



**Reflections on 2020
Faithful Fools**

**Submitted to Our
Board of Directors**

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Carmen Barsody
Annual Report for 2020

Oh my, a year it has been, hasn't it? On January 15th, I posted a quote from Ken Feit on Facebook in honor of Kay Jorgensen's 3rd death anniversary:

*Fools live in hope,
and if they are going to work
in a situation that seems hopeless
they need the sense of folly.*

Well, I think I personally was a bit low on folly this year as we lived through the challenges of the pandemic. The year began with full days and full nights with classes and immersions and planning for a Fools Feast. As March was approaching, we were feeling a bit stressed at the fact that we had been going steady since the beginning of the year, once again hosting the class from USF on Women, Poverty and Catholic Social Thought, led another coming of age retreat, and having just finished a weeklong immersion with a group from St. John's and St. Ben's from Minnesota, and now were preparing to host, for the first time, two immersions simultaneously – one from Oregon State University and one from UC Berkeley – while at the same time preparing for the Feast in the first part of April. It all was a bit more crazy-like than folly-like. Then...Whooooosh...the pandemic of Covid 19 wiped the scheduled calendar clean, sent people to their homes for safety, and Sam and I were here at the Fools Court and in the Tenderloin, where so much seemed the same, except there were no formal programs happening inside the court. The sidewalks were filled with the usual activity of drug dealing and using, and those without shelter were more visible than ever as those who had shelter were inside. As many news articles and e-news articles have stated, the situation in the Tenderloin quickly became overwhelming.

As Faithful Fools, our mission of living in the neighborhood meant that we were here, our work continued. Scheduled programs inside the building ceased. Mercy Volunteers, Jolie Slater and Maggie Brannen sheltered in place in their home by St. Mary's hospital; Jackie Hider, Linda Chrisman, Sharon Weld, Ade Kroll and Ed Bowers all sheltered in their homes. Sam and I felt the loss of the other jugglers as our work of accompaniment and advocacy continued, and actually became more intense. Though many things were shaken up we found our steadiness and grounding in the understanding that our living here, our "life of presence" was a primary task, and from here we would discern our action. Sam quickly took the reins on the advocacy and I on the individual accompaniment, and we juggled with each other on the intersecting parts of our work.

Accompaniment: As an IHSS (In Home Supportive Service) provider I was deemed an "essential worker" so was able to go into people's rooms and to medical appointments to assist people. Currently I am a designated IHSS worker for 5 people.

There were also a couple of extraordinary accompaniment and very tender needs that we took on. For the first 2 months both Sam and I accompanied J through his cancer treatment, taking him daily to his radiation appointments, accompanying him to all his appointments, and making sure he had what he needed. In July, C had emergency spinal surgery, and because of our longstanding relationship with C, I was called upon to help navigate and coordinate her care as well as get in order her advanced healthcare directive. Then we needed to be available in the many months of ongoing recovery. Together with Linda Chrisman, Ollín Rocha, and me, we are

assisting her with many daily tasks like food shopping, laundry, cleaning, and offering the very needed listening ear when frustration with the limitations of recovery become a bit much. I also became a primary support for T, a man who lives around the corner from us. I received an e-mail from a fellow who had made a street retreat with us a couple of years back when he lived in the same apartment building with T. He asked if someone could assist T who was struggling with dementia and was declining. Once again, we are grateful for Fools like Julia Wald. With Julia's help, we were able to get legal papers, such as Power of Attorney and Health Care Directive. I came to know T's medical history and have become the primary contact for his doctors, as well as sharing his POA with one of his longtime and trusted friends. We've become a place for T to connect and even volunteer with mailings, and I manage his finances for him.

There have been numerous moments of accompaniment as we supported people in mental health crisis and bedbug infestations, as well as providing financial support for food and rent, especially in the beginning months of the pandemic when people lost their jobs and the whole city and country was scrambling on how to get support to the most vulnerable. A very uplifting relationship has been accompanying CT as she has found stability and hope in having a place inside a SIP (Shelter-In-Place) hotel. CT is now working toward becoming a healthcare worker through HomeBridge. She is a woman who Kay spent a lot of time with just listening and encouraging and caring about. We keep a picture of CT's mom in our front window. Her mother was shot and killed by her father when CT was just 7 years old. That picture allows CT to see her mother every day. She has lived that trauma and carries that loss every moment of every day. To see her growing strength and determination is a light in this tough year. As the year came to a close we served as a rehab and respite place for SW after her hip surgery. A pure delight to have her presence with us every day for two weeks.

