

A Holy Week reminder of finding Christ in the poor

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 2, 2012 NCR Today

Last week, Patrick Murphy-Racey, who is a deacon for the Knoxville, Tenn., diocese, found himself in Des Moines, Iowa, for a trip and wondered what he could do in a free afternoon.

Murphy-Racey realized he wasn't too far from the Des Moines Catholic Worker community. He found his way over there and spent the afternoon with the workers.

As anybody who is familiar with the Catholic Worker movement knows, Catholic Worker houses are normally a hodgepodge of things -- a place where a community of people responds to the needs of those around them in any number of ways.

Sometimes that includes bread lines for people experiencing hunger, shower houses for those forced to live on the street, or even just an open door for those who need to vent.

Writing about his adventure to the Des Moines house [on his blog](#) [1], the deacon reflects a little on how that community responds to those around them.

In a visit that way last fall, I also got to experience a little of the Des Moines house's community and was astonished at the number of things they do and the sense of family they've fostered. You'll see some photos of the community's 35th anniversary, which they celebrated last October, below.

Present at the celebration were many of the community members and others who have been touched by their work, including Martha Hennessy, a granddaughter of Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day, and Des Moines' mayor, Frank Cownie.

For his part, Murphy-Racey ends his blog on the experience recalling how a woman he met at the Worker House community volunteered to walk him back to his hotel. What he says speaks for itself:

The time passed quickly and suddenly I realized I'd been there for over five hours and had made many new friends. As I said my goodbyes to people that I had worked with, served, or spoken to, I was actually sad to leave them but it wasn't the best area and I wanted to walk back to the hotel while it was still light out.

I finally put my UT pullover on, set my cap on my head and walked out the back door to the alley. The woman with no teeth walked with me. I turned to her and asked, where are you going? She said, 'I'm going to walk you back over I-35 until you are in a better area. No one will mess with you if you're with me.' As we walked, she took out some prescription medication and asked me to read the directions for her. 'I don't like to have people see me with pills, especially for pain. I have a bad back and they give me pain meds for free but I had to promise not to take more it says on the label.' 'Do you need glasses?' I asked her? She threw her head back, opened her gummy mouth and laughed hard as she grabbed my arm

to steady herself.

When she finally calmed down and after she coughed for a while, she looked straight ahead as we walked and said, "I never learned to read, honey. My eyes are fine." And so it was that evening as the sun set over Des Moines, that Jesus Himself walked me out of that neighborhood and over the interstate to safety...

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[1] <http://dpatsblog.blogspot.com/2012/03/finding-christ-in-lent-in-spite-of.html>