worker families do not clearly remember this message of welcome, this is in part because her words about the role of married people in the lay apostolate were so often laced with ambivalence, or frustration at the loss of once industrious single volunteers. Many contemporary Workers have speculated that the root of this ambivalence may lie in Day's personal experience of family life. "Neither Dorothy nor Peter have much to say to me about the intimacy of family life with children," wrote Larry Purcell, a father and founder of a small Catholic Worker house. "Peter left his family in France and may never have married. As far as we know he had no children. Dorothy was raised in a highly dysfunctional family and made the decision to let others raise her daughter."[33] "While she was undoubtedly a saint," added Larry Holben in his contribution to the Catholic Worker family newsletter, "Dorothy does not appear to have been a

31. Dorothy Day, Memorandum, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1948.
32. Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 229. "On Pilgrimage" was Day's regular column in the *Catholic Worker*, and she published two books that shared its title. This one was a compilation of her personal journals from 1948; the other, subtitled *The Sixties* (New York: Curtis Books, 1972), is a republication of her columns and other *Worker* articles from the entire decade of the 1960s.
33. Larry Purcell, "Reflections of a Catholic Worker Dad," *Family Life in the Catholic Worker Movement* 1:1 (May 2001): 18.

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very good mother. . . . Tamar appears to have been shunted off repeatedly to this craft school, that farm or community, these friends, while Dorothy pursued the harsh and dreadful love that was her calling. And even when Tamar remained at home, the cost for the young child appears to have been at times significant."[34]

Such judgments have struck other Catholic Workers as presumptuous, especially in light of the fact that Tamar has refused to confirm them. Though her sense of privacy prevented her from giving details about her experiences, Tamar Hennessy told oral historian Rosalie Riegle that "it was wonderful to grow up [at the Catholic Worker]. So much enthusiasm! And everybody had found something they really wanted to do, so it was just so . . . so hopeful. I loved the spirit of that first ten years. But Dorothy would be away a lot, and I had a hard time with that. I even nick-named her 'Be-going.' I wanted Dorothy so bad! When she came home, she lit up my room, she lit up my life."[35] This account is revealing, because it suggests that Dorothy was not so much a bad mother as a mother who genuinely struggled to balance the demands of parenting with those of being a movement founder.[36] Given this experience, it is understandable that she would encourage other Workers to count the costs before becoming parents, though she may have failed to recognize the differences between her experience as a single parent and movement *founder* and the different possibilities for married parents who were simply *participants* in the movement. (Apart from those who have done significant prison time for civil disobedience, most contemporary Worker parents would say that being part of the Worker allows them to spend more, not less, time with their children.)

IV. Encouraging Words

But Day's seemingly harsh words of 1940 and 1948, coupled with the ambiguous record of her own parenting, do not exhaust her legacy for Worker families. As she traveled the country to raise money and encourage local groups to start their own houses of hospitality, Day often connected with people who were already combining hospitality

34. Larry Holben, "Family Life and the Catholic Worker," *Family Life in the Catholic Worker Movement* 1:1 (May 2001): 11–12.
35. Tamar Hennessy, in Riegle, *Dorothy Day*, 109.
36. Katherine M. Yohe's insightful analysis of Day's relationship with Tamar, "Dorothy Day: Love for One's Daughter and Love for the Poor," *Horizons* 31:2 (2004): 272–301, suggests that this struggle continued from Tamar's birth all the way to Day's death, with Tamar at her side. Interestingly, Day's regret at her neglect of Tamar during her childhood seems to have led her to invest a great deal of energy into Tamar's own family in later years.

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with family responsibilities, and she rarely failed to offer an encouraging word. Her very first published account of a speaking tour, for example, began by praising a Rochester mother named Teresa Weider as "an outstanding example of personal responsibility and hospitality. . . . She has always gone on the principle that what one had, one must share. She has six children, and a few grand children, and she has recently adopted another child. She has gone in for hospitality in a big way, and she hereby invites any and all of the Catholic Workers to stay with her whenever they are in Rochester or passing through."[37]

Such accounts became increasingly common in the pages of the *Catholic Worker* in the years after World War II, as the movement adapted to some dramatic changes in its social context. Before the war, the movement consisted primarily of urban houses of hospitality that both served and were staffed by single men unable to find paid employment. With the onset of war, unemployment declined dramatically, male Workers were either drafted or sent to conscientious objector camps, and most of the Worker houses closed. But the Worker's larger vision of a lay apostolate committed to social reconstruction remained salient for an increasingly broad array of American Catholics. The theology of the mystical body of Christ, which Day had learned from Virgil Michel and other liturgical reformers, was endorsed by Pius XII in his 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*. A series of World Congresses on the Lay Apostolate were held in 1951, 1957, and 1967, while in the United States an array of new Catholic movements articulated models of lay action in a variety of social arenas. [38] Prominent among these were the Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students, the Grail, the National Catholic Rural Life Movement, and the Christian Family Movement, which invited married couples to gather in small groups to discuss the connections between their faith, their families, and the larger society.[39] Like the Catholic Worker, these new groups hoped to have a transformative

37. "Day by Day Account of Editor's Travels Thru West and North," *Catholic Worker* 3:7 (December 1935): 1.