Another light is our continued collaboration with RV and the HOT team (Homeless Outreach Team.) RV is an individual we have supported for years as he worked his way toward housing and employment after being released from prison. When we become aware of specific individuals who are more vulnerable and need a room, he assists us in finding one. Through RV we have come to know more HOT team workers and helped weave a mutually collaborative relationship as we work to get people a room off the streets. We have welcomed the HOT team into the Fools court to use the bathroom, have a cup of coffee, or just pause for a moment when they are working in the neighborhood. I could write many stories as our work of accompaniment is full and broad and constant.

Volunteers: Maggie Brennan and Jolie Slater, our Mercy Volunteers ended their time of volunteering in March when the shelter in place orders took effect. It was an abrupt ending, but neither felt safe to come into the Tenderloin with all the unknowns of COVID-19 at that time. Ollín Rocha came as a volunteer in August. Though we knew it would be a different experience than other years, we still feel the challenges. It is a loss not to have opportunities to come to know people in the Tenderloin community through in-person community meetings, or to experience advocacy work while attending meetings at City Hall, etc. He has spent time volunteering with Silena Layne at Compass Family Shelter. He has also been a great support in the individual accompaniment work, especially with C. He has helped do some painting and repairs. We are grateful for his flexibility and understanding, as well as his willingness reflect and learn through all the challenges. We have decided that, given the limitations and unknowns of this time of Covid, that we will not have a Mercy Volunteer for 2021-22 .

This Fall also brought the delight of two more volunteers. Anthony Graffagnino and Meg McGuire, two people who came to know us through Starr King. They are both spending one day

a week with us. Meg currently is the ministerial intern at the UU Church of San Francisco. She continues the tradition of walking the path up and down the hill between the church and the Tenderloin. Meg and Anthony have immersed themselves in the work of accompaniment. I have especially appreciated the opportunity to share our Fool's history and philosophy and see things anew as we walk and learn together.

Reflection/Deep Thought: With new people and all the challenges of this time, we have been reminded of the importance of intentional reflection. Though we take time for reflection along the way, we will have committed to sitting with one another on Thursdays for a time of reflection. As we accompany many people, it is important, as we do in a street retreat, to pay attention to what shows up for us – What gets in our way of being more fully present? What are we learning about ourselves and others? Through reflection we can learn and be resources for one another.

These complex times also require deep thought. I am tremendously grateful for the thought that Sam brings to every conversation, whether in organizing, consulting, advocacy, mentoring, teaching a formal class or over a cup of coffee with a neighbor or colleague. Sam is working more from Calistoga where she carries on with the many zoom calls with many groups, as well as has the necessary space to reflect on the work of these past 10 years, do some writing about the work and learnings, and to think her/our way forward. The renewed commitment to reflection and thought as we move forward is central to our life and work.

Street Retreats: We began the year with street retreats for various groups and anticipated a 7-day retreat in May. With the Shelter-in-place we ceased doing regular retreats. In November we held our first street retreat for our new volunteers and staff, and a few old fools. Meg McGuire, Anthony Graffagnino, Leah Laxamana, Ollín Rocha, Alex Darr, Susan Petro and I did a retreat together. I was so grateful to do it. I realized how I had missed this foundational of our practice, and how important it was to share with people who are walking and working with us. I hope to plan a few more retreats for this coming year.

Adaptions/New ways of doing things: Being that we have not been able to physically gather in the Fool's Court, we found ways to still honor special moments. It has been a tradition to build an ancestor's altar for Day of the Dead and to gather for a ritual. This year we created a window display in the lobby so from inside and outside the building we could honor those who have passed on from this earthly realm. At Christmas we decorated the lobby, stringing lights on the cactus tree, and hanging ornaments in the window to brighten the night and days. Also, we were part of creating the annual memorial for those who have died on the streets. Though we missed the procession through the streets carrying the banners with individual names, and singing from the heart with Melanie DeMore, and then gathering for the ritual in the plaza, we were able to hold a beautiful ritual of remembrance in Civic Center with a few religious and community leaders, and invite people to participate virtually as it was streamed on Facebook. This meant that more than 1,300 people were able to share in the ritual as it was accessible to people throughout the country and world. Even our friends in Spain, France, and Scotland viewed it. I believe that as people shared the link to memorial on their own Facebook pages that more people became aware of our work. This became evident as we received donations from people whom we'd never met and who had not donated before.

