

FOOLS FABLES COMMUNITY



2016

Towards A Sustainable Community

“Sustenance.” What a lovely word! It tastes good in the mouth when you say it – not like chocolate, exactly; more like a rich, hot soup on a cold and drizzly day, or like a quiet conversation with a dear companion, when that was exactly what you needed. “Sustenance” – support, encouragement, and strength to do what needs to be done. “Sustenance” – what it takes to keep on going, to endure.

These days at the Faithful Fools, sustenance is much on our minds and in our conversation, as we think deeply together about how this work is to be sustained into the future. It is still a small shock to realize we have been here more than 18 years! – and so we are asking ourselves, what will it take to enable new generations of Faithful Fools to be present as needs of this neighborhood become all the more pressing in light of all that is going on locally, nationally, and globally?

From the very beginning, our work as Fools has been to be present to meet needs as they arise – at our door, on the sidewalk, in the neighborhood, at City Hall.

For individuals who knock on our door, we are a stillpoint, and a place of connection. Sustenance for an individual sometimes means we step in to be trustee or disability payee. This can be sustenance for the individual’s family as well, providing the space and time needed for stressed relationships to heal, without the pressure caused by tension about who controls the money. Or sustenance might mean walking alongside someone else who is striving to complete the tedious paperwork, phone calls, and appointments to move inside from sleeping on the street; we can be there to keep the process moving when it seems impossible. Sustaining momentum toward stable living is so important to community. We all need to do it together, and do it for each other.

As important and consuming as it is, one-on-one support is not enough; the needs of the human spirit include a deep desire to have a say in decisions like development or zoning that can change the nature of a neighborhood forever.

So we support that too: every week you will find community organizers in our living room, enjoying a meal and working to realize a shared vision of equity and justice. Some of them live in single-room occupancy hotels, some on the streets; some work in nonprofits; all of them love this city and are working together to amplify the voice of the community.

And, on any given day, you are likely to find students from around the city or across the country, who come to Fools’ Court to learn with our community. We all participate in learning—students, teachers, Fools, all —when we sit together in the reflective circles that guide our work.

When Carmen and Kay were dreaming and walking the Faithful Fools into being, they didn’t think they were founding an organization; they imagined the building of a community.

There is no foreseeable end to the work they started, is there? Community is not a goal to be accomplished and checked off a “to-do” list. There are no end dates attached to the work named in our mission: meeting people where they are, shattering myths about poverty, acknowledging each person’s incredible worth. These activities don’t end, because they are the very substance of community—they are the bread and butter of life; they are sustenance itself.

Stewardship of this community requires provisions for the long

haul. It requires pledges and estate gifts and one-time donations. We are both grateful and sustained by your gifts. We invite you to continue growing with this Faithful, Foolish community that belongs to all of us.

Peace to you and yours,

*Carmen
Mary & Sam
Jackie*

OUR UNION IS LIKE THIS

**You feel cold
so I reach for a blanket
to cover
your shivering feet.**

**A hunger comes into your
body
so I run to my garden
and start digging potatoes.**

**You ask for a few words of
comfort and guidance
and I quickly kneel by your
side
offering you
a whole book as a
gift.**

**You ache with loneliness one
night
so much
you weep, and I say
here is a rope, tie it around
me,
I will be your
companion
for life.**

Hafiz



Fools learning to juggle which is what we like to do best: juggling what needs to be done and juggling just for the fun of it.

A Retreat into Community

Loneliness is often present for me. My mind holds me separate, setting boundaries even as I interact with others through service. I analyze what I want to do. I ask: Am I available right now? What do I want to share? What can I commit to? How vulnerable can I allow myself to be? How open can I be to another's vulnerability? These thoughts and questions hold me separate. They keep me from being fully present in the moment.

In April 2016, as I was preparing for my first 7-Day Street Retreat, I felt anxious. Even more questions swirled in my mind. Would I be able to sleep, my face exposed beneath street lights? When I awoke, would I find my belongings still next to me? On a typical one-day Street Retreat, I immerse myself in the Tenderloin for 5 hours, interacting with many people but rarely talking with another Fool. Wouldn't seven days of not talking with another Fool be lonely?

Yes. Yes it would. I shared my questions with the others and this is what they said, "While we bring intention and presence to the retreat, there are no rules like not talking to each other." This was such relief to me. My question that felt so serious a moment before now felt a little silly.