38. For an overview of the theology of the lay apostolate in the twentieth century, see David O'Shea, "The Lay Movement in Roman Catholicism—Developments in the Lay Apostolate," 56–43. As James T. Fisher has suggested, the release of *Mystici Corporis Christi* was only a partial vindication of Day's position, for that document expressed an understanding of the mystical body that was significantly more triumphalist and hierarchical than Day's own. See Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933–1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 47–53.

39. For an overview of the last movement, see Jeffrey M. Burns, *Disturbing the Peace: A History of the Christian Family Movement, 1949–1974* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). Leo Richard Ward, C.S.C., *The American Apostolate: American Catholics in the Twentieth Century* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1952), is a postwar publication that gives a vivid sense of the interrelations among these movements.

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effect on the larger culture precisely by adhering to the best Catholic values, and as a result there was a great deal of cooperation and mutual influence. During these years, the *Catholic Worker* served simultaneously as a chronicle of urban hospitality in New York (where families were not prominent) and as a forum for a nationwide network of activists, most of them committed to family life.

From the 1940s to the 1970s, Day's "On Pilgrimage" column gave constant testimony to the family orientation of this network. Traveling across the country, she stayed with families as often as at houses of hospitality, and typically praised her hosts for finding their own unique ways of combining the ideals of the Catholic Worker with the responsibilities of family life. In one 1946 column, for example, Day began by writing that "every year I like to make a real pilgrimage and visit some of our groups around the country," then devoted most of her space to families rather than official communities. In Saint Joseph, Minnesota, Don and Mary Humphrey, once members of the Milwaukee Catholic Worker house, were developing various craft projects while Don taught at the College of Saint Benedict. Al Reser, one of the founders of the Chicago house, was now working to support his four children, but also very interested in a "family Apostolate" that would help rebuild homes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet another family, the Gallaghers, were buying a quaint brick farmhouse where they planned to host "Catholic Worker parties" and "family conferences."[40]

In a similar column written five years later, Day characterized the movement as "the houses of hospitality, the farms, the homes of young married couples whose lives have been given direction and meaning by the teaching of Peter Maurin," then devoted most of her space to describing various models of family life. She described Saint Benedict's farming commune in Upton, Massachusetts, where four families with a total of twenty-eight children were in the process of carving out autonomous family farms—a change that Day supported, for the sake of avoiding legal tangles. After an idyllic description of evening storytelling, she wrote that "I am hoping that these farms, these families around the country will keep their own log books, their own journals telling of their life and struggles, for the comfort and solace of other families in the fields, factories, and work shops. So much beauty has sprung up in this synthesis of Peter Maurin of cult, culture, and cultivation!" In describing a visit to Rochester, she scarcely mentioned the hospitality house, while dwelling on the work of the ever faithful Teresa Weider:

40. Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 13:9 (November 1946): 1, 7, 8.

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> I esteem and love Teresa Weider because of her unfailing love for the poor. Her house has always had a Christ room and many were the men who went from our St. Joseph's house on Front Street to convalesce at her home. She has performed the works of mercy all through her married life, and her husband has aided her. She has six children of her own, now all happily married and in the family apostolate. To further this apostolate, Mother Weider has helped in paying hospital bills and buying layettes for innumerable mothers.

The column ended with accounts of two families, the Gauchats in Cleveland and the Murphys in Detroit, who were associated with more conventional houses of hospitality; there was virtually no mention of singles-dominated houses akin to the New York Catholic Worker.[41]

Day took a more theoretical tone in her next column. In her public speaking engagements, she mused, she always spoke of the "works of mercy" enjoined in Matthew 25, and of how "our salvation indeed depends on them." This led many people to think she wanted them to start up houses of hospitality, and to feel guilty if they failed to do so.

> But I try always to explain that it is not just in terms of Peter Maurin's program of Round Table Discussions, Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes that I am speaking. He said at the very beginning that the way to reach the masses of people, the poor and the destitute who did not know Christ (if they did they would be rich) was through the works of mercy. . . . Since it all does depend on each one of us, that means that we must each try to have a Christ room in our homes where we can shelter others.[42]

By maintaining Christ rooms, she implied, families could be at the center of the Catholic Worker movement (and of the lay apostolate), even if they were not at the center of every hospitality house.

"It is not presumption," she added in a later article, "to say that [God] meant most men to marry and bring up a family and our work as laymen is to try to work for that kind of social order where it is easier for men to be good, where it is easier for the family, which is man's natural community, to live."[43] A decade later she repeated the point that "the normal life in this world today and always is that of the family. The majority of us are called to marriage and not to celibacy."[44] She was also emphatic that families were as much a part of the movement as anyone: "When I speak of Catholic Worker families, I

41. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 18:3 (October 1951): 1, 2, 6.
42. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 18:4 (November 1951): 1, 2, 6.
43. Day, "Have We Failed Peter Maurin's Program?," *Catholic Worker* 20:6 (January 1954): 6.
44. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 29:6 (January 1963): 2.

