

Faithful Fools
Annual
Reflections on 2019
Presented by
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Resident Fools

Overview

As we were preparing for one of the Fall 2019 board retreats, we came across this statement in our bylaws:

This corporation (known as Faithful Fools) intends to foster awareness and analysis of deteriorating social conditions in the United States and the world at large, seen from the level of the streets, and to facilitate individual and collective responses thereto.

It is a sobering and heartening reminder that our fundamental purpose is as urgent and as necessary as it has ever been. In some ways, it is true that conditions are demonstrably worse than were even just a few years ago. But it is also true that this deterioration has been happening for a very long time. Guided by our Mission Statement, we have been fulfilling this organizational purpose in our work in education and advocacy. We are constantly striving to increase the depth of awareness and analysis through partnering with various colleges, high schools, and now a medical school. There can be no doubt that we steward our resources and energies to facilitate collective and individual action. Sometimes that's with students on immersion, more often it is with our neighbors as they become stronger activists. Art remains central to our engagement with the communities surrounding us—music, poetry, watercolor, photography—these media live within all of us as we do the work we are called to do. But most importantly, we keep close to our hearts the reality that these deteriorating social conditions are not confined to San Francisco. We are deeply aware that conditions in other parts of the world are deteriorating as well and that the wellbeing of those in other parts of the world is linked, intractably and inexorably, to our own wellbeing. This is what fuels our work. We hope that you will see it in these reflections on the year 2019.

Nicaragua

It's important to begin with our friends and fellow Fools in Nicaragua before we describe the ins and outs of what's happening here in San Francisco. They have not been far from our thoughts since April of 2018 when civil unrest erupted in response to government policies that threatened the wellbeing of the people. We have had no one travel to Nicaragua in the past two years due to the tensions between the people and the government. However, we were extremely grateful to host Heidi Meza, the founder and director of Colegio San Francisco de Asís, and Mercedes Gonzalez, the community leader, here at the Fools in September. It was such an enriching time for us all as we shared about the work they are doing as well as the deep pain of the oppressive situation in Nicaragua. Many tears were shared and our hearts were

strengthened having some time together. Our commitment as fellow Faithful Fools remains strong in helping to support the school and the community work. Our hearts remain bound up together with theirs as we remain strong as Fools together.

Staffing

It's been a year of great change. After nearly 4 years with few staff changes, we experienced the shifts that come as people inevitably find new moments in life. **Hy Carrel** and **Nicole Fusco**, after deep reflection and thought, decided it was time to move back to the east coast where they both have family. **Mary Ganz**, too, came into a new moment as she fulfilled her plan to retire. As the three of them prepared to leave, we had many moments of remembering good times and hard times, times of learning and growing together. Each them, singularly and together, have had deep influences on who the Fools are as a community and within the community. We surely miss them and will always be tugging just a bit on the purple yarn that connects us.

The Jugglers Circle made up of staff and Volunteers meets weekly on Tuesdays over lunch to share what is happening with each other and also in the work we are doing. On Wednesday mornings the five-some (Carmen, Sam, Jolie, Maggie and Ximena) meet to work out schedules, plans, and responsibilities as they are the ones who are the full-time presence each week. Currently the Jugglers is made up of Carmen Barsody, Maggie Brennan (Mercy Volunteer), Linda Chrisman, Sam Dennison, Ximena Gasca-Iranzo, Jackie Hider, Ade Kroll, Dorian Rhodes, Jolie Slater (Mercy Volunteer) Tim Tapley, Sharon Weld, Elise Youssoufian, and Kasey Asberry joins us when she is in town.

Elise is readying for some changes of her own these days. She is progressing in her studies—both in school and in life. This spring she is again embarking on a world-wide journey to connect with her own ancestry and with greater wisdom the world has to offer. We know we will see her again in the Fall, but in the meantime, our love goes with her, too!

As a balance to these leave-takings, **Linda Chrisman's** presence is growing stronger as she extends her availability to meet with more people at the Fools Court and in the neighborhood. She now is at the Fools two to three days a week doing one-on-one sessions of Somatic Experience and also volunteering with Glide's Harm Reduction team on Tuesday evenings. Linda would love to be here more so we will work together to identify and write grants that could support her work.