Even with these meetings, new fears and questions arose in the days leading up to our retreat. In a culture that admires self-reliance, would others look out for my needs? How could I calm these worries? I thought of the Fools who have made a practice of annual multi-day street retreats for almost 20 years. I thought of my own choice to commit to participating in this practice. I chose to have faith in this community and practice.

On retreat, we circled for group reflection each morning and each late-afternoon. I felt the way others cared about my opinions, observations, and jokes. There was no doubt that this community of Fools was caring for my physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

The deep sense of belonging that I felt on retreat with this community resonated powerfully. Among these individuals, I felt safe and sustained, achieving a peace and connection deeper than usually present in my life. I found a new appreciation for communal living and a little insight into the lives of my friends who live in pairs or larger groups under the highway and in the park. We are one large community, made up of many, many interwoven communities, and we share universal needs such as to belong, to eat, to sleep, and to feel safe.

This process pulled at my self-image and my sense of differentness. I second guessed my interactions less because of my faith in the people and process to which I had committed. I still asked many questions, but they were less analytical. I did not question myself. I did not question my worth. I did



Seven-day Street Retreat Reflection



Bianca Huerta & Hy Carrel

I did not question whether I belonged. I ventured out with others and on long walks, alone, and laden with all my belongings. I felt purpose. I felt community. I did not feel lonely.

Hy Carrel

Faithful Fools was established as a community of people from all walks of life who work together for personal and social change.

We discover
on the Streets
OUR Common
Humanity



I AM A PERSON WHO
LIVES IN A TENT
I AM THE
TENDERLOIN
I AM A PART OF YOUR
COMMUNITY
I WANT TO BE
TREATED WITH
AND I WANT TO TREAT YOU THE SAME
DIGNITY
I
VOTE

Where
Celebration
Community
and Healing Occur



"I don't have any money. I don't own a gun because I won't be violent."

Times are Hard: Resisting Despair & Injustice



Speaking Out

Faithful Fools sponsored this argument (below) against Measure Q in the November 2016 San Francisco Voter Handbook. This measure (which we are sorry to say passed) further criminalized tent encampment, which is one way for people living on the streets to build safe communities. We included our voice in the voter handbook because it is, in Camus' words, one zone of influence at our disposal.

Faithful Fools argument against Measure Q:

This measure is an expression of frustration, not a meaningful response to the growing crisis of homelessness. Tent encampments are symptoms of a severe housing crisis as well as a lack of resources including mental health beds and emergency shelter. Even when encampments are disrupted by police sweeps, the problem doesn't go away; the people just get moved from place to place. While the measure does require that the City offer shelter or housing before a sweep begins, it doesn't specify the number of days shelter must be available. This means we will only be seeing police engage in the frustrating exercise of moving people on just to see them reappear elsewhere within a few days. We urge you to vote NO on this measure—resist the urge to express frustration with a law that is punitive and expensive, but not helpful.