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mean all those who have worked with us and who married, and are raising children and are encountering all the difficulties of supporting large families."[45]

Unfolding experience also led Day to soften some of the principles articulated in the 1948 memorandum. Though she had insisted that single people should control houses of hospitality, she could not ignore the fact that the Detroit and Cleveland houses, both anchored by families, outlasted most singles-oriented houses. At the same time, her awareness of the genuine struggles of many farming families led her to reconsider her view that families should subsist on wages rather than donations. Writing shortly after the death of Larry Heaney, a Catholic Worker farmer revered by many in the movement as a saint, she initially praised Heaney's fellow farmer Martin Paul for recognizing "the fact that houses of hospitality had to be financed by appeals. . . . A vocation for this work, and it was definitely a vocation, was something else again than a vocation for marriage. When a man got married, then it was up to him to be on his own, support his own wife and children, and go on performing the works of mercy, according to his ability, with a Christ room in the house, the meal set out for the needy guest, the clothes passed on." Thus, the Pauls and Heaneys had used their own resources to buy their farm in Missouri. But, she hinted, they might have taken the principle too far. The lot of the farm families, she suggested, was "indeed harder" than that of the houses of hospitality that had such ready access to donations. Even with hard work, a Catholic Worker farm "is not self-sustaining, it has to be helped. And this is the bitterness which eats into the souls of those Catholic Workers who are married, who are raising families, who are trying to live either on a wage or on the land. In their suffering they reject the idea of almsgiving. And to protest this, is the point of this entire article."[46]

In keeping with the new principle that families should sometimes be "helped," Day occasionally used her column to solicit contributions for Worker families that were struggling to make ends meet. After describing a family that wanted to build a farmhouse at Upton but lacked the resources, she reflected that "if anyone has any money to invest in a family, to draw dividends in heaven, here is an opportunity."[47] Several years later, she visited the family farm of Jack and Mary Thornton, who had previously lived both at Easton and with the Gauchats in Cleveland, and then challenged her readers: "Why don't

45. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 30:2 (September 1963): 2.
46. Day, "Poverty is the Face of Christ," *Catholic Worker* 18:16 (December 1952): 3.
47. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 18:3 (October 1951): 2.

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people invest in families? There certainly should be some of our readers who can, and I wonder if some of our readers can help out here. When we put in an urgent appeal for money for a house for a family in community, relatives and friends came forward with the needed cash. Here are our brothers in need of help."[48]

During the 1950s and 1960s, Day also took a keen interest in other movements that had created communities of families. The German Bruderhof community, which espoused total community of goods and staunch opposition to war, settled near the New York Worker farm in the 1950s. Both Day and several other Workers visited Koinonia, a communal farm in Georgia that took a strong stand for integration during the civil rights movement and suffered considerable violence as a consequence. During visits to England she came to know Taena, a community that began without religious affiliation but evolved into a community of Benedictine oblates. And in the early 1960s, Ed Willock, a Catholic magazine editor who had been involved in the original Worker house in Boston, helped found Marycrest, a rural community that at one point included eighty children and their parents. Each of these movements was featured repeatedly in the pages of the *Worker*; together, they may have suggested to Day that the conflicts at Easton were not as inevitable as she had supposed. Reflecting on all of these communities, as well as on the Worker farms at Upton, Massachusetts, and South Lyons, Michigan, Day wrote in 1963 that "I am overcome with admiration at the hard work, the endurance, the continuing vision of these families."[49]

48. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 24:4 (November 1957): 4.
49. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 30:4 (November 1963): 1, 6. See also Day, "Community of Brothers," *Catholic Worker* 22:5 (December 1955): 1; and "Pacifist Community Suffers Fire," *Catholic Worker* 23:8 (March 1957): 1 on the Bruderhof; "Bombing at Koinonia Farm, Americus, Ga.," *Catholic Worker* 23:2 (September 1956): 1; "Developments at Koinonia," *Catholic Worker* 23:3 (October 1956): 5; "The Story of Koinonia," *Catholic Worker* 23:6 (January 1957): 8; Kerran Dugan, "Interracial Community Attacked," *Catholic Worker* 23:8 (March 1957): 1; Robert Steed, "Two Weeks at Koinonia," *Catholic Worker* 24:1 (July–August 1957): 8, on Koinonia; Frank Goodridge, review of *Community Journey* by George Ineson, *Catholic Worker* 23:2 (September 1956): 5; and "Taena Community," *Catholic Worker* 23:4 (November 1956): 3, on Taena; Arthur Sheehan, "News from Marycrest," *Catholic Worker* 29:2 (September 1962): 7, on Marycrest. For more on these communities, see Benjamin Zablocki, *The Joyful Community: An Account of the Bruderhof, a Communal Movement Now in its Third Generation* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1971); Markus Baum, *Against the Wind: Eberhard Arnold and the Bruderhof* (Farmington, Pa.: Plough, 1998); Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); and Jack Holland, "A Vision on a Hill: Recalling Marycrest, an inspiring experiment in Christian community," at www.irishecho.com/newspaper/story.cfm?id=11704.