Speaking of the five-some, **Ximena Gasca-Iranzo** is a new name among the staff of Fools. Ximena has been a part of the Fools community for many years. She first arrived at the Fools in 2007. Since then Ximena has been a regular visitor at the Fools. In the summer of 2019, she moved into a studio across the street, and when Hy & Nicole moved back east, she became a very regular volunteer. As time progressed, it became clear that Ximena is a natural Fool and finding her way into being a reliable member of the team as she learns more about the work and mission of the Fools. She has joined Carmen in getting certified to be an IHSS (In Home Supportive Service) worker to be able formally assist people who have been housed and in turn supplement their income through hourly wages paid by the state.

Maggie Brennan took a second year as a Mercy Corps Volunteer and she was joined by **Jolie Slater**. They are filling the gaps in much needed ways: assisting with hosting programs,

greeting people at the door, creating art, and yes, creating lots of laughter too. We are glad to have them both.

Jackie Hider remains a steady presence in our lives. As she likes to say she arrived here 8 years ago to do a paper on street chaplaincy and never really left. We can't express our gratitude for all that she contributes, be it consulting with Sam on designing educational experiences or the connections she so easily forges with students on immersions. We deeply appreciate her and the support and leadership she brings to many programs, staff and volunteers within the Fools and throughout the community, especially Night Ministry.

We have also been grateful for the presence of **Sharon Weld**. Sharon's first experience with a Starr King School for the Ministry class. She sat in the great room with 20 or so other students and heard about the work we do and walked the streets for a few minutes to get the sense of the neighborhood. Since then she has been volunteering with us. In the fall of 2019, she became an intern at UUSF, furthering the long tradition of Fools who walk up and down the hill, creating a path for connection.

This dramatic shift in staffing made it evident that we needed to return, in earnest, to the question of the Fools' future, especially in terms of staffing and funding. With that in mind, we asked the Fools' board, staff, and volunteers to gather for two half-day retreats (October 20th and 26th, 2019) for a time of visioning. A huge wall calendar that made visible the day-to-day life of the Fools was greatly appreciated. It helped us all grasp and understand the fullness of our work and also how it can feel overwhelming at times. We appreciated greatly coming to a place of each board member naming what they felt they could contribute, and also to be supportive as we begin looking to hire another team member, a **Steward of Abundance**, who would hold primary responsibility for fundraising, grant writing, and managing the program income.

Advocacy—Conditions on the Streets

The year 2019 began with strong indicators that much of our time and attention would be spent responding to increasing levels of police enforcement—of sit/lie laws, tent prohibitions, and drug enforcement. In mid-January, JW, who lives in a tent at 230 ½ Hyde St. was arrested by an officer who later declared, "She hasn't gotten herself together so now it's time for law enforcement to make her get it together." JW spent 3 weeks in jail and each time she was scheduled for a hearing, we went to 850 Bryant St. to make sure she knew she wasn't alone. It wasn't until her third scheduled hearing that she was actually brought up from her cell to the court. When she looked around the court and saw a familiar face, her whole demeanor changed. Later when she told a friend that we were there, her friend said, "Damn, nobody's family even shows up. You're lucky to have them." For weeks after that, further hearings were scheduled and continued. Each time JW had to go to court, she struggled with symptoms of trauma—sleeplessness, jitters, high levels of anxiety and hyper-vigilance. It was a credit to her and her growing trust that we would be there that she was able to get to each hearing. Each time she was at risk, not knowing if she would go back to jail or go free. In the end, all the charges were dismissed for lack of evidence.

Since then, there have been monthly (if not weekly) mass arrests. The arrests have focused on drug dealing and fugitive warrants (failure to appear in drug court, etc.). On any of these occasions anywhere from 10 to 60 people were arrested in a day. We witnessed directly

the psychological impact of arrest on JW and others, and we witnessed directly the social impact of these mass arrests on the people living and spending time in the streets. Overdosing and increased agitation, sometimes leading to violence, have been quite evident in the wake of this aggressive police enforcement.

The increased aggressive police enforcement occurred simultaneously with the announcement of a hearing on “open-air drug dealing” in the Tenderloin and SOMA. In response to increased demands by those who want to see drug dealing go away, SFPD increased its enforcement activities and the City formed a Task Force to address the issue. We participated in and then began hosting a Community Council in response to these efforts. The Community Council successfully lobbied to have the Task Force be focused on “harms related to street level drug dealing” and to be composed of 9 people from the community and 3 from the criminal system, rather than 12 or 15 from city departments with an emphasis on “eliminating drug dealing.” This “Street Level Drug Dealing Task Force” held its first meeting on Jan 30, 2020.