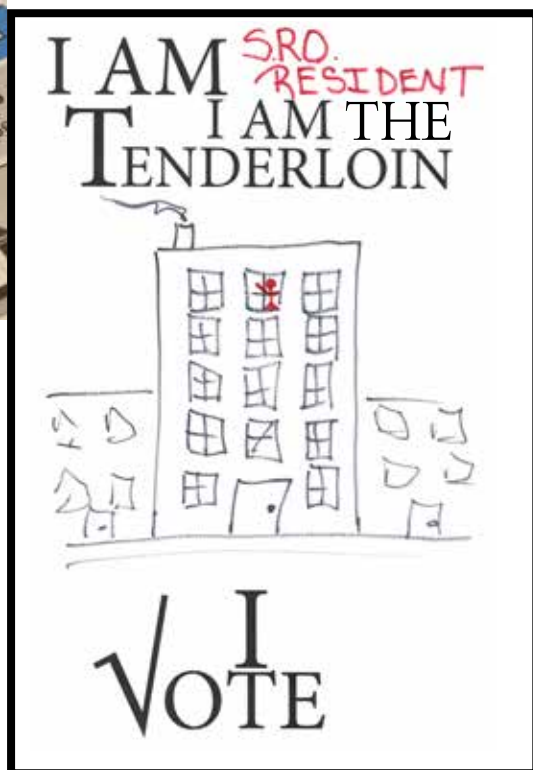
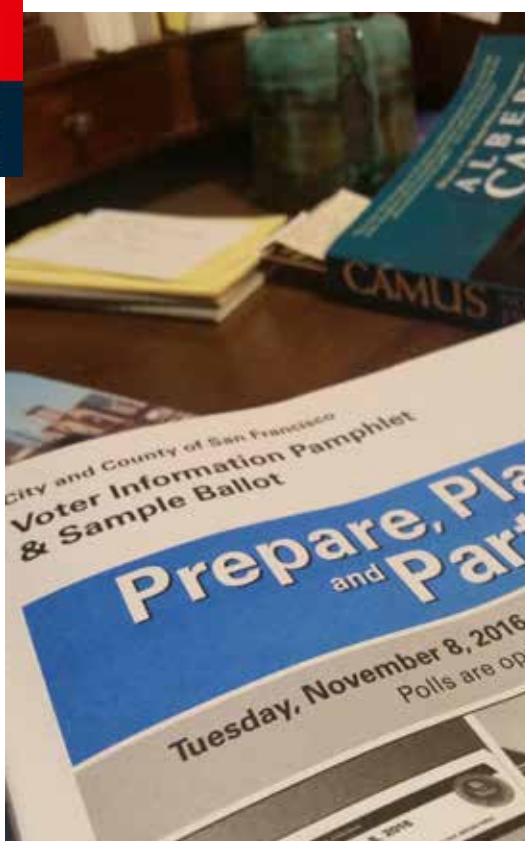
We turn to Albert Camus (1913–1960), author of *The Plague* and *The Stranger* in these hard times. As a witness to social injustice and global violence of nearly unimaginable proportions, he was and remains an inspiration. His call to action resonates with us, and so does the call to cherish each person's worth which Camus reminds us is due to both our defects and our talents. Our active resistance to despair and injustice is rooted in both reflection and action.

Nov. 1939—On the heels of the Nazi invasion of Poland, Camus wrote:

I can understand you, but I cease to agree when you try to base your life on despair, maintain that everything is equally pointless, and withdraw behind your disgust. For despair is a feeling and not a permanent condition. You cannot stay in despair. And feelings must give way to a clear view of things.

You say: "Besides, what is to be done? And what can I do?" But the question doesn't start by presenting itself like that. You still believe in the individual because you can feel what is worthwhile both in those around you and in yourself.

There is something for you to do, have no doubt about it. Every one of us has at our disposal a certain zone of influence, which we owe as much to our defects as our talents. But whichever is the case, this zone is there and can be immediately used.



So the only real power I have is to organize.” Jesse Johnson, Community Activist & Artist



Bianca Huerta with Monique Ortiz of San Francisco Night Ministry (above). And you can also see her by the piano listening to a lively discussion. Bianca, our first Mercy Volunteer, gave us a year of her life and we gave her our hearts.



Margaret Cloudfeather greets you!



rAmu Aki, our poet emeritus and inspiration, has taken up residence in Louisville, KY, near his family. His presence is missed, but his voice calling the ancestors continues to call us to our better selves.



Sometimes when someone from this city goes out to far away places, a reminder that they are a piece of purple yarn. That little bit of purple...

Alex Darr (who has participated in so many Street Retreats) takes not just a bit of yarn around his wrist, but a BIG ball of yarn, which does not even begin to express the Fools' gratitude that goes with him wherever he is. No doubt his life as a full-time father is as foolish as foolish can be.

There is a community of the spirit. Join it, and feel the delight of walking in the noisy street and being the noise.

Rumi



A little foot washing and massage for Ed Bowers from Care Through Touch



Kasey Rios Asberry and Greg Moore being the noise of the streets

Circle of Faithful Fools is heading
 places or needs a long-lasting
 are not alone, we take a little
 and tie it around their wrist.
 The purple yarn is a reminder that we
 are all connected within
 this whimsical
 and committed
 community
 of Faithful
 Fools.