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Meanwhile, some of the early "agronomic universities" were evolving into clusters of traditional family farms. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the *Catholic Worker* consistently promoted both their own agrarian ideals and the "back-to-the-land" theories of Gandhi, E. F. Schumacher, and Helen and Scott Nearing. Indeed, Day's account of one Labor Day retreat suggests that families were the heart of the movement from the end of World War II until young peace activists began creating a new generation of hospitality houses in the 1960s and 1970s. She wrote in 1957,

> Since going to press last month, we have had a very interesting Labor Day conference, at Peter Maurin farm, our sixth annual discussion of pacifism, with conferences in the grove, many families attending with all their children, two and three year olds. Having no baby sitters, parents had to alternate in the care of the children so that they could listen in on the conferences. In some cases, the children came and played quietly in the dirt, made fortresses of twigs and stones, while we discussed peace.[50]

Those who see the Worker movement as a predominantly urban phenomenon may be struck by the rural character of these examples. Indeed, Day's enthusiasm for farming families may explain the widely held belief of contemporary Workers that Day was open to families on farms but not at houses of hospitality. The closing of many urban hospitality houses also shifted the movement toward rural life in the postwar years. But families also participated in the Worker's urban apostolate. Two of the houses of hospitality that survived the war, in Detroit and Cleveland, were able to do so because they were anchored by stable families. (Another house, in Rochester, achieved stability by incorporating as a 501[c][3] nonprofit. If coverage in the *Catholic Worker* is any index, this troubled Day much more than the presence of families in Detroit and Cleveland.)

When families did choose to participate in urban hospitality, Day's attitude was often positive. She was consistently supportive of Lou and Justine Murphy, who raised a large family while dividing their time between two houses of hospitality in Detroit and a farm in nearby South Lyons, Michigan. Their work, she wrote, was "evidence that a family can undertake works of mercy and raise their own children in a slum, not only without their being contaminated, but on the contrary demonstrating an ability to lift the level of intelligence and awareness of the other children in the neighborhood."[51] In Memphis, Day's friend Helen Riley ran a house of hospitality and day

50. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 24:3 (October 1957): 8.
51. Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 197.

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nursery with her husband and a son from a previous marriage. Day reported on Riley's decision to scale back after having a new baby, bemoaning "how little the married apostolate is accepted in the world even in this day of the lay apostolate," and stressing that even without a "house of hospitality in the formal sense" the Riley family would be "continuing the work."[52] And shortly after visiting a new house of hospitality on Oakland, Day reported that the Callagy family was "another example of how a family, given the temperament, the health and the energy necessary, can take care of work, family duties, and such an apostolate as this at the same time. There are five children and enough other young families in the movement so that they babysit and exchange hospitality."[53]

This is not to suggest that Day was always encouraging to Worker families outside New York. When Brendan Walsh and Willa Bickham had a baby shortly after starting Viva House Catholic Worker in Baltimore, Dorothy Day sent them a letter suggesting that they might consider moving on. But even that message had a positive effect, in that it helped them commit to valuing their family as much as their work of hospitality. "The tone I got" from the letter, Brendan recalled, "was make sure you do everything you can to raise your own family, because if you don't do that well nothing else will be done well. . . . She was clear to make some time for a family within a family."[54] Indeed, in the early years of Viva House, Brendan and Willa were able to adopt "a flowing attitude toward our Catholic Worker work" that in turn made it possible for them to sustain their commitment for their daughter's entire childhood and beyond.[55]

Is it possible to reconcile the "two faces" of Day's attitude to families? It might be too simple, though not entirely false, to say that Day liked families best at a distance. So long as the demands of family life did not interfere with her personal vision for the New York houses and farms, she was supportive, but when tensions emerged, she defended that personal vision with tenacity. A more generous interpretation might be that she was consistently faithful to the principle of "personal responsibility" that figured so prominently in Worker ideology. She took the responsibilities of family seriously and could be quite sharp in warning Workers not to jeopardize their families for the sake of the work. When families took responsibility for blending

52. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 23:4 (November 1956): 6.
53. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 31:9 (April 1965): 5, in *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 220.
54. Interview with Brendan Walsh and Willa Bickham, May 25, 2000.
55. Willa Bickham, interviewed by Rosalie Troester, November 7, 1987, box 3, series W–9, DD–CWC.

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family and Worker life, she responded positively, even encouraging compromises that seemed to run counter to her own ideals. But she rebuffed any explicit or implicit suggestion that she was responsible for creating a model of Worker life that would automatically work for families. In this sense, Julia Occhiogrosso was certainly correct to say that "Dorothy didn't give us models for families." The real work of "inventing the Catholic Worker family" was done not by Day herself, but by the families that figured so prominently in her columns.