Responding to the formation of the Task Force has only been one element of our work around the worsening conditions on the streets. In addition, we’ve been working with these organizations and coalitions over the last year:

1. St. Francis Memorial Hospital Citizen’s Advisory Committee (TLHIP)
 - a. A primary goal for 2020 is “addressing the conditions surrounding homelessness.” This goal allows us to do trainings around trauma and harm reduction and propose/support community-based programs oriented towards calming chaotic behaviors on the streets.
2. Solutions not Sweeps
 - a. This campaign, developed and launched by Coalition on Homelessness, is asking the city to cease confiscating the private property of homeless people, cease using the police as the first responders to homelessness, end the use of cleaning as a pretext for moving homeless people, and end the towing of vehicles that are used as residences.
 - b. Growing out of this campaign, we have gotten more involved with being present when sweeps occur. Most recently, we were present with Coalition on Homelessness advocates when Willow Lane was swept last fall. While we couldn’t prevent the sweep itself, we did delay it by our presence and asking, “What shelter space is available?” When it was revealed that there wasn’t sufficient space for the 60 people living in the alley, they delayed confiscating property and putting up barricades for 24 hours. Many of the people displaced that day returned in the following weeks when police and Department of Public Works attention turned elsewhere.
3. Market Street for the Masses
 - a. As part of Development without Displacement, MSMC supports the Community Council as well as people who are serving on the Task Force.
4. TL Community Benefit District
 - a. We are collaborating with the TLCBD to address the use of street cleaning as means of moving homeless people. In contrast to the City’s use of fire hoses and pressure washing to move people, the TLCBD is using sidewalk

cleaning as a way to get to know people living in tents and create more sense of community.

5. Ariel Croft from Cutting Ball Theater
 - a. Ariel Croft’s family commemorates the loss of their youngest child by contributing to the wellbeing of people on the streets. This year the family produced 20 tent kits. These kits contained a tent, a sleeping bag, sleeping pad, and toiletries. We shared distribution of these kits with Night Ministry. They typically went to people whose tents wore out or were confiscated by police or Dept of Public Works, or those have been recently released from hospital or jail.

Street Retreats

We continue with monthly street retreats and also responding to the many groups that request them. This year we prioritized working with those schools that are able to contextualize the experience by integrating it in the curriculum. We are requiring deeper engagement in a preparation process that includes parents and teachers. This has worked well.

A new school we worked with was San Francisco Schoolhouse. Kirsten Hove and Carmen first joined in a parent’s meeting and then the parents and teachers made a street retreat a few weeks later. The students then came on a street retreat on a school day. Silena Layne and Carmen prepared and led the process for the students with a focus on community. It was a magnificent experience of mutual investment in the learning process and community engagement. We also led the annual retreat for the Unitarian Universalist Coming of Age students in addition to the various college and university groups that came to San Francisco on to learn and serve as an alternative break experience.

We held 3 “Into the Streets” experiences for new staff and volunteers of 826 Valencia. For a few years now, they have asked us to lead these retreats as part of their orientation process. It is a nice collaboration with our neighbors.

The Institute for Street Level Learning

Our educational efforts continue to grow deeper and to extend to more and more partners. When we began the intention of strengthening our educational work, we were funded by CHI to focus on increasing our partnerships and expertise in experiential learning. Since then, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of immersions that we host as well as steady growth in the variety of partners with whom we work.

The increasing depth of what we have to offer is exemplified by our long-time relationship with Erin Brigham of **the University of San Francisco**. Over the last 10 years, we have taught “Women, Poverty, and Catholic Social Thought” 8 times. Each time, together with Erin, we have learned more about how to create a transformative learning environment. There are three important elements of the class that we developed together that deserve focus:

- Inviting and welcoming the students to the Tenderloin
 - We noticed a few years ago that we would lose 2 or 3 students in the first couple of days because their experience of the Tenderloin was jarring and intimidating—in some cases, a parent would dictate that the student drop the class out of fear.

- Two years ago, we began walking to the Tenderloin together for the first 2 days of class. And this year we added more extended time walking the streets with questions and reflections from the class discussion. This has created a learning partnership between the Tenderloin, in all its diversity and complexity, and the students as they integrate what they are learning into a grounded, wholistic worldview.
- Tenderloin community students
 - Three years ago, we began inviting our neighbors to participate in the class. Some have come as guest speakers, but others simply come to join the conversation. This has changed the quality of in-class discussions. On one level, this has created a climate where the students open remarks with deeper explanations of the readings as they know some in the room haven't done the reading. On another level, the community students bring their daily lives into the conversation. This adds depth and complexity to the questions that students are asking and thinking about. And for the community students, this recognizes their expertise in these subjects, honoring the wisdom of their life experience.
- Binding a community and a book
 - The students create a book together as their final project. This book is made up of pages that each student designs to express what they have learned in the class. On the last day of class as they reflect on what we have done and discussed, we hand stitch the book together—in effect stitching our learning together.

