

The Christ House Newsletter

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for friends and family

Easter 2007

He is Risen, Alleluia

The world can not bear to face the mystery of life and death, so it drapes Easter in the image of a bunny and egg hunting. The challenge of belief is still there, though; it is just ignored.

The disciples found it difficult to accept the Resurrection, and at first faltered. We then should not be too hard on ourselves. It might help if we focus on the cycle of death to life, which is constant in nature. And on the fact that no energy is lost in the physical world: energy changes to matter, and visa versa.

The difficulty in believing in the Living God is that we can not understand the fullness of life. Just as we can not imagine, hold within our minds, the magnitude of the cosmos, which is only creature, we can not imagine or hold God in our minds.

Is that not why Christ said we have to become like a child? Picture a child who grasps his father's hand as they move through the traffic and crowds of a busy city on their way to a destination never before experienced by the child. He doesn't know the way, but as long as he has his hand in his father's, he has no fear. He might even enjoy all the hustle and bustle of the city.

When Christ appeared to the disciples, he said "It is I; do not be afraid." He understands our fear, so he always extends his hand to us.

We want to thank all our generous and faithful friends who support us in many ways. Christ House is about life, making life new for men who have suffered much. Just as belief in the Resurrection is a challenge, so is accepting the teaching of the Mystical Body. We are His hands and feet. We are the only ones who can do the little miracles and healings for Him.

May your Easter be filled with faith and hope, and may you find God in all that come your way.



Three board members who came to dinner before the annual board meeting: L-R Br. Hanney, Mr. John Chermack, and Br. Draney.

Besides the usual business matters, the board reviewed and approved of all the work recently done on the building. It was agreed that the front entrance way and fencing were to be the next projects

COMINGS AND GOINGS

Presently we are housing seven residents, which means we have a full house. As usual, there have been some in's and out's since our last newsletter.

We have taken in a nineteen-year-old from Chateressia, a town in Ethiopia, who was referred to us by a former resident also a refugee from Ethiopia. The two young men had basically the same situation; the family moved to the U.S. as refugees, but upon arrival discovered that the housing was too small to accommodate all the members. The older boys had to move out, ready or not.

This young man is hurt and happy at the same time. He feels a certain amount of separation, even rejection, but at the same time realizes he has more space and opportunity at Christ House. He wants to go to college and is studying now for his GED; we have the computers and software to help in that. He will also have the example and help of other men who have done it.

We have also taken in a young man whose mother was brought to the U.S. by human traffickers. He has lived in the shadows for several years but now, since his mother has received legal help and broken free, he can start to live in the light. His family has to start from zero financially, so we are pleased to provide a space for him at Christ House.

In addition to beginning to work at the program for work as a medic, he is studying for the GED. Hopefully these two new men will be able to support and help one another.

Vijay, our live-in volunteer, is back after a long hiatus. He took a long journey that looped him back to Washington where he

used to live and teach. After a few months there he went to New Orleans to visit old friends from his native Sri Lanka. Mississippi was the next and last stop on the way back to us. He will spend some time with us helping run the house, and also volunteering at some local drop-in centers, soup kitchens, etc.



Yves, our Congolese ex-resident

Yves, a man from what was Zaire, and is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has left us after a twelve month stay. He worked at the Museum of Modern Art as a security officer/guide and loved doing it. He took some accounting courses at a community college, also became quite fluent in English, which is something that other residents from a French speaking country find difficult. His job is a good one and can lead to better things. We wish him well and keep him in our prayers.

Ibrahim, a resident from Ivory Coast whose asylum was denied, left us after only four months. He had applied for his work authorization and when it came, he decided to move on. We don't recommend moving after such a short time; it is better to build up a little nest egg and larger network of support, but sometimes the younger men want more

freedom than we can give, or they have a special circumstance that makes their move safe.



Ibrahim M Cheegwella, has moved on

Vladimir, our Russian-born resident, after many months of delaying by the Navy, was finally inducted. There must have been a lot of security clearance issues. He wrote us that the first two weeks were mostly paper work, but now is involved in the real boot camp.