V. Early Catholic Worker Families: A Spectrum of Possibilities

The early Catholic Worker families cannot fit into a single mold. In keeping with the principle of personal responsibility, each family found its own way of embodying such values as hospitality, poverty, and nonviolence in the context of family life. But it is possible to place these families on a rough spectrum stretching from those families that sponsored houses of hospitality similar to the New York houses, through families that devoted themselves to the agrarian ideals of the movement, to families that incorporated elements of hospitality or agrarianism into outwardly conventional lifestyles.

At one end of the spectrum were Lou and Justine Murphy, bulwarks of the Detroit Catholic Worker for several decades. Both came to the movement in the 1930s: Lou was part of the group that started Saint Francis House (for men) in 1937, while Justine became manager of Saint Martha House (for women) after a stint at the New York Catholic Worker. Lou served as an ambulance driver for American Field Service during World War II, after which he returned to marry Justine and resume Catholic Worker activities. They raised their six children in part at Saint Martha House and in part at a farmhouse at the South Lyons farm, which was for a time home to several other families as well. Since they were not always able to attract short-term volunteers, they often "count[ed] on the very men we have sought to help" to make the work manageable. The scale of their hospitality ebbed and flowed as economic needs changed, but they were still at the work when a new generation of Catholic Worker families began turning to them as mentors. Like Dorothy Day, they were quick to caution these younger folks that full-time hospitality was not right for every family. "As far as a family life in the Worker movement," Lou told Mike Cullen of Milwaukee's new Casa Maria community in 1968, "I think it's a very natural thing for some, not for all." A suburban

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family that volunteered at the house, he added, were "as much a part of the Worker as we are."[56]

In Cleveland, the Gauchat family began much like the Murphys. As a young college graduate unable to find suitable work during the depression, Bill Gauchat had written to Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. They encouraged him to "do something in your own locality" rather than coming to New York, so he joined with some local Jesuit high school teachers to found Blessed Martin House. His future wife Dorothy began volunteering there as a high school student, and soon distressed her parents by falling in love with Bill. Dorothy Day then intervened by arranging for her to do an apprenticeship with Catholic Worker artist Ade Bethune in Newport, Rhode Island. This strategy, which Day would later use to delay her own daughter's early marriage, kept the younger Dorothy connected to the Worker movement even as it allowed the couple time to discern the depth of their attachment. By the time they married—with some help from the local priest in Newport—friends of the Worker had donated a seventy-six acre farm in Avon, Ohio, just outside Cleveland. Dorothy and Bill began their family life at the farmhouse, where they performed small-scale hospitality while Bill continued to commute to the urban hospitality house.[57]

Though the urban house stayed open until 1954, the flavor of the Gauchats' work gradually changed. Early on, one of the homeless men who lived at the farm briefly kidnapped one of their children. Since Dorothy Day treated Dorothy Gauchat as a sort of second daughter (she was similar in age and personality to Tamar), it was natural for the younger woman to turn to the older for advice. "I remember going to Dorothy with it and praying," Gauchat told an audience in 1977, "and she said, 'Never do anything that you don't want to do,' and at that time I did not want to have the men in my house; I wanted to keep our family separate. But Bill and I still clung to this idea of personalism, and we believed and still believe that that personalism has to be in our lives, not just in one period but lifetime."[58]

A new avenue for personalist commitment emerged when nuns at a local hospital asked them to take in a young hydrocephalic boy. This

56. Louis Murphy, interviewed by Michael Cullen, January 23, 1968, folder 9, box 2, series W–9, DD–CWC; Justine Murphy, in Troester, *Voices*, 296–98.
57. Dorothy Gauchat, interviewed by William Miller, July 29, 1976, folder 30, box 1, series W–9, DD–CWC; Dorothy Gauchat, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester, January 20, 1988, folder 17, box 4, series W–9, DD–CWC.
58. Roundtable Discussion of the Catholic Worker Movement, Marquette University, November 9, 1977, folder 19, box 1, series W–9, DD–CWC.

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baby made such a powerful impression on the family that, several years later, they made foster care for children with disabilities their apostolate, always keeping "in mind that our primary vocation was our marriage and our children—our family." This work in turn evolved into Our Lady of the Wayside, a nonprofit agency which today has a $14 million budget and serves 182 residents in 41 distinct households. Before things reached that scale, however, the widowed Dorothy Gauchat withdrew to start over with foster care for AIDS babies, resolving to remain unincorporated as a way of preserving Catholic Worker-style personalism.[59]

Though Our Lady of the Wayside did not publicly identify itself as a Catholic Worker, the Gauchats retained their personal sense of Catholic Worker identity throughout their lifetimes. "I still am [sold on the Catholic Worker]," Dorothy Gauchat told historian William Miller in 1976, "even though I think that it means different things to different people. We're doing it in a much different way than Dorothy ever conceived of, but . . . Dorothy made this point so many times, that every house is different. . . . Each house will have its own character, because it's going to have different characters running it; each one has a different vocation, different weaknesses, and different strengths." Through all the changes, Day was quick to reassure her that "your vocation is to be where you are and doing the work that you are doing right now," and indeed, the Gauchats figure as prominently in Day's columns as any house of hospitality outside of New York.[60]