The variety of our partners is well exemplified by our new and growing partnership with the **University of California San Francisco**. Over the past year, we have been invited to work with the UCSF Center for Community Engagement (UCSF CCE). Through that connection, Sam was asked to work on two different projects:

1. School of Medicine Strategic Plan—Community Engagement Workgroup
 - a. This workgroup, a sub-community of the School of Medicine Strategic Planning implementation project, was charged with identifying specific goals and practices that would foster stronger and more effective community engagement on the part of UCSF.
 - b. Through this work group, we identified 12 goals and practices for immediate and mid-term implementation. Among them establishing the expectation that community partners be compensated for their time and effort, creating simpler ways to reimburse community partners for collaborative efforts, creating minimum set asides from large grants to support community engagement (including paying community partners), and establishing best practices and mechanisms for training staff, researchers, and students in best practices.
2. Curriculum Development for School of Medicine
 - a. Under the recently implemented Bridges Curriculum, there is both room to and a mandate for community engaged learning. This project is

designed to support the development of curriculum and practices that will bring all medical students into community engaged learning and research over the next 2 years.

- b. First year medical students—ARCH week pilot.
 - i. This project brought all 161 first year medical students into the community for a half day immersion.
 - ii. We hosted, with GLIDE, 44 of those students in the Tenderloin. Those students began with a reflection on their own experiences and assumptions about the TL and poverty. They went on a tour with Del Seymour’s Tenderloin Walking Tours. And they finished with small group discussions with community residents (Carolyn Cox and Kim Diamond from the Fools).
 - iii. This project was an overwhelming success. Students rated the experience highly and reported transformative experiences in their reflections. Kim Diamond and Carolyn Cox also reported this as a significant experience.
- c. 4th year medical student rotation
 - i. This project is developing the curriculum for a 4th year medical student rotation for community engagement. A pilot is being launched in February 2020, with further roll out in the Fall of 2020, and full implementation occurring in Fall 2021 for all 4th year students.
 - ii. While the ultimate shape of the rotation is still being discussed, the early pilots will feature reflection and community resident engagement in order to bring the medical students into direct personal engagement with people who use and are impacted by the health care system.

Immersion

Faithful Fools once again hosted immersions for High School and Undergraduate students. The College of St. Benedict & St. John’s, St. Ignatius High School in San Francisco, Santa Clara University & Cristo Rey High School in San José are now annual participants. We appreciate the growing connections with the local schools. This year Jolie and Carmen attended a Mass at St. Ignatius for Community Partners, and Sam and Carmen were special guests at their Solidarity Dinner and shared a reflection using the poem, “Los Motivos del Lobo.” We were asked to speak about the importance of the immersions and how they are part of our mission as Faithful Fools. We had a great time. In turn they gave us a \$700 donation that was collected that evening. Santa Clara University is now offering one-day retreats for students who have done immersions out of the country or in other states in an effort to support them as they integrate their immersion experiences with their daily lives. We held one retreat for them last Fall and two more are planned for the Spring of 2020.

Hy and Nicole did great work in strengthening the planning, organization and accompaniment of the immersion groups. Upon their departure to new adventures in New York, Maggie Brennan (Mercy Corps Volunteer) has taken the lead on the planning and accompaniment, with the support of Sam and Carmen. All of us (staff and volunteers)

participate in the accompaniment of immersion groups when they are here. This past year we have been primarily focusing on Harm Reduction. The learning takes place through Theatre of the Oppressed, workshops on Harm Reduction, Narcan training and preparing kits at Glide with the Harm Reduction Team. They also have opportunities to serve at St. Francis Living Room, Safe Passage, Boys and Girls Club, Night Ministry, Care Through Touch, as well as doing Tai Chi in the chill of the morning air at Boeddeker Park along with a magnificent group of Chinese elders.

This Fall we had two more universities contact us about doing immersions so in this next year we will also have 10 students from Portland University and 7-8 students from UC Berkeley.

Additional Notes from a Few Jugglers

Maggie Brennan, MVC

This year my role has evolved into more accompaniment and scheduling tasks, in addition to providing general presence for the Fool's Court and support for programming, including meal prep, participation, and providing a listening ear to whoever may come to the door.