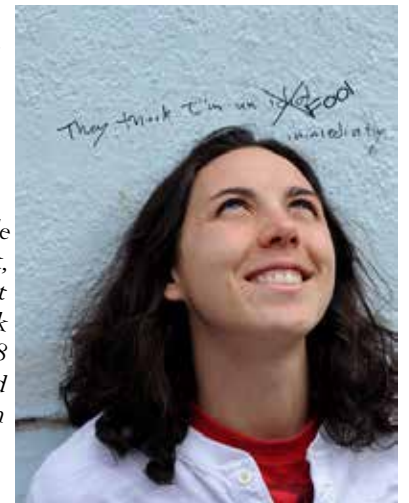
And sometimes new people arrive. Here Nicole Fusco (our Mercy Corps Volunteer for 2016-17) celebrates arriving in San Francisco with her fellow Mercy Volunteers, Marissa Gonzales and Frisco Gonzales (from Las Vegas, NM--on the left) and Lupita Avila (from Chicago on the far right).



Sometimes the purple yarn brings people back, too. We are so glad that Mary Ganz (left) came back to us two years ago (after 8 years on the east coast). And Jackie Hider, who has been making the Fools Court her home a few weeks at a time for the last 5 years decided to spend an entire year with us. These two are fine examples of what happens when the purple yarn tugs on you and brings you home.

Community

A Heart
 In Unreasoned
 Openness
 A Living Room for
 All Being
 In This living room
 Of Community
 Our Conversations
 Listen-Touch in
 Heart-Walks of
 Being and
 Letting
 Ade Kroll, OSF Be



Sara Warfield is a chaplain of the streets (a uniquely foolishly position for a wonderfully unique chaplain) whose work is jointly supported by the Fools, the Gubbio Project, and St. Francis Hospital. We are so treasuring her wit, wisdom, and presence.



And where would any of us be without Nieves Moreno? He's the one we turn to when we need a laugh or some help with just about anything. He IS a Fool--through and through, and better than that he is OUR Fool!



Robert-Harry Rovin has returned after recovering from a serious fall. He and Kay Jorgensen chat before a Thursday afternoon session of WRITE ON!!!

How The Tenderloin Changes You . . .

*Reflections on Two Weeks of Immersion in the Tenderloin
St. Ignatius High School Students 2016*

It has become all too common in our community to pay little to no attention to our surroundings; we have been conditioned to pay little to no attention to those we walk by. We were afflicted by this “disease” prior to our Immersion trip to the Tenderloin. Coming from the privileged setting of St. Ignatius College Prep, the 10 of us (8 high school seniors and 3 staff/faculty) were strangers not only to the community of the Tenderloin, but to each other as well.

When we began our Tenderloin Immersion, the “disease” that had afflicted us for so long came into full force and made us weary even before we began confronting our illness face-to-face. We saw ourselves as being on a mission to help “fix” the most neglected part of our city. Our curiosity about the true nature of the community was the only thing that kept us from running in the other direction.

Faithful Fools taught us that we had it wrong the entire time. These two weeks taught us that we were not here to “fix” the “Tender Zone,” but instead be with it. In our time here, we not only learned that our previous understanding of the TL was flawed, but that our desire to fix was what was truly flawed. The Tenderloin isn’t longing to be saved, but it is a place to find connection.

It would be a Herculean task to be able to say in a few words how thankful we are to Faithful Fools. We were welcomed by this community and that experience started here at the Fools. Every day, we were blown away by the care shown to us. At so many moments it would have been appropriate to say “You’ve done enough,” but the Fools never failed to out-do themselves again and again. Thank you to Faithful Fools, and in fuller extent, to the Tenderloin, for enlightening us in our misconceptions and we only hope that we were “enough” in return.



St. Ignatius Students dressed up to volunteer at a community event



Tenderloin Votes, community activists, registering voters at Turk & Hyde. From left to right: Lauren Small (Glide), Sam Dennison (Fools), James Pounders (TLvotes), a voter registering, and Jesse Johnson (TLvotes)



Engaging Students in Voter Turnout

There are many forms of separation, and when they are enforced by social or legal norms, we experience them as segregation. Segregation is most notorious (and rightfully so) when it is racist, but other forms of segregation reinforce social injustices. When we segregate by age or income or race or gender, we lose sight of just how much our wellbeing and our humanity are bound up with one another.

In June, just in time for the primary election, a group of University of San Francisco students with their professor, Dr. Brandi Lawless, studied and worked with us. In the process we all found a deeper understanding of why we must work so deliberately for social justice.

University of San Francisco students also participated in precinct walking (organized by TL resident voter mobilization organizations) in both June and November, helping to knock on more 1,500 doors for each election. Student/TL resident teams knocked on doors together handing out information on ballot issues and where/when to vote. Through these and other efforts we are seeing a steady rise in Tenderloin voter turnout.