The Gauchats were certainly not the only Catholic Worker family whose center of gravity shifted from urban hospitality to rural life. Of the farming families who were part of the movement in the 1940s and 1950s, perhaps none were closer to Dorothy Day's heart than the Heaneys and Pauls. Larry and Ruth Heaney met at Holy Family Catholic Worker in Milwaukee, where Larry was a live-in Worker and Ruth was on the staff of the local St. Vincent de Paul Society. Early on, Larry developed a reputation as a Catholic Worker "saint" because of his transformative effect on the homeless guests and his ability to "forgive seventy times seven."[61] They spent the war years at Mary-

59. Dorothy Gauchat, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester; Dorothy Gauchat, *All God's Children* (New York: Hawthorn, 1976); and www.thewayside.org.
60. Dorothy Gauchat, interviewed by William Miller; Dorothy Gauchat, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester. Also see Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 197–98; Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 18:3 (October 1951): 6; Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 22:2 (September 1955): 8; Day, "Bill Gauchat: The Way of Peace," *Catholic Worker* 41:4 (May 1975): 3; and Stanley Vishnewski, "Gauchats Practice Hospitality," *Catholic Worker* 27:6 (January 1961): 1.
61. Dorothy Day, "Death of an Apostle," *Catholic Worker* (June 1949): 1, 6.

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farm in Easton, then returned to Milwaukee to raise money for a farm of their own. Soon they connected with Marty Paul, who had converted to Catholicism as a result of his association with one of the Chicago houses, and his wife Gertrude. In 1947 the two families purchased a twenty-five acre farm in Starkenburg, Missouri, which they named Holy Family Farm. At the time, the Heaneys had four children, while the Pauls' first child was a baby. They soon confronted the harsh poverty of farm life, which was exacerbated by tragedy: Larry died of pneumonia in 1949, while Ruth was in the hospital bearing their sixth child. Marty continued to manage the farm for the next eight years, but his wife's worsening illness eventually forced their family to move closer to her parents. Ruth Heaney then rented out the farmland, but continued to raise her children there because "I just felt it was easier to be poor on the farm." Indeed, some of the Heaney children were still there as late as 1992![62]

Given the difficulties they confronted, both Ruth Heaney and Marty Paul remembered their experience with some sadness. "We were never," Marty Paul told Rosalie Riegle, "a real community in the sense of what we wanted—you know, a Catholic Worker community, a communal farm. Because we had to make a living. I drove a school bus for a while, and I got some assistance through the GI Bill of Rights. . . . But we managed to survive, I guess."[63] "I think my kids suffered from these ideas," added Ruth Heaney, "because there were so few of us. . . . I know my oldest daughter really suffered over being different, but when she was about thirteen, she said, 'Oh Mom! I used to wish you were like everybody else, and now I'm glad you're not. But I do wish we could have had a community.'"[64] At the same time, they were regularly visited by other families drawn to the Worker's agrarian ideal, and at least one of those families, that of Jack and Fran Woltjen, spent many years on a nearby farm.[65] So if the Heaneys and Pauls never had a full-scale communal farm, they were certainly an anchor for families seeking to integrate rural and community life.

A similar pattern, without such a large element of tragedy, emerged at Saint Benedict's Farm in Upton, Massachusetts. This farm, which

62. Ruth Heaney, in Troester, *Voices*, 17–19, 23–26; Ruth Heaney, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester, July 14, 1989, folder 25, box 4, series W–9, DD–CWC; Marty and Gertrude Paul, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester, July 18, 1988, folder 4, box 7, series W–9, DD–CWC.
63. Marty and Gertrude Paul, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester.
64. Ruth Heaney, in Troester, *Voices*, 26.
65. Jack Woltjen, "Mo. And Penn. Farms Write," *Catholic Worker* 24:3 (October 1957): 8; Jack Woltjen, "On The Land," *Catholic Worker* 26:10 (May 1960): 3. The latter article reports that they had been farming for nearly nine years and were expecting their sixth child.