I maintain relationships with other organizations in the neighborhood, from attending meetings at the Coalition on Homelessness or Hospitality House, to teaching art class at the Healing WELL, and volunteering at the Men's Winter Shelter at the Unitarian Universalist Church.

My scheduling duties range from assisting in street retreat planning to finding shadowers to planning and scheduling various high school and college immersion groups. This past year we have hosted students from St. Ignatius High School, Cristo Rey High School, the Hamlin School, the Unitarian Universalist Church, University of San Francisco, and Santa Clara University, and we are planning for many more for the coming year. The immersions typically include volunteering at Safe Passage, The Living Room, Boys' and Girls' Club, Open Cathedral and the Healing WELL, and participating in programs such as harm reduction workshops, Theater of the Oppressed, Tai Chi in a neighborhood park, and programs at the Fool's Court. I also assist in facilitating and participating in street retreats and the immersions. Another scheduling task I am responsible for is Somatic Experience appointments, a type of trauma therapy facilitated by Linda Chrisman.

I carry out various graphic design projects that come up around the Fool's Court, including website design, flyers for events, fundraising mailings, thank you cards for donors, and designing new signage for the building. Additionally, I take on handy-work duties around the building, including painting.

As far as accompaniment, I regularly walk with various individuals to dentist appointments, the DMV, helping in their rooms, hospital visits, navigating the housing search, and anything else that someone may need support doing. I also have regular meetings with one woman from the community who needs a listening ear to help process her trauma.

One case of accompaniment that I have focused on is Alex, an individual Faithful Fools has been accompanying for over 4 years. He has been a regular face around the Fool's Court, coming for different programs and often dropping by to say hello and chat at least once a day. 2018 was a hard year for Alex. His brother died of cancer; in June Alex lost his housing at

Folsom Dore in because of “behavioral problems”; in September, Alex lost access to his Social Security money because he refused payee services from Conard House, leaving him unable to pay for his antipsychotic medication, which led to some erratic behavior. In early 2019, we were working with Alex on his self-awareness, maintenance of his energy, and respect for boundaries in order to allow him to better participate in our programming as well as move towards housing and hopefully a more stable life. In Spring 2019, we stopped hearing from Alex and eventually found him at San Francisco General Hospital. He suffered a head injury and surgery and some type of abdominal surgery from an assault or collision. We were not able to get the full story of what happened, as he doesn’t remember much from the event, other than being struck from behind. From SF General, he was sent to Laguna Honda Hospital for long-term rehabilitation. He was weak after his surgeries and used a walker at first, then to a cane, and now only needs a cane if he leaves the Hospital Campus. Physically, Alex is largely recovered from the incident, but because he does not have housing to return to, and because of concern for his “cognition and decision making,” he is not being released. He has been working with a social worker at Laguna Honda to look for board & care housing and to get his finances worked out. His social worker was able to help him gain access to his money and set him up with a payee. At this point, Alex is much more stable than we have ever seen him, largely due to the fact that he is both living in a stable environment and his on antipsychotic medication. Currently, our involvement with Alex includes talking with him on the phone almost daily, visiting him at Laguna Honda, and picking him up to bring him to programming at the Fool’s Court because he is not allowed to leave the hospital campus on his own. This type of accompaniment is very important for Alex, considering he has been pent up there for almost a year now, and has little stimulation.

Jolie Slater, MVC

As a Mercy Volunteer:

As a Mercy Volunteer at the Fools I have been engaged in a variety of learning experiences since my arrival in August. I was initially drawn to the Fools because of the mission statement, “We participate in shattering myths about those living in poverty, seeing the light, courage, intelligence, strength, and creativity of the people we encounter.” It felt to me to be a comprehensive statement about who the Fools are, not only what they do. As I have come to know the Fools and Foolery better over the course of the last 6 months, I have found this statement to ring true in every corner of our work here in San Francisco.

I often find it difficult to explain what I do as a Fool to those outside of this unique organization. I have found most of my days as a Mercy Volunteer revolve around flexibility and awareness. I have learned to be more flexible in my time as a Fool as I never really know what I am about to encounter when the doorbell rings. I have found this to be both challenging and rewarding as I get to know more and more faces and personalities throughout the neighborhood. That sense of flexibility transfers to just about all of my work at the Fools as unexpected things often arise and require immediate action or attention. I have also become more aware since my arrival at the Fools. I have become privy to the social climate of San Francisco, the structures that contribute to marginalizing people, the rising aggression and criminalization of poverty, and the degree to which my liberation is bound up with all of my

neighbors. These are all things that had never crossed my path in my home state of Rhode Island and have substantially increased my worldview and sense of social justice. This awareness has fostered a motivation to be present and involved in any way that I can.