Our Building: We have continued to slowly work on the post-flood repairs and also address upkeep of the building. We bought window shades to cover the wall of windows on first floor to help keep out the chill in winter. We are still working at getting the floor heat hooked up. Carlos Guevara introduced a friend of his, Frankie of NorthSouth Plumbing, who installs floor heating

units, and he donated the heaters and labor of installation. The only thing remaining is to finish the electrical outlet for the heaters and then we hope we will have a little warmth on first floor. Carlos has donated much of his time in doing the electrical work, as well as installing acoustic panels on the ceiling to help lessen the echo in the rooms.

There are two long-time improvement needs that we are beginning to contemplate. The lack of adequate heat in the building has always been a challenge. Frankie of NorthSouth Plumbing said it could be done on the second floor. It would be about \$45,000 to install. It is a capital improvement that we could seek a grant for. The other need is to put ceilings on the bedrooms upstairs. This has been a longtime need that has presented itself over the years and I believe is necessary to provide some privacy and better rest for anyone who lives at the Fools Court. Carlos Guevara has said it is very possible and would cost around \$8000 to put on ceilings with insulation to help with warmth and noise. We would need to add a couple of new sprinkler heads, which would be a minimal cost. Having a ceiling on the rooms would also provide a kind of loft space above the rooms for storage, or even a sleep over.

Nicaragua: We continue to support the community and educational work in Nicaragua. The teachers and director of the school have also had to work with the challenges of the pandemic. They began the school year in January with 250 students, but with technology and economic challenges and with the many instabilities in the homes of the students, there were 175 students who completed the year.

Funding: We were very disappointed to have to cancel the Fools Feast, and the cancellation of classes and immersions meant that we lost significant income, yet we saved money with early departure of the Mercy Volunteers and other staff adjustments, including delayed hiring of Leah as a co-director. You will see in the financial reports from Daisy and Tim that individual donations and grants that were given to support our work in these times helped us end the year in the black, and with a generous surplus to take us into this new year. We are extremely grateful to all of you for your generous support and stewardship with us.

Sam Dennison

A Year of Racial Reckoning (and COVID too): It is a curious thing that before March of 2020, very few people here in the US or anywhere in the world really, thought much about the pandemic of 1918. Indeed, very few people even really knew much about it. When we think back to the 1920s, we think of gin joints and prohibition, wild prosperity followed by the stock market crash and a decade long economic depression. We think of the people who died in WWI and maybe in the Russian Revolution, but we don't think about the 50 million people who died from the flu. I have a hunch that not too many decades from now, we won't talk as much about the pandemic as we will about the uprising of white supremacists and the terror of their violence. My greatest hope is that we will remember 2020 as our next step (but not our last one) in coming to terms with the violent, racist history of the US. If that hope is to be realized, all who are committed to unraveling the power of racism have a lot of work to do.

The streets of the Tenderloin in the early days of the pandemic turned a on spotlight the Bay Area's history of red lining, employment segregation and urban renewal; the vast majority of people seeking tents and congregating on the sidewalks in those early chaotic days were Black San Franciscans. Not long after, racial justice activists protesting the murder of Mr. George Floyd in Minneapolis named the principle for how we must reorganize/prioritize our thinking: Black Lives Matter.

Back in 2011 and 2012, Micah Frazier (gender fluid, doula, and generous partner) gave us Fools a framework for beginning our direct confrontation with anti-Black racism. They taught us about the link between mass incarceration and the war on drugs. Together we watched the film 13th Amendment multiple times with groups of students and TL residents. We examined how we felt and talked about the Central American men and women who sell drugs on the streets, and we struggled to come to grips with harm reduction, both as a way to address problematic substance use, but also as a framework for mapping out alternatives to incarceration and aggressive policing in the TL.

All of these ideas came into play and have been put to the test in the last year. Just before lockdown, the City of San Francisco chartered a process, the Street-level Drug Dealing Task Force, to investigate how to effectively address harms related to open-air drug sales and use. We had been hosting the Tenderloin Community Council for about a year prior to the first meeting of the Task Force and we were prepared to contribute to the process, hoping to focus attention on racism, alternatives to policing, and the wellbeing of the multiple, disparate communities of the TL. The Task Force was suspended due to COVID for about 4 months and began to meet again in September.