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grew out of the original house of hospitality in Boston, was the shared home of the Paulson, Roche, O'Donnell, and Ericson families until the mid-1950s. At that point, the families divided the land but continued to share life more informally. "It is again the world in microcosm as any community is," wrote Day after a visit in 1954. "To me, whenever I visit Upton, it seems family life at its most beautiful. . . . Cult, culture and cultivation! There is certainly more than a suggestion of Peter Maurin's synthesis here." Carl Paulson's work as a stained glass artist appealed to the many Workers who wished to restore the craft ethos of the Middle Ages, as well as providing his family with a somewhat more secure economic basis than farming alone. Like the Heaneys, the Roches and Paulsons were able to remain on site into the next decade, with at least some of the children finding ways to remain connected to the Catholic Worker movement.[66]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the pages of the *Catholic Worker* were filled with reports from families seeking, with varied success, to sustain themselves, and the ideal of community, on the land. In Nova Scotia in 1960, two families established Saint Joseph's Farm on 250 acres, dividing the farmhouse so as to combine cooperation with respect for the integrity of each family.[67] A year later, Pat and Mary Murray wrote that they had moved to a farm after ten years of thinking about it, adding that "we are still talking about the idea of community, but have never been able to interest anyone in this phase of the Catholic Worker. . . . Have a 3 room apartment over the garage which anyone interested in community life on the land could have, or come build here, there is plenty of land for a few more."[68] Among the most faithful correspondents were Jack and Mary Thornton, who had lived at both the Easton and Cleveland farms before attempting life as an independent farm family. "We surely count our blessings," wrote Mary Thornton after more than a decade of this lifestyle. "Nine lovely children, eighty-three acres of land to let them run on and twenty-five head of cows and calves who make a lively schedule for us to keep." They even found a neighboring family who had been reading the Worker for more than five years, suggesting that the network of families inspired by the *Worker* included many who never publicized

66. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 21:5 (December 1954): 2; "C. W. Weddings," *Catholic Worker* 31:1 (July–August 1964): 5.
67. Dick and Louis LeBlanc, "Community in Nova Scotia Tries 'Back to the Land,'" *Catholic Worker* 26:10 (May 1960): 3.
68. Pat and Mary Murray, "Letters from Two Families," *Catholic Worker* 27:6 (January 1961): 8. Four years later they were still on the land and still hoping for a sustained community to break their isolation: Murrays, "Appalachian Spring," *Catholic Worker* 31:10 (May 1965): 8.

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their efforts. Three years later, however, economic pressures forced them to move to California, where they hoped that "your younger, single idealists will . . . take over where we must leave off."[69]

The economic challenges of farming led many Catholic Worker families to combine part-time farming with more conventional careers. Julian Pleasants, a professor at Notre Dame whose family shared an eighty-acre farm with up to seven other families, was among the most articulate of this group, publishing widely on the Catholic Worker movement and the ideals of the lay apostolate. "As we got more into the idea that our farming would be part time," Pleasants recalled,

> we saw this as a much more universal pattern. Only so many people could manage to be economically independent, but if you were going to use this kind of life to create a good neighborhood for rearing children and to have opportunities for meaningful work for the whole family, you didn't need lots of land and you didn't need to be an expert in innumerable things. And it sort of freed you to focus on things that you felt you wanted to get the most out of.[70]

From Day's perspective, this approach was one way to achieve Peter Maurin's ideal of uniting the scholar and the Worker, and in 1961 she wrote that "Julian is the only scholar I know who has built his own home, to shelter his own family, a job which is never finished, so that as he said, his sons can boast that they helped build the house they were born in."[71]

Other couples felt little vocation to rural life but were also unwilling to be as intimately involved in a house of hospitality as Lou and Justine Murphy. For these families, the ideal of the Christ room had powerful appeal. Dorothy Day reported regularly on people like Paul Moore, an Anglican priest in Jersey City who lived with his family "in a colored section and have their doors open always to all the young folk of the neighborhood. Where love is, there God is."[72] In New York City itself, there were many volunteers like Bob Rambush, who moved out of Saint Joseph's House at the time of his marriage but kept such an "open house" in his new apartment that the house manager "threatened to make it an annex to our house of hospitality."[73]

69. Mary Thornton, "Monica Farm," *Catholic Worker* 27:3 (October 1960): 8; and Jack and Mary Thornton, "The Thorntons," *Catholic Worker* 30:1 (July–August 1963): 5.
70. Julian Pleasants, interviewed by Rosalie Riegle Troester, December 1, 1987, folder 8, box 7, series W–9, DD–CWC.
71. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 27:6 (January 1961): 2.
72. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 21:7 (February 1955): 4.
73. Ibid., 1, 4, 6.

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This was the experience also of Tom and Monica Cornell, who met and married at the New York Catholic Worker in the early 1960s. Though their wedding was held at the Worker, they immediately sought out a new apartment. "I didn't want to be so closely involved in the Catholic Worker community after I married," Tom Cornell explained to interviewer Deane Mowrer. "A family is a community of its own." The Worker house, Tom told me "had nothing but a storefront and a bunch of unheated apartments that didn't have showers, that didn't have toilets. The toilets were shared by everybody on the floor out in the hall. And I thought that the mother of my children deserved more than that."[74] Still, Tom continued to work as an editor of the newspaper, and the Cornells shared their new apartment's dinner table and shower with friends from the Worker almost every night. Through subsequent moves to Brooklyn, Newburgh, New York, and Waterbury, Connecticut, Tom and Monica continued to find ways to "work as Catholic Workers," even though it was only in Waterbury, when their children were nearly grown, that they "officially" declared their home a Catholic Worker house. By that time, theirs was just one of a new generation of flourishing, family-oriented Worker houses and farms.