While waiting for induction, he took a job at McDonalds, and they were amazed how quickly he mastered the register. They didn't know he had a degree in mathematics!

THE STORY OF "LUIS"

When I was at Christ House last month for the Board Meeting, I asked one of the residents who was at table with us what caused him to leave his native country and come to the United States. This is what he told us:

My family was very poor and lived in the country. We had to beg permission of the landowner to build a shack on his property. There was no money for clothes or books, and the school was miles away.

One night when I was twenty, we heard a noise; it turned out to be some guerillas who had encamped over the hill behind our house. The next morning they came and asked for food. They were desperate and had guns, so we scraped together whatever we had and gave it to them. A couple of hours later they were all dead. The army had been following them.

A few days later I went into town, and on the way back the bus was stopped by soldiers. They boarded the bus and took me off. They said, "We would like to ask a few questions, and if get the correct answers there won't be any trouble." I was blind-folded and thrown into a gas station garage where there were already several other young men bound. The soldiers were waiting to get a truck load, I guess.

They roughed me up, tied my hands behind by the thumbs, which is very painful. The thumbs swell up hurt terribly. We were there overnight, and in the morning we were taken to some kind of detention center where the real questioning began. The thing over the eyes never came off, so we were disoriented. We were beaten and practically starved for days on end.

My family and other people from the town went out looking for us, but couldn't find us because no one knew where this detention centers were and the militia kept on denying that we were in their hands. Even the people from *Human Rights* couldn't find anyone only headless bodies that would show up in an empty lot or in some dark alley.

I believe that my tormentors stopped when my family came and argued with the soldiers, assuring them that they knew for sure that I had been picked up from the bus on that Sunday because one of them had seen it happen. The bottom line was twenty-three days later I was released and told to go home. The only others released were those who had witnesses to the fact that they were abducted.

Soon after that day I decided that I could not, would not, stay in this land where one had to live in fear constantly. I set out for Mexico, then the United States. It took me several months with many hungry, hard days to get to New York, but I made it, and I thank God for it.

Upon my arrival to the USA I filed the application for asylum. Without a lawyer to push my case, and without a permanent home, I scratched out a living for twenty years until the asylum was granted."

"Luis" was referred to Christ House by Catholic Charities when his asylum came through. He has taken some courses and has worked hard on his own at learning to speak fluent English, although he had practically no formal education in reading and writing Spanish. A real survivor, "Jack of all trades" and fast learner, he works now for a Fifth Avenue furniture company making crates, pallets, and doing general carpentry.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

We have finally finished all the work that we had set out to do: The street entrance was entirely rebuilt, and we converted all the floors from linoleum or carpet to vinyl tiles. After waxing them they look better, are cleaner, and one can really see the difference!

Our Christmas holidays went as usual: fun filled, joyful, and full of very interesting surprises. We had presents for everybody thanks to The Twelve Apostles parish.

The two Latino residents were deeply touched; one was coming from a six month vacation courtesy of Homeland Security and the other had just finished the long trek you've just read about that kept him borderline to madness.

We are grateful to the IHM parish in Scarsdale, and to Dottie Meehan for supplying the generous and delicious holiday meal.

We were are very happy to hear that they were able to re-start their outreach ministry that has been beneficial to so many programs like ours.

We thank all of those who were able to help us and we pray that God will bless them all!



Vladimir, our sailor, with Luis, and Antonio

NEWS FROM THE "HOOD"

Sister Helen Travis, who passed away recently, would have been very happy to hear that the center she created, The John Travis Center has won The Union Square Award which consists of a grant of up to \$50,000.

The Center, re-opened last year after extensive renovation by the city, is a home for men recovering from drug or alcohol addiction and transitioning back into the community. The Center provides counseling, referrals, and other services. During the day, men living at the Center go to jobs, attend school, or participate in recovery programs.