



# Fools Fables

Volume I, Spring 2000



169 Homeless people died on the streets of San Francisco in 1999. The Faithful Fools and others joined Rev. Glenda Hope on December 21st, in front of SF City Hall in a memorial service to honor the lives of those who died.

Photo by: Lydia Gans  
Associate photo @ FF Ministry

## Faithful Fools Street Ministry

We are called to a ministry of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth. We seek to meet people where they are without judgment through the arts, education, advocacy and accompaniment. We participate in shattering myths about those living in poverty, seeing the light, courage, intelligence, strength and creativity of the people we encounter. We discover on the streets our common humanity through which celebration, community and healing occur.



Rev. Kay Jorgensen and Sr. Carmen Barsody

## Who Are The Faithful Fools?

Faithful Fools? Who are these fools on the streets of San Francisco? On your way to work you may notice them stopping to visit with a panhandler, walking arm in arm with a homeless elderly woman, or sitting on the curb with a drugged out kid. There is no one lower than the fool. It's all up from there, leveling us all to an equal playing field. As you pass city hall on your Greylines tour bus you may spot them demonstrating and leading a prayer service while advocating for housing rights or a living wage. The trickster, the fool "embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined. They are "the authors of the great distance between heaven and earth." Mid-day they may be guarding someone's piled high shopping cart while a hungry street person moves through the food line at Glide Memorial Soup Kitchen. As you sip a latte in your favorite coffee hang-out, you might get to hold one of the babies they watch to give stressed-out young mothers a break or play with children while another fool counsels a parent. You may hear they have just performed a wedding ceremony in the city jail while later picking up donated ice-cream cakes from Ben and Jerry's for the Homeless Welcome Center. They may stand before you as you are seated in pew or meet-

ing house speaking to the economic and spiritual qualities of poverty vs. abundance, urging your consciousness and generosity to rise up and follow. On some Saturdays, if you know someone who "knows", you could join them in a circle of lawyers, students, teachers, mechanics, clergy and many other "types" for a Street Retreat, sharing their interests, anxieties and preconceptions as they prepare for a day on the streets on their own. From poor to not-so-poor and back. "The best way to describe the trickster is to say simply, that the boundary is where he will be found. Sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it—but always there." The words of Lewis Hyde from *Trickster Makes This World* articulate the way of the world and the way of our work in the world.

The two original Fools, Rev. Kay Jorgensen and Sr. Carmen Barsody are familiar with the life of the fool in other contexts. Kay performed as a mime and clown in *The Street Circus*, a company that brought theater to the streets in Minnesota, and Carmen as a Franciscan sister working in the spirit of St. Francis on the streets of a barrio in Nicaragua. We quote Rainer Maria Rilke in our brochure as it speaks both to the necessity and difficulty of crossing the threshold of another's existence with love. "For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation."

### Needs List:

Financial donations  
People with Presence  
Van  
Socks  
Razors  
Mens underwear  
Big soup pot  
sharp knives  
votive candles

EVERY NEED BRINGS IN WHAT'S NEEDED.  
PAIN BEARS ITS CURE LIKE A CHILD. HAVING  
NOTHING PRODUCES PROVISIONS.  
ASK A DIFFICULT QUESTIONS,  
AND THE MARVELOUS ANSWER APPEARS.

-RUMI

Kay, Carmen & Susan:

*You all could not have come into our lives at a better time. If sooner or any later, we would not have been ready to receive any of the blessings you have soulfully given and helped us receive. You have been the major contributors of peace and showing me my faith and prayers are heard. You have and are continuing to show us we can have the life we need and deserve. Thank you...I just pray that more people who are of light come into our lives to guide us.*

*Thank you,*

*The McDaniel Family*



Susan Knutson

## Susan Knutson, OSF Faithful Fool

Hi, My name is Susan Knutson. I am a Faithful Fool and a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, MN. My background is healthcare, both in nursing and administration.

I came to Berkeley, CA ten years ago to work with a spiritual teacher and I continue to do so. In the Fall of 1998 I made a street retreat with Carmen and Kay in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. That experience began my transformation toward being a presence on the streets of San Francisco. The lines of separation between myself and those who live on the streets began to blur and eventually began to disappear. The streets of San Francisco and those who live on them, which once looked ugly and dirty, now became a place I felt welcomed and at home in.

Since February of 1999 I have been spending time at a hospitality center for homeless people, hosted by the Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. As my relationship with those who live on the streets grew, so did my desire to spend more time on the streets. So, in July of 1999 I was formally invested as a Faithful Fool. I'm also a member of the Fools of the Round Table (Board of Trustees) of the Faithful Fools. I also am present at and participate in the street retreats we do as well as spend Fridays in the Haight/Ashbury district in San Francisco.