In this gathering
there is no high, no low,
no smart, no ignorant,
no special assembly, no grand discourse, no
proper schooling required.

There is no master, no disciple.

This
gathering
is more like
a drunken
party,
full of
tricksters,
fools,
mad men and
mad women.

This is a
gathering of
Lovers.

Rumi



Melissa Fafarman and Mary Ganz enjoy a knock-knock joke as told by Charlie with help from his friend Sam Dennison (above).



Look! Mary Ganz, Elizabeth Kwok, with Ade Kroll are making art in the Demonstration Gardens (left).



Learning

Vivienne is our student liaison with USF Just a year ago, when I was a freshman entering the University of San Francisco, I had no idea how being part of the Martín-Baró Scholars (MBS) Program – a living-learning community at USF focused on examining issues of poverty, social justice, and diversity – would change me. MBS students live together in the university's tightly packed dorms and take classes together. Last year we also worked on a collaborative documentary with the Faithful Fools for a year. Living with the people that I went to school with every day taught me a lot, including how to grow up and be mature about problems instead of just bottling up my feelings.

Ordinarily, when you go to school with someone and then say goodbye at the end of class, it's naturally easier to avoid confrontation. However, when you live with the people that you go to class with, things get harder: you now have to be open, honest, and communicative about your feelings and thoughts in order to avoid making your living environment toxic. As a result, I had to learn how to be more open and honest with the people around me if I wanted everyone to get along and have fun!

I came to college wanting to be more open about who I am because I spent a majority of my life closed off and introverted. I was scared of trusting people and becoming attached to those around me, so I avoided it all. However, MBS taught me that there are people in this world who genuinely want to get to know me and be a part of my life. Being around people who pushed me to be myself, explore my dreams, and learn how to laugh and enjoy the moment taught me to be more comfortable with who I am and with the people around me. In the end, there was a most remarkable thing about my community-engaged learning experience with the Martín-Baró Scholars and the Faithful Fools: I genuinely felt a sense of community throughout the entire process. The entire MBS cohort became a second family, and the Faithful Fools became a home away from home. And that is what makes community-engaged learning so unique.

Vivienne Pismarov



Heidi Meza, Mercedes Gonzales, and Arlen Casco

INSPIRED

I am 26 years old and I live in a small neighborhood of Managua, not far from the Faithful Fools of Nicaragua. I grew up in the 90s just as my country was beginning to recover from many years of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary war. During that time, I realized that the people around me were inspired by

a community of Franciscan Sisters from Minnesota who had recently come to live in our neighborhood. In a short time, they became known as people who were willing to help with whatever was needed, leaving behind political, religious, economic and other differences. After a while, we were no longer just people living in the same neighborhood, living as if each family were an island, but rather, we were forming a true community.

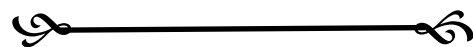
To inspire others is not easy, and it is even harder to find a source of inspiration. What inspired me most then, and what I continue to admire to this day, are the women of my community. They discovered that by helping one another, they had the strength to leave violent relationships and move forward with dignity. One of those women is my source of inspiration: she is Mercedes Gonzales. The first time I met Mercedes I saw a spark of energy in her eyes as we discussed issues related to women, especially equality and the defense of our rights. Though I did not know it then, she had experienced domestic violence herself. She was then and is now an inspiration. Together we raise our voices in defense of women's equality, and every time we do, we make our community stronger.

Arlen Casco

**From the Streets of
Managua
to the Streets of the
Tenderloin**



Thank you!



You are Cordially Invited



The front doors of Fools Court are open for the music to reach the sidewalk. People look in and smile; a guy offers to join in and play the Conga drum; little kids and even grownups dance on the sidewalk; another guy stops by to ask "What is this place?" and learns there is a free writing class tomorrow.

D.D. notices the sandwich board we put up on the street inviting all into our morning meditation, he comes in, meets fellow meditators, feels encouraged to seek healing for his addictions; two years later D.D. joins our Bible Study, meeting still more folks who support and respect him.

R.V. connects with Fools through Bible Study and three or four years later, he has full-time work, having parlayed his compassion into a city job helping people sleeping on the streets get housed.