During the months that the Task Force was suspended, we worked with many of our neighbors to bring basic services to the streets of the Tenderloin. People were being discharged from jails and shelters to prevent the spread of COVID in congregate settings, and the closure of shelters meant the closure of medical respite shelter beds, so even people who were being discharged from hospitals were being sent straight to the streets. There were no resources for the people being discharged—no clothing, no tents, no sleeping bags, no food, no water. We saw clusters of people huddling together for warmth as others scrambled to get blankets and other protective gear for sleeping on the streets. The population living on the sidewalks of Hyde Street dramatically increased, and again, the racial disparities were glaring. A visual survey of the people around us at any given moment showed 70-80% of the people were African-American. They were individuals and they were family groups—uncles with nephews and nieces, grandparents and grandchildren.

It wasn't until late May, within days of George Floyd's death and a settlement with Hasting Law School, that the City began to address the dire conditions on the streets. At that moment, along with Coalition on Homelessness and other organizations, we became a driving force in working with Jeff Kositsky and HSOC (a homeless response team) in organizing the placement of people into hotels. Many people, who for years could not get housing, were prioritized for hotel rooms. We saw dramatic changes in the health and wellbeing of dozens of people we know well. Many homeless outreach workers saw the same in people they've known for years, too.

We saw for the first time what it meant for older Black residents of the streets to be prioritized. Before COVID, priority rarely went to single adults, largely because housing for single adults is in short supply. This policy/reality has meant that the number of people who are both older (over 55) and who have been on the streets for years has increased, and because most of the single adults on the streets are Black, that meant that the people who are left behind are most often Black older adults. Policies designed to prioritize youth and families for housing has left us with the reality that while San Francisco's population is roughly 4% African-American, but almost 40% of the people on the streets are African-American. But because the shelter-in-place hotel placements focused on elders with underlying health conditions, people who had not been prioritized for years were suddenly at the top of the list. In that one shift, we saw the number of Black adults on the streets get a proportionate share of the services being offered by the City.

Arising out of these experiences, a group of people from different organizations who frequently disagree with each other and frequently found themselves exasperated with the on-going circle of debates around what to do began to meet. After a few tense and tentative meetings, we decided to continue meeting. It's an ad hoc group that calls itself "Disagreements in Dialog." As a group, we are there to change our minds, not change the minds of others, but only if and when we find ourselves hearing something new or gaining new insight into what is at stake for another.

Emblematic of that process, was one particularly dramatic moment. Someone close to the Hastings lawsuit explained, "We singled out tent removal because we didn't want police to focus on driving out homeless people." Some of us hadn't realized how intentional that choice was and that it wasn't intended to be an anti-homeless policy in disguise. As we continued to talk, someone else said, "But what that means is you can be homeless in the Tenderloin, but you must sleep on the concrete and move every day." A few weeks later, the person close to the lawsuit said, "I walked into the Tenderloin this morning and saw all these people wrapped up in blankets or a coat sleeping on the sidewalk. I realized that while it was easier to walk down the street, it wasn't any more humane. We took away people's shelter." The conversation then could turn to why hotel placement was so powerful, how it made sense in terms of really getting people off the streets and not just moving them around. "So the issue is this," said one participant, "not whether we think it's okay for people to live on the streets or not. We share the same long-term goal. What we are struggling with is what do we do now when there isn't enough housing. How do we make the streets livable for everybody, housed and unhoused. It's the short term that is so difficult and where we have disagreements." That raises complex questions without easy answers, so we remain in this group: Disagreements in Dialog.

By the time hotel placements began to slow, the Drug Task Force was reconvening. The language of coercion (people won't change until they face stiffer prison sentences), of xenophobia (the Central American drug dealers aren't part of our community), and racial stereotyping (most of them are just care more about their drugs than their families, they are just too lazy to get a job) made it clear to us that there is much work to be done to address the underlying structures of policy and thought that have created the situation we are now living.

Our Work Going Forward

There are many places where anti-racist work is being done. From the GLIDE annual Alabama Pilgrimage (which I participated in last year) to UCSF's exploration of medical reparations and opening workforce development as a way to address historical racism, we know that many San Franciscans have taken on the challenge of racial reckoning. This last year, Carmen and I did a service for UUSF focusing on moving from White Fragility to Accountability, and I have presented to the Drug Dealing Task Force a framework for addressing the harms of the open-air market that explicitly includes racial reckoning. (Attached to this report).