As a Steward of the Court:

Having the physical space we do in the Tenderloin allows us to see many visitors at Fools Court. Much of what I have been engaged in is interacting with these visitors and maintaining the property as folks come and go. From answering the door with a smile and welcome to answering any questions visitors have (to the best of my ability), with lots of tea and coffee in between. I have found this to be one of the most important parts of my job as a volunteer at the Fools. Our space allows for a sense of calm for all those who enter, and the offer of a cup of coffee or refreshing glass of water can shape the experience people have as they walk through our doors. We work to maintain the Fools as a home and as a calm oasis for people to come to amidst the craziness of the big city beyond our doors.

Tenderloin Community Council:

The very first day I arrived at the Fools was a Thursday. After a brief introduction to the Fools and the building I found myself in a gathering of the TL Community Council. This initial meeting was centered around a discussion regarding the combative use of language in legislation which would create a Task Force to address open-air drug dealing. I did not understand most of the concepts or words said at this meeting, but followed along silently with the confusing edits of the legislation handout in front of me. Since that initial day at the Fools I have become increasingly involved in our Community Council. I have served as the scribe for our meetings, assisted in administrative tasks, and worked closely with community members who wish to be more involved in the task force and community council. **Sam Dennison, Dorian Rhodes** and I have worked as a team to navigate the administrative side of maintaining the Council and subsequent notes, alerts, and stipends. I also assisted **Cheryl Shanks** and **Jesse James Johnson** with their completion and submission of the application to the City. Because of this group I have learned a great deal about leadership, facilitation, the importance of a well-worded email, community building, and alternatives to police enforcement.

Media & Design:

I have been able to put to work my design abilities since working at the Fools. My undergrad experience included a minor in Studio Art with a concentration in Photography which provided me with basic photoshop skills. I have grown these skills exponentially with the Fools and guidance from **Sam Dennison** and have created many media files for our various platforms. These skills have primarily benefited the editing process of our annual Fools Fables and the creation of our marketing for the upcoming Fools Feast in April of 2020.

Sharon Weld, UUSF Intern

My role at the Fools this past fall has largely been indirect as I have been searching for the opportunities to connect the church (Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco) back down the hill to the Fools. Carmen's increased presence at church has kick-started the

congregation's memory of that downhill path. My presence, I think, has been to keep that awareness alive in small but repeated ways. Street retreats are a continuing connection, but so are small things like including the Fools on the agendas of social justice groups, underlining the Fools presence with the church's lead minister, and supporting a larger Fools' presence on the UUSF website. My own weekly travels into the Tenderloin are also a regular reminder. Some church members have asked about joining street retreats; others have shown interest in visiting. I am hoping to add more feet down the hill in the coming months.

Programs

We continue to offer regularly scheduled programs. These are still points for the community around us and for the Fools who anchor them. Their longevity and continuity speak volumes about the needs they fulfill.

Our **Conversation of Biblical Proportions** continues to be an important touchstone for 8-10 people. This is probably our longest running program. We inherited it from the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center (TREC) very early on. It continues largely because **Ade Kroll** takes primary responsibility for the group's lively conversations. As she noted last year, "It isn't really a Bible study but more of a spiritual exploration and application of the texts to one's life." Tammy Lundy and Fred Rabidoux share in leading the group at this time. Merida Wilson has been unable to lead these last months due to health problems. Since the construction has been completed the group has begun meeting downstairs as it is more accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Brian Darr has been stalwart in his monthly **Movie Night**. Having completed 15 years of showing films and leading discussions, this program is nearly as long-standing as the Bible Study. It gathers people for whom movies are joy, and Brian brings out the best in the movies he chooses and the people who come to watch them.

WRITE ON! Continues to meet every Thursday. Elise Youssoufian, a faithful volunteer, has been the companion to this group since Hy's departure. She has helped facilitate using skype or speaker phone so people can participate remotely. Meg Whitaker-Green and her daughter Hillary along with Sheppard Kominars and Hy Carrel are people who have been participating from afar. We so appreciate **Robert-Harry Rovin's** long-time commitment to leading this group. Despite periodic health and transportation difficulties, he perseveres, and as do all who enjoy this creative writing opportunity.

Barbara Meyers, a UU minister who was a Faithful Fools intern in 2003-04, and her spiritual direction colleague, **Karolyn Stenlund**, continue to hold the **Listening Post** on most Thursday afternoons. They are now a familiar and anticipated presence for neighbors. We love having them here and also meeting others who sometimes come to participate as listeners with them.