Dream Team: Quentin Olwell, Carmen Barsody, Yielbonzie Johnson, Carleton Smith, Diane Sherman, Susan Knutson, Alex Mercedes, Joanne Klinnert, Jody Shipley, Karen Day, Kay Jorgensen





Kay Jorgensen and Jamillah, 1999

## Street Retreats: What Are They About?

Day long street retreats are a primary element of the ministry of the Faithful Fools. Since July of 1998 more than 200 people have joined us for street retreats. They have come from as close as the Bay Area and as far as Idaho, Boston and Chicago.

There is a certain innocence or place of not-knowing that we carry with us into the streets, but it is out of that place of not-knowing that we have the possibility to discover what is there for us to know, and to, as we say in our mission statement, "discover on the streets our common humanity". Myths get shattered. Our own stories get revealed to us. We begin to see the light, courage, strength and creativity in the people we encounter.

The day begins as the group is gathered with song and reflective readings. After a time of introducing ourselves, sharing what has brought each one to the retreat and the hopes and expectations that each one brings, an orientation to the layout of the day is given and then we set out into the streets for a number of hours. Adults go by themselves and youth are shadowed by an adult who previously has made a retreat. There is nothing that anyone must or should do except trust that they will be led to that which is theirs to encounter in the day. In the late afternoon we return to share our experiences and close with a soup and bread

supper, and if we're lucky a little wine and chocolate.

While moving through the day people are asked to walk with a consciousness to that which arises from within them - attitudes, judgments, fears, assumptions, etc. - about who is in the streets and why some people are homeless, especially at a time when we are being told that this is an era of great prosperity in the U.S. What is it we see and hear and feel as we have conversations with individuals, walk through the streets, sit on a bench in the U.N. Plaza, or in a drop-in center, stand in a food line waiting for a meal, become tired or have to go to the bathroom and confront signs that say, "restrooms for customers only", or "no loitering"?

We share the richness of the experience as it is reflected through the voices of some of those who have gone into the streets with us.

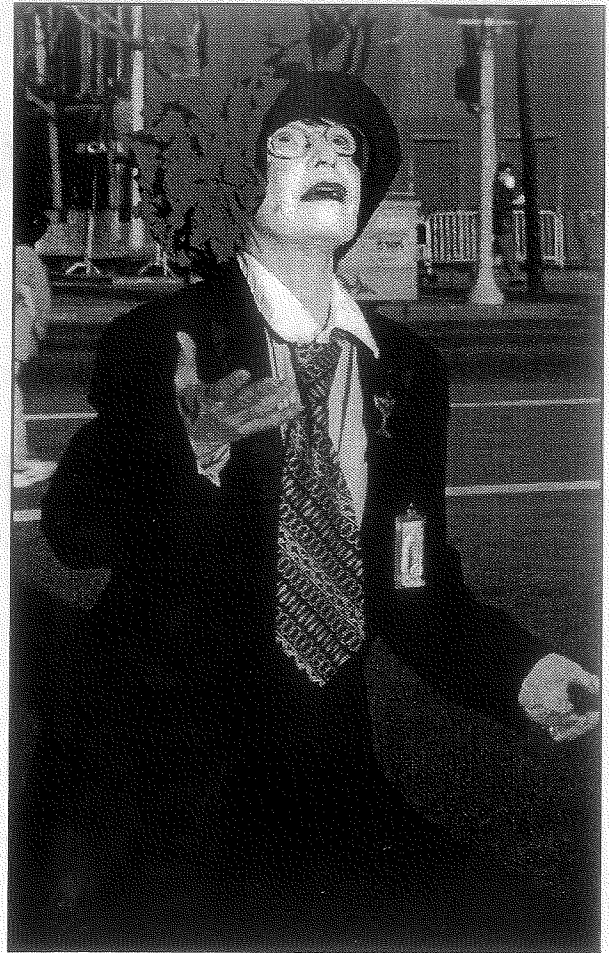
*"How? This is the question which is popping up in my head. How can we ignore this? I was sitting there in the U.N. Plaza watching people avert their eyes. What are they afraid of? Are they scared they will see themselves? I am one of those who turns my head. I am guilty of the same thing. What are they missing because they turn their heads. They avoid the pain but they miss out on the beauty, humanity and life which is there as loud as loud can be. Who are we protecting? When will we realize they are beautiful?"*

Caesar knew that it was my first time out there (at least with the 'mission' I had). He stopped his friends from talking about the bad, depressing parts of life. He wanted me to see the beauty. He wasn't 'homeless'. He had a home, 'the earth is my home.' Hey!!! That's my answer! The earth is my home! How can the earth be both our homes and at the same time he be considered lower than me and 'homeless'? We are both housed under God's roof and enjoy God's beautiful world. WOW! That means Caesar and I are the same. We are one. We are beautiful."