But there is a great deal yet to be done. In our work with St. Francis Memorial Hospital, we are pushing for adopting a Trauma-informed systems framework because we know it will help address the historical/structural traumas of the Tenderloin that have their roots in racism. We are working with the Coalition on Homelessness to push the City to adopt international standards for water, sanitation, and hygiene access for homeless people, including a racial justice component.

And we are doing our own work as well. We continue to learn about the subtle **and** the egregious forms racism takes nearby and nationally. We look at our own internalized ways of thinking and acting. We pursue reflection and then action and again reflection, as this is the slow, but steady way we know best. We know we are part of the system and that in the future we will discover other ways that we have failed to meet the moment. But still we do what we know to do in this moment, and we will do otherwise as we learn and grow. For now, we will continue to push for more openings for the voices of people who aren't heard, we are taking on mentorship roles with young people of color, and we speak up, when the moment calls us to do so. Racism is egregious and it is also so very difficult to overcome. The backlash we've seen to the Obama administration, the uprising at the US Capitol, and the ongoing loss of Black lives makes this urgent work, but also it requires that we remain steady and committed for the long-haul.

On a Happy Note: Leah Laxamana is now a full-time Fool!!! A year ago, we were contemplating this possibility and now the possibility is a reality. As a community, we have matured quite a bit since we last made full-time hires (Hy Carrol and Nicole Fusco, if you will recall). When we hired them, there was not a lot of need to create a training cycle for them. Nicole had been a Mercy Volunteer for a couple of years and Hy had been volunteering for a few years as well. They knew what it felt like to show up at the purple building every day and what needed to be done.

We have hired Leah to fulfill a particular need in our day-to-day functioning and she brings a strong background that we know will serve that need. Leah too has known us for quite a while, but her transition to being a full-time Fool is giving us a chance to examine how to bring someone into the daily life in a way that is not overwhelming while being realistic about the stress of working here. We learned a great deal from hiring Hy and Nicole, and we also learned a great deal from Ximena, who worked full-time with us last year. Combining those lessons and Leah's self-awareness as she acclimates is giving us rich insights into who we are and who we can be.

We are so glad for Leah's presence. Her intelligence, patience, insights . . . well, all of her, is such a gift. We are looking forward to working together, walking together, and learning together. May we have many good years together discovering our common humanity.

Board Report: Reflection by Leah Laxamana

New chapter, same book. My first week as an official member of the Fools team started with a street retreat — the very same way I was introduced to the work of the Faithful Fools in 2016. This time, instead of being with random strangers, I was able to walk in the company of new and long-time jugglers; one was doing the retreat for the first time, another did it as a way to reconnect with the neighborhood he had to avoid for a while due to the pandemic. Having been connected to the Fools in different ways over the years, getting to start my time as staff through the retreat revealed a recurring theme of my relationship with the Fools — one where I get to be in a familiar space but always discover something new, both in the environment and within myself.

In my first eight weeks, instead of experiencing the usual hum of activities and groups of people I was accustomed to at the Fools Court, it was more a steady trickle of various aspects of all things Faithful Fools: comforting and helping someone tortured by the idea of a bedbug infestation vs. an actual infestation occurring; mailing out the Fables and not long after, thank you notes to friends who immediately responded to the appeal; printing legal and unemployment insurance documents for neighbors; and sprucing up the lobby for the holidays. My group encounters mainly happened over Zoom with community partners, which serve as a space to acknowledge the reality on the streets and find ways to support people when needed; in one case, the tragic death of a beloved resident who couldn't access the proper care he needed has become the driver for a campaign advocating for more equity in the health care system. My highs and lows within this short time range from accompanying a woman who has been unhoused for years move from a shelter into a beautiful apartment, to regularly encountering people on the sidewalks who look like they are on the brink of death.

The biggest shift that occurred for me from working in philanthropy to being at the Fools is going from reading and writing about people and places experiencing challenges, to having actual names and faces and engaging with them. While this is often daunting, I am more overwhelmed by the privilege and confidence I've been afforded to witness what truly being "faithful" means and strengthen my own ability to be such and see people beyond their struggles. While I was brought into the Fools to help cultivate the spirit of abundance and generosity, my role is also about enhancing the work in the "in between spaces," as well as to bring in new insights, questions, and continue the thread of connecting people from all walks of life.