TL Think Tank has continued under the leadership of **Dorian Rhodes**. They meet the first and third Wednesday of the month. Dorian has been finding community experts to form panels and discussions around the question when does a neighborhood become a community. It is a credit to Dorian that the Think Tank lives and thrives.

For more than two years Hy Carrel, with the support of Carmen, provided the organizing and leadership for the monthly **Community Meals at Old First Presbyterian**. In anticipation of Hy's leaving he asked **John Brett** to take on the responsibility. John is a long-time friend of the

Fools and also works with the Gubbio Project. Hy did a magnificent job of preparing John and thus since October John has taken the lead. Carmen still serves as a back-up if needed, but so far John is faithfully there each month and doing a very fine job.

We (re)built It—And Here They Come

2019 shall go down in the annals of Fools' history as the year of reconstruction. Carmen, in last year's reflections, described that fateful event which set the tone for the entire year:

To have ended the year (2018) with the sewer backing up the day before Thanksgiving and flooding the first floor somehow was an appropriate ending to an already challenging year. A complete clearing out is sometimes necessary to begin anew!

A "complete clearing out" was putting it mildly. We were dismayed to find that all the walls were contaminated with asbestos, and it was necessary to remove them all. So we did the clearing out and then reimagined how the walls could best be put back. In the rebuilding, we imagined how the space had been hampered by some walls and could be freed by leaving a couple of walls unreplaced. In doing so, we were able to create a space that is not only more accessible to those who use wheelchairs, but also a space better suited to gathering groups of people. During construction, we moved towards rebuilding the space with intention, rather than speed. We even reopened the space to use slowly, rather than with a whoosh. What unfolded in the weeks and months after the new double doors opened was a gradual increase in collaboration with our neighbors and an expansion of gatherings at the Fools Court.

Our greatest appreciation is for the return of Night Ministry. We missed them during the time we couldn't host them and now that they've returned, our building feels right again. There is one big change, however, and one for the better: Night Ministry now meets in the new gathering space on the first floor, using the new larger interior room to serve food, and appreciating the wide door and accessibility of the bathroom. They have now expanded to Monday nights, offering an evening meditation. Meeting now in the downstairs creates a sense of welcome and flow for those who are just outside the door. Our building is much warmed by their presence. We are so glad they are back.

Here is what Elizabeth Hill, who helps host the gathering, says about their return:

SF Night Ministry has come home to 234 Hyde and the Faithful Fools! The renovated first floor space is more inviting each week as new artwork and warm colors are added. In addition to our regular guests, and some new faces, we are happy to welcome CPE students, Carma and Cecily. USF students have yet to return from winter break and during this hiatus the Fools, local church groups, and Pastor Monique and Pastor Valerie have made sure that a hot meal is offered to all who come. The dedicated kitchenette and serving space make the flow of the Gathering much more efficient. Whether folks are struggling, celebrating, reflecting or experiencing deep pain, the Faithful Fools have created a first-floor sanctuary to welcome, comfort, and offer presence to all who enter.

Night Ministry is also began offering meditation on Monday evenings as a time of calm for those who are walking the streets in service and those who are living on the streets. They describe it this way on their website:

Meditation Group is a pilot community program. It is a weekly Buddhist-inspired gathering. After check-ins and tea, we engage in a heavily-guided, trauma-informed meditation period. We end with check-outs. Teachings center on the two wings of Dharma — wisdom and compassion. All are welcome at Meditation Group. No meditation experience is necessary.

In addition to Night Ministry, others are now regularly using the space. The Coalition on Homelessness was forced to leave their old home on Turk Street. They found a new, but much smaller home, at Hospitality House. They now frequently use the downstairs for community organizing (Solutions not Sweeps meetings, for example) and for larger staff meetings. It's true that when you have people who visit regularly, you become better acquainted and more readily accessible in times of need. We are able to work with them more directly when sweeps are happening and we are able to help with campaigns like Solutions not Sweeps.

It is a relief and liberating to have sufficient space for multiple programs to be going at one time. One notable day in January saw Starr King School for the Ministry students in the building at the same time as USF students, who left for a tour of Compass Family Shelter services (with our Board Member Silena Layne), just as some of our neighbors were arriving for the first 2020 meeting of TL Think Tank. Not all days are that busy, but more and more often we have multiple groups using the various spaces fulfilling our promise to steward this sturdy purple building for this community.