"The experience of today that touched me most deeply was the sense of community I saw. How we in our church, work place, schools, etc. try so hard to create a 'community' and today I found with the homeless men and women all the signs of a 'community'. I felt welcomed, included, heard, warmth, laughter, helpfulness in every way. I entered a stranger and left feeling a part of a totally authentic moment of real deep community. My sense was of being blessed in many ways. I carry this moment deep within me as I leave here today, my deep gratitude for this day."

"The day began with trepidation – what would I encounter on the streets? I walked down the UN Plaza and was somewhat taken back by the situation. Where would I begin? How could I help? Anger arose – how could this situation exist, and just a few feet from City Hall? How can we just walk by? And it occurs to me, that is what we do - we just walk by, perhaps overwhelmed by the situation, our feeling of helplessness, afraid to look at what is triggered by this supposedly less than pretty sight. But that is it – on the surface or first glance – it is just an unpleasant sight. But contact with the people in this situation changes everything. Suddenly they are no longer objects to be ignored but human beings with stories, pain, humor, struggles - just like me. It's really not very much different. The homeless represent deep seated fears we all have.

For me there was difficulty at times. I kept feeling an urge to change the situation. I felt the weight of the stories at times. But I also saw the lightness, the humor, the camaraderie. I was moved by the sense of community and the openness. At all times I felt welcomed in this circle. At all times. And that is amazing to me?



Oscar

### **Street Retreats are offered monthly.**

The dates for 2,000 are the following

Saturdays:

**March 25th**

**April 15th**

**May 6th**

**June 10th**

**August 5th**

**September 23rd**

**October 21st**

If you'd like to participate in one of the scheduled retreats or plan a retreat for a particular group please **call Kay and Carmen at 415-474-0508**. We ask for a donation \$25-\$100 (sliding scale) which goes towards supporting the ministry. Thanks.





## Fools of the Round Table

Rev. Kay Jorgensen  
 Sr. Carmen Barsody, OSF  
 Sr. Susan Knutson, OSF  
 Sr. Catherine Laboure Fitman, SP  
 Pastor Craig Geiger  
 Quentin Olwell  
 Karen Day  
 Fred Rabadoux  
 Megan Fitzgerald  
 Rev. Susan Starr  
 Edward Watson, LLP  
 Rev. Meg Whitaker-Green  
 Kaye Carlson  
 Ros Carol

In the coming issues we will feature the individual Fools of the Round Table. Each of them are wonderful and dedicated people who believe in the vision and ministry of the Faithful Fools. We are grateful for all they do. We'd like to say a special thank you to **Ed Watson, LLP** who has worked with us for more than a year as we have gone through the process of incorporation and applying for non-profit status. We also give great thanks to **Rev. Susan Starr** who has put a great deal of time into preparing a boiler plate grant proposal that can be used as a base for all our grant proposals. We are grateful for Ed and Susan's faithfulness through a lot of tedious work. We give thanks for the help of **Michael Keenan** who is serving as the broker for the building. He is an absolute saint! Thanks Michael!" **Megan Fitzgerald** was working at Ben and Jerry's Ice-cream in San Francisco as a cake decorator. She made a lot of folks happy as she donated delicious ice-cream cakes to The Welcome Center, a place of hospitality for people living on the streets. Thanks Megan! We also give great thanks to **Diane Sherman** for helping us create our brochure and now our Fools Fables newsletter. It is a joy to work together. Thanks Diane. **Yvonne Garcia**, our computer angel, has kept us technologically linked. Thanks Yvonne!

## Sr. Catherine Laboure Fitman, SP Faithful Fool

When I first became aware of the Faithful Fools I was delighted to become involved with homeless people on the street. Again! I say again because back in Massachusetts I had been very supportive of women in my community who were beginning to bring an awareness to many others of the needs in our local community, to make known what was happening to families, men and women living on the streets. I was able to help bring about a whole series of services, especially health services that provided care where the people were, and a network of doctors, nurses and other health professionals who eagerly joined us to help in this area. Shelters for men and women were established in many locations; food distribution centers and places where meals were served became needed and came into being as well as houses where people who were transitioning from living on the street would live while beginning to enter the various jobs available and many other services that were more critical for people.

Many people joined us and did fundraising, organizing, meeting with people wherever they were on the street. Many, many other programs were begun.

When I became involved with Kay and Carmen, and later Susan, I thought I was ready to move right along. The first thing I was asked to do was take part in a street retreat. That changed my beliefs and life in many ways. I thought I knew so much. My first retreat opened up my awareness. Even though I had been so much a part of my Massachusetts experience, I had never, not even once, gone out on the street and experienced what people really face. That sounds simple but it was a profound learning for me and has changed forever the beliefs I had and opened me to another world.