I'm truly grateful for the incredible opportunity to be an added presence in the cherished purple building and to take part in the journey of the Faithful Fools and our neighbors.

**Jackie Hider
Board Report
Jan 2021**

Due to the Covid 19 lockdown, my age, and a medical condition, I spent the majority of 2020 in San Diego. During my eleven years visiting and living in the Tenderloin, I have come to love and appreciate my life with the Faithful Fools. This deepened when I lived mostly full-time across the street from our beautiful purple building. During my time away from the Fools, I have been contemplating what my next steps would be. Often, when I am working through a tangle, a voice will come through and give me a clear answer. It's my voice, of course, and I have to walk through muddy confusion, but when I hear that voice, I pay attention. In early October, 2020, after I had been away for seven months, my inner wisdom found its voice and said,

Don't stray far from the Fools!

I wondered, and continue to wonder, "What does that mean?" It's not about proximity. Even though I am in San Diego, I feel more connected, more a Fool, than ever. My question, and the subject of this report is, "What is it to live in the spirit of the Faithful Fools?"

There are so many ways that this spirit of the Fools have affected the way I see and operate in the world. It seems a worthy project to dig in and explore the details of this topic, but I am not going to do it now in this report. I think though that what the Fools have done and continue to do is take the abstract concepts from my Buddhist practice, bring them to life and give them feet on the ground.

When I finished the Chaplaincy program at Upaya Zen Center, I was I ordained into the Zen Peacemakers, a group founded by Bernie Glassman. The Zen Peacemakers are guided by three tenets: Not-knowing, Bearing Witness, and Finding Loving, Appropriate Action.

Here are some the ways that my time with the Fools have brought these tenets to life.

Not Knowing

I came to the Fools with a lot of ideas and judgments about drug dealers, and users, fears around chaotic behavior, and some idea of how I could help. I didn't have a clue about how to befriend people living on the streets around our building. I was scared and offended. But, then I started to get to know people at Bible Study, the writing group, morning meditation, movie night, and meetings about all sorts of issues. People came to these events, not because of where they lived or because of their relationship to drugs, or money. They came because they wanted to write or watch a movie together. I became friends with people, began to be in a relationship. My stories, ideas and judgments softened.

We Fools also "participate in shattering myths." I had a lot of myths about the drug dealers who were a constant outside our door. The myths were not positive. When they offered to sell me drugs, I said "never. Don't ever ask me again. And don't call me honey or baby. I am like your grandmother." Then, they stopped offering me drugs and started to call me Mamacita. More than once, they accompanied me to my door. During one seven-day street retreat, a young dealer was shot, and we mourned with his wife and friends. I began to understand the complexities of drug dealing and using. The sense of our common humanity began to grow

Bearing Witness/Not Turning Away

A foundational practice of the Fools is the Street Retreat. The instructions are to be present to oneself and to others. Let the "knowing" unfold. That's it. I will never forget the time a group of us on a 7-day retreat found one of our members completely despondent, tears flowing down their face. A young woman was lying on the sidewalk with blood all over her arm. Our friend said, "There is nothing I can do. All she wanted was her drugs. All I can do is sit here with my broken heart and be present." That is bearing witness.

Another practice of bearing witness is to not turn away from the suffering that is apparent. This happens every day in one way or another. It is common to see someone passed out and someone with a needle in their arm. It is also common to wonder if someone is breathing. What to do? I used to walk by, too scared to look. Then I thought I had to be some kind of savior. I was reacting from a myth that people living on the streets couldn't take care of themselves. Then, after a couple of very uncomfortable situations, I learned to not turn away and when appropriate, ask for help from the community.

Loving Appropriate Action

Taking action is found in many forms, Presence and attention are essential. Working with the Fools has given me many opportunities to get it right, and to sometimes to get it wrong. I have brought chocolate to a friend in the hospital and heard their worries about going back to their SRO. I have held a friend, keeping them from running across Hyde St. during heavy traffic. (They were not happy with me.) I helped a newly homeless family get licenses for their dogs. I have accompanied a friend to the Homeless Advocacy Project to fill out paperwork for SSI. I have registered people to vote. I have attended many meetings at City Hall in support of the work being done by the Fools or one of our partners. All this loving action is the work of the Fools. They set the ground. I have learned to say yes, I will give it a go.