Annual Memorial

This year the expanded space provided the gathering site for the **Annual Memorial for People Who Have Died Homeless in San Francisco** for which Carmen was a primary convener. This year the names of more than 280 people were read as we took the time to acknowledge the significance of each person's life. For a second year, Skywatchers made an individual banner for each person. They also led a procession through the streets to City Hall and then to UN Plaza where the vigil was held. As people gathered, Melanie De More's rich voice filled the space as she prepared people by teaching the songs they would sing through the streets. From beginning to end, it was a beautiful and solemn event. We are grateful to be a part of this important annual memorial.

Some Additional Notes on Accompaniment

There are people we accompany whose lives have been shaped by or are still shaped by living on the streets. As we notice the increasing pressure on low-income people—the narrowness of the ledge between being housed and being evicted due to the expenses of transportation and medical care, the systems that tow cars or having long waiting lists for childcare—we are also aware of the growing hopelessness of people who are now on the streets. Current city policy is directed towards eliminating all structures on the streets (tents, cardboard shelters, etc.). This doesn't mean providing housing for the people who make homes

in these structures, it means taking the structures away from them. We speculate that this is so that San Francisco's poverty will be less visible and therefore less appalling.

In the face of these pressures, we are working to keep people housed and seeking to stabilize those who are on the streets so if housing should become available, they will be psychologically able to make the transition. We have two stories of those who are housed and need help to stay housed. The first is RF who was on the streets for nearly 15 years. In 2016, RF's name came up on the housing list and, after 3 long months of paperwork and waiting, RF got inside. In the nearly four years since getting a room, RF has come to us several times, behind in rent and needing assistance. We've worked with the housing agency that runs her building and when the last shortfall occurred, we said to RF, "We will help this time, but you must get a payee." RF has continued to struggle with money management but now is determined to get a payee. It turns out however that it is a complex process to get one. The laws protecting many against fraudulent practices also makes it onerous for those who really need a payee. So, we are again working with RF to obtain the services she needs in order to remain housed.

We have also been watching, and working with, D&D who now live very near the Fools. Their story includes periods of homelessness, severe ill health, and struggles to manage what few resources they have. As a married couple, they can't take advantage of many resources as he makes "too much" money (which amounts to barely a few hundred dollars a month above their rent). So rather than get divorced, they are working on making due with what he earns. Three years ago, we helped them move from an insect-infested small room above a strip bar (with much cigarette smoke wafting up through the floorboards) to a studio apartment nearer to the Fools Court. In these three years, her health has dramatically improved. While she continues to have bouts of intense pain and illness, they are shorter in duration and less severe overall. Through having stable relationships supporting them, they have gained increasing control over their finances as well. She has gotten approved for some government support, a very small amount, and together they have learned more skills for managing their money effectively. They are finding themselves less often on the brink of financial disaster and more confident about how they want to live their lives.

JW and R are two people we have now known for years. We've known R for almost ten years and JW for more than two years. Both have lived in this neighborhood for a very long time, mostly on the streets, occasionally in SROs. They are special to us as neighbors and we know they care for us as much as we do for them. They exemplify how our wellbeing is bound up together. JW, for the moment, is intent on staying stable in front of our building. She is caring for her health more and she watches over the sidewalk, keeping it clean and promoting respect for the various people who spend time there. R is now living in a tent on Eddy Street with his partner S. R's health is clearly being affected by living so rough. His once confident and jovial demeanor now betrays exhaustion. Cataracts are visible in his eyes and this man, who could once dance for hours in front of our building, now struggles to stand for any period of time. For a number of years, he had friends who let him stay inside most nights. Both of his two closest friends died in the last 18 months and he has fewer options and now sleeps in a tent on the street. R has always looked out for us, steering trouble away from our door when needed, helping us look for people who were missing, and generally acting as a peacekeeper when he could.

These are only two of the many people we know living in tents or on the cement near the Fools Court. The fact that the overwhelming majority are Black and Latino serves as a daily reminder that racism is both cause and symptom of policies that dehumanize people of color while perpetuating structural poverty. Our relationship, indeed, our connection with the wellbeing of these unique and special people fuels our commitment to see the conditions on the streets improve.

It bears repeating that our organizational purpose is as urgent and heartening as ever. It is our calling. So, we will close with these, our opening words, as we know this is the work we are called to do at this time and in this place:

This corporation (known as Faithful Fools) intends to foster awareness and analysis of deteriorating social conditions in the United States and the world at large, seen from the level of the streets, and to facilitate individual and collective responses thereto.