Melissa Fafarman



**Your donations
support the work
of
Faithful Fools in
many ways and
many places**

REMEMBERING MARSHA CAMPBELL



We remember our dear Marsha Campbell, who passed away on February 9, 2016, when she read one of her poems at the release party for vol. 4 of *Living in the Land of the Dead* back in July 2011. Marsha was a poet who taught us so much about insight, courage, and love. One of our favorite memories is of Marsha singing Christmas carols at our annual holiday party. Marsha's life was not easy, but the world is so much better for having heard her voice in song and poetry. Here is her poem:

On the Death of Whitney Houston by Marsha Campbell

Heart's knowing is
how to recover from loss
how to believe
and how to balance one's energy

when another being has been
run out of breath
drained of heartbeats
claimed by an early sleep
for a star to enter darkness

Heart's knowing is
a confession of drugs
mixed with alcohol
an early sleep
a lesson in how to dream with awareness
how to dream in sleep in and sleep in dream

so that the soul becomes articulate.

Discovery

In December of 2015, I went to the Faithful Fools community in Nicaragua with Carmen and Alex. When I got off the plane, I was greeted with a lot of hugs and kisses from people I did not know. It was like right away I was family. Oh, how I was immersed in the culture. The sense of community is inspiring and really strong there—from the local school run by Heidi to education in the Fools Court.

It was a hard trip for me physically, and when I got sick people cared for me like I was one of their own. I never had that kind of care at home. I just felt how everyone was interconnected with each other.

Andrea Dolin



Andrea and Adelia



FOOLISH COMMUNITY INDEED!!!

Now that the 2016 election is over, I find encouragement in the opening sentence of the mission statement for Fools Mission:

The more beautiful world that we seek has already arrived, calling us to a consciousness-raising ministry of supportive companionship and hope that transforms the way we give meaning to our lives.

What audacity! "Already arrived?" Really?? Yet, the truth of it continues to surprise even those of us Fools already inclined to believe it. A young man accused of a serious crime finds his bail raised by 300% for no stated reason other than the severity of the charges—and one of the Fools accompanying him posts bond. The Fool's observation? "I no longer could think of that money as my own." The young man sleeps in his own bed that night, aware that something beautiful just happened.



Thomas Atwood

A young student brings a trumpet to our monthly Music Jams until the night he shows up empty-handed. A song leader asks, "Why?" — only to find out that the child's school no longer loans them out, and music classes are no longer available. Before long, a shiny trumpet appears on his doorstep, accompanied by a certificate redeemable for private lessons.

When another community member loses his vehicle to thousands of dollars in accumulated citations and fines, 25% of the cost is covered in a matter of days by someone who not only knows him personally, but is also aware that the driver sleeps in the vehicle.

And while these examples describe financial generosity, not everyone is in a position to do the same. At times, all a fool has to offer is accompaniment, tutoring, encouragement, musicianship, or a long walk. It all matters—and it's all about meeting human needs. Recognition of the need is a lot easier when the human being in need is someone you know personally.

Fools that we are, we face each new day with faith that we will have what we need before it is asked of us. As Howard Zinn once said, "...to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

*Thomas Atwood is a friend, long-time Faithful Fool, and founder of Fools Mission in Redwood City, CA.
You can find out more about their good work at
www.foolsmission.org*

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Faithful Fools **Mission Statement**



We are called to a ministry of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth.

Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people where they are 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.



Carmen and Kay put their heads together

CHALLENGED & CHANGED

Kay and I said early on, "Faithful Fools is a community of people from all walks of life working together for personal and social change." We knew that our actions would be stronger if rooted in community. To live and work intentionally in community, adorned with our egos and blind spots, requires a radical willingness to be constantly challenged and changed.

We Faithful Fools come together, some people living securely inside and rarely having to question security or privilege, while others are struggling to find housing and some vital anchor of stability, but human beings all. We seek to have space for our own humanness and everyone else's and know that sometimes we just don't act or communicate as skillfully as we'd like. It means creating a place where people who are feeling isolated in their lives and in their work can come and feel enlivened with others and at times say literally to one another, "You don't have to go it alone." It means not only doing something because it's important or necessary for me, but also doing something because it is important to another, or simply because it needs to be done.

We are here working together for social change and for individual change. We don't make vows or pay membership dues. We don't profess a common creed or set of ideologies. What does connect us is our genuine care for one another and a deep commitment to be actively engaged in the larger community of which we are all a part.

Carmen Barsody, OSF

Fools see the world in all its glorious absurdity and act on what they see.



photo by Merida Wilson