At present I am entrusted with the being with the older people who gather at drop-in centers, out on the street, in hotels and wherever I can encounter them. Another Faithful Fool, Kaye Carlson, has experienced the same desire so we shall begin our days together spending time in these places and being a presence to whomever we meet.



## There's a Place for Us

Leonard Bernstein's musical, *West Side Story*, reminds us of the need for a place and time to live out one's dream. The Fools are in the process of seeking funds to buy a building and copy business at 230/34 Hyde Street in the Tenderloin. Though we could continue to carry out our work without a space, there are factors about having one that would make a significant difference to the quality and expansion of what we do.

The copy business would be extended to include job training with computers and general work skills needed for employment or to run a business.

The building would also provide space for arts of many forms to be pursued. Working with us would be Martha Boesing, playwright, actor, and director doing improvisational theater; Diane Sherman, graphic artist, dancer, poet, muralist; Alex Mercedes, pianist, vocalist, composer and others. Bringing homed and homeless people together to make masks, do Authentic Movement, tell Tales and through many forms create together an atmosphere of beauty and peace while reflecting on the meaning of our lives in the midst of a great deal of violence and suffering.

A Space also provides opportunity for gathering groups of various kinds: Street Retreats, workshops, conferences, performances, reflection groups that include the people whom we accompany on the streets, the Faithful Fools, and our board, the Fools of the Round Table.

It would become our administrative center and a place for small services and rituals. People living in poverty are often in need of a ministerial presence for such rites-of-passages as weddings, namings and memorial services. We could provide a safe and comfortable place for these to occur. We could also provide hospitality for visiting groups who come to do street retreats.

At this time we are exploring with our various communities the possibilities for raising funds and a capital fund drive is forthcoming for the purchase of the Hyde Street building.

In the meantime there are ongoing costs of the ministry such as phones and beepers to stay in touch with people, storage space for clothes etc. our Public Mail Box, emergency housing funds, food and medical needs of those we walk with as well as travel costs, mailings and fundraising efforts. We thank you for your support up to now that has given us the means to carry out this ministry. As the ministry grows so does the need for your continued support. Until our non-profit status is established please make checks out to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Francisco.

\$850,000 would allow us to buy the building, do minor yet necessary remodeling, and establish the job-training program.

### THEREFORE IF:

**85 people give \$10,000**

**OR**

**850 people give \$1,000**

**OR**

**8,500 people give \$100**

**OR**

**17,000 people give \$50**

**OR**

**34,000 people give \$25**

**OR**

**170,000 people give \$5**

**OR WITH**

**85 MILLION PENNIES**

**the dream of the Faithful Fools to have a center in the Tenderloin becomes a reality!**

Dear Faithful Friends of the Fools,

We are excited to share with you our first edition of Fools Fables. It has been two years since the Faithful Fools Street Ministry came into being. Many, many wonderful things have happened in that time. Street Retreats are held monthly, and at times bi-monthly, drawing people of all ages and from various parts of the U.S. The "Fools of the Round Table" was created with 12 Fools who serve as our Board of Trustees. The Faithful Fools Street Ministry has become officially incorporated and has applied for its non-profit, 501(c)(3) status. More Fools have joined us with their presence on the streets, particularly Sr. Susan Knutson, OSF, Sr. Catherine Laboure Firman, SP, Kaye Carlson and Karen Day. We taught a class entitled, "Bearing Witness: Ministry in Community" at The Starr King School for the Ministry at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. In our commitment to share the experience of the street ministry with our own faith communities we have had many opportunities to create worship services and give homilies in Unitarian Universalist and Catholic churches in the Bay Area. And most recently we have taken steps to buy a building in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco as a center for the ministry. We would also live here out of a desire to establish a permanent presence in the neighborhood.

As the ministry grows we are in need of volunteers to help with all the pieces that make up the ministry. We need people to help in the accompaniment of individuals and families who come to us for help and support. We also need people who can do computer/office work, have accounting skills, design web pages, organize clothes and toiletries to be given out, make soup and bread for street retreats, smile brightly on overcast days and know how to juggle a variety of colorful objects in the company of other fools. If you are able to help in any way please call us at 415-776-4580 ext. 262 or e-mail us at [faithfulfools@value.net](mailto:faithfulfools@value.net).

We hope that you enjoy reading this first, historic edition of Fools Fables. If you know of others who would appreciate receiving a copy please send us their names and we will send one to them. We look forward to sharing with you in future Fools Fables.

Faithfully,

Kay and Carmen



### *Faithful Fools Street Ministry*

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