VI. The Legacy of the Early Families

By the time Dorothy Day's movement was a generation old, her vision of the lay apostolate had received significant vindication from both church and society. At the Second Vatican Council, the gathered bishops issued an emphatic "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People" that called special attention to the apostolic work of families. As "the primary vital cell of society," each family was urged not only to function as a domestic church but also to "offer active hospitality, practice justice and other good works for the benefit of all its brothers suffering from want."[75] Meanwhile, the ferment generated by the civil rights and antiwar movements inspired dozens of young idealists to start new Catholic Worker communities across the country.

As was the case during the founding years, these developments had mixed implications for families. The first generation of Catholic Worker families, like leaders of other lay Catholic movements, assumed that their fidelity to the church's official teaching—including its teaching on family life—would enhance their work for social reconstruction. For Dorothy Day and others, the large size of Catholic

74. Tom Cornell, interviewed by Deane Mowrer, June 5, 1968, page 31, folder 10, box 1, series W-9, DD-CWC; and interview with Tom Cornell, May 23, 2000.
75. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, paragraph 11.

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Worker families was a countercultural sign of resistance to industrial efficiency, and Day rarely missed an opportunity to point out that a particular family had six, or eight, or ten children. But the notion that family life was itself a religious apostolate led many families to reflect critically on their own experience, and out of this reflection emerged significant resistance to the church's position on contraception. As more and more Catholics limited the size of their families, leaders in the lay apostolate stopped portraying birth control as a symptom of social injustice, and some even called for a change in the church's policy. The Worker-inspired Marycrest Community, which had been founded to provide Catholic couples the space to have large families, began tentatively speaking out for birth control in 1955.[76] And when Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the prohibition in his 1967 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Christian Family Movement founders Pat and Patty Crowley were among the loudest voices in protest.[77]

Catholic Worker families were not vocal on this issue, choosing to maintain their traditional focus on issues of war and poverty. But they were changing along with their cohort: while the first generation of Catholic Worker families often had close to ten children, those who started their families after Vatican II typically had four or fewer. This trend may have made it easier for these families to commit to the urban hospitality that has re-emerged as a hallmark of the Worker movement since the 1960s. The overall expansion of the movement has created a wider range of choices for Worker families: those families that do urban hospitality are often in middle-sized cities rather than giant metropolises like New York, and many have moved back and forth between urban and rural settings in response to their families' changing needs.

Both the shift to smaller families and to more involvement in urban houses of hospitality occurred during Dorothy Day's lifetime, and neither seems to have troubled her much. "It is interesting to see young families in charge of houses of hospitality," she wrote in 1967.

> David and Catherine Miller are looking around for a house in Washington, D.C. The Cullens [in Milwaukee], the McKennas [in Boston] and the Millers are the youngest in the field. But the Murphy family in Detroit, the Gauchat family in Avon, Ohio, have been operating for more than twenty years, and Karl Meyer's house in Chicago has been going five years. At Tivoli the Corbin family are in charge. It is a harder and more realistic approach, this family lead-

76. James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933–1962*, 101–29.
77. Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 174–83; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 221–27.

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> ership, and there is less room for pride and dissipation of energy. But it is a most particular vocation, and certainly none should undertake it without a vocation.[78]

Her words were prescient: though not all the houses she mentioned have endured, the presence of families as a central part of the movement is now widely recognized. Families like the Walsh-Bickhams in Baltimore, the Schaeffer-Duffys in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the Purcells in Redwood City, California, have raised children to adulthood within the context of a steady commitment to the work of hospitality. Vastly more families have taken to heart Day's hint that being a full-time Worker is not everyone's vocation; these families have sustained houses of hospitality as "extended community," spent brief periods of time as live-in Workers, or established Christ rooms, in most cases without calling anyone's attention to their efforts. There is, in short, a remarkable spectrum of Catholic Worker families today, though in many respects the spectrum is not that different from that which existed in the 1950s.

What is different is the number of families involved and the consciousness they bring to the Work. While Dorothy Day was quick to stress the value of the Worker vocation and the family vocation, today's Workers are more inclined to claim that the two vocations are interdependent. Many say that they would not have chosen to become parents were it not for the support of the Catholic Worker community and the inspiration of Catholic Worker ideals. "It is only," declared Julia Occhiogrosso at one conference on families at the Worker, "because of my years of testing out this faith in divine love in souplines and hospitality houses that I gleaned courage and desire to become a mother."[79] Many also suggest that the Worker's integrity as a lay movement depends on the inclusion of families. "So many people in the world are in families," Claire Schaeffer-Duffy told me. "That's their reality. So for the Catholic Worker to embrace so many families, it's a very powerful witness."[80] Such ideas are new and challenging for both the Worker movement and the Catholic Church as a whole. Yet they also build, in a way that should be acknowledged, on the efforts of seven decades of Catholic Worker families.

78. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 33:5 (February 1967): 6.
79. Julia Occhiogrosso, "Reflections of a Catholic Worker Mom," 24.
80. Interview with Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, January 5, 2002.

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