All that I describe in the preceding paragraphs is in the spirit of the Faithful Fools. They modeled and provided opportunities that brought life to the three tenets of my Zen Peacemaker Practice.

I am thankful.

Linda Chrisman
2020 Reflection

Reflecting on the past year, it's hard to remember life before mid-March and the onslaught of the coronavirus. At that time, I spent Tuesdays at the Fools seeing 4-5 people for individual Somatic Experiencing sessions. In the evening I volunteered with GLIDE Memorial Church's harm reduction team. I also took the "Train the Trainer" Narcan training offered by the DOPE project. Whether I was walking the streets of the Tenderloin with GLIDE's team passing out harm reduction supplies or meeting with people privately at the Fools, my focus was on expanding community, cultivating relationship, and meeting people "where they are."

In mid-March, plans to increase my presence at the Fools to three days a week were put on hold because of the shelter-in-place order. Besides the Fools now not having the income to support my increased presence, I was also in a high-risk group for the virus due to my age. I spent the next 3 months at home in Oakland before traveling to Colorado in June to tend to my elderly parents. Throughout most of my time at home and in Colorado, I maintained weekly phone contact with 2-4 people who I was accompanying before Covid-19. It wasn't until mid-November that I returned to the Fools, 2 days a week.

I returned to a dramatically different Tenderloin. The east side of Hyde Street was (and still is) packed with people. Numerous people crowd the sidewalk—dealing, using or just plain hanging out. Many don't wear masks. There appears to be a stark divide between those who huddle in their room afraid of going out because of exposure to the virus and those who party on the street. Some people have told me they are afraid to come to the Fools now and are also afraid to go out in general because of increased violence in the neighborhood.

My involvement at the Fools has changed dramatically too. I can no longer meet with people individually in the zendo or offer touch as part of a Somatic Experiencing session. Instead, I meet with people at Boedecker Park or sometimes upstairs at the Fools to talk. I am more involved in the day-to-day intimacy of people's lives now. I do whatever is needed—clean refrigerators, crush cockroaches, deliver laundry, run errands, help fill out forms, go along to doctor appointments, or offer a steady arm for a walk around the block. Mostly, I provide a little bit of company during these months of isolation.

The ban on support groups, classes, indoor dining, and in-person meetings has had a profound impact on the people I know in the Tenderloin. Living in the small space of an SRO, several people have become severely depressed and have been unable to tend to their basic needs. At a time when the usual community resources are no longer available, the personal connections that the Fools offer are even more essential. Having on going, reliable contact with someone makes a huge difference. With the contact that our "village of fools" provides, I see people slowly becoming more stable and beginning to become a little more engaged in life.

This next year, I hope to expand my presence at the Fools and become more involved with the larger community of the Tenderloin. I miss the connections I made with people at Glide and with others. I also want to learn more about the rich political dynamics of the Tenderloin.

Reflection by Ollín Rocha Mercy Volunteer 20-21

Throughout my time volunteering at Faithful Fools I have had many different roles. Some days I am just present at the Fools ready to answer the door for anyone who comes by. Other days I am working on little projects around the Fools making sure everything is in good shape. Nonetheless one of my biggest roles this past year has been accompanying those we serve.

Throughout these past months, I have formed relationships with various people. I have entered their lives and have formed a trusting bond with each one of them. I accompany them in their weekly routines, help them clean their homes, take them to medical appointments, bring them groceries, and assist them in other day-to-day activities. Amidst all that I do for them, one of the most important roles I have come to learn is that I am simply present in their lives. During a time when people are confined to their homes and have limited interactions with others, I have been able to provide them with my presence. I engage with them on a personal level. We have conversations, share life stories with one another, and are simply just enjoying each other's company. I feel that this has been one of my largest roles during my time at the Fools as I am always in one way or another providing accompaniment to others.

My time at the Fools has provided me with an experience like no other. I have learned what it means to be present in people's lives and how to approach individuals in a gentle way. I have come to see how every service I provide for someone has a positive impact on them in some way. Whether it is cleaning their room, accompanying them on a walk, or simply having a conversation I am able to brighten their day. As the year continues, I hope to provide a positive impact on others and in doing so learn more about myself as individual.