



# Faithful Fools Street Ministry Leadership Reflections On 2018

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## **Section I**

### **Reflections on 2018 from Carmen Barsody**

#### **Resilient:**

That is the word that comes to mind. With all the challenges of 2018 we discovered how resilient we are as a community of Faithful Fools. To have ended the year 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! Sam and Carmen were grateful they had had some time for a sabbatical in the year as they both had the capacity to meet this unexpected event. Everyone, volunteers, staff and board stepped up! We have taken the flood in stride, and with a little effort and a bit of excitement we have turned the event into an opportunity.

#### **Flood Repair/Reconstruction:**

The flood repair required the removal of asbestos and lead. That work is near completion and next we will be working with an architect with plans to improve the space on the first floor and to make rooms and restrooms more accessible for people with mobility challenges. The reconfiguration of rooms will provide improved meeting & office space. A wonderful opportunity is to bring in natural light through the existing window frame that had been covered up by sheetrock. We do not feel hurried and rather want to move at a pace that allows us to think through each step since this is a kind of once-in-a-lifetime moment for us Faithful Fools.

#### **Jugglers/Leadership:**

Jugglers Circle/Leadership Team meets weekly to plan, evaluate, imagine and keep the communication strong. Beyond the staff members it also includes regular volunteers. Currently the group is made up of **staff** Carmen Barsody, Maggie Brennan (Mercy Volunteer), Hy Carrel, Sam Dennison, Nicole Fusco & Mary Ganz, and **volunteers:** Jackie Hider Ade Kroll, Tim Tapley, Sharon Weld (SKSM student) & Elise Youssoufian (CIIS Work-study student & at-times hourly paid staff)

#### **Fundraising:**

In 2018 we once again had two appeals – Osgood’s Feast and Fools Fables. Both had very good responses. We wrote a special appeal in one of our e-newsletters seeking pledgers and though that did not have a big response we did acquire 2-3 more pledgers this year. We do have a strong circle of supporters, many who have supported us for years, and we make an effort to stay in direct relationship. For each donation we write hand-written thank you notes. Ade Kroll takes the lead on this but Carmen invites all of the staff and volunteers to write notes so as to keep ourselves conscious of those who make it possible for us to be firmly here.

We learned from Kalliopeia Foundation that they have determined a new focus for their funding and so 2019 is the last year we will receive a grant from them. It is the

close of a long-time relationship that began almost 18 years ago. Our gratitude is great for their firm commitment to our work for so many years. The loss of this annual \$40,000 grant challenges us to seek out new grantors and donors. It was a good thing Carmen returned from sabbatical with a commitment to strengthen our fundraising efforts. Currently we are exploring grants and other funding sources for the construction and Sam is exploring possibilities for grants to support her salary. Another major source of income is our immersions and the classes we host. We will explore having one or two more immersions in the year that could bring in resources to cover our costs.

### **Demonstration Gardens:**

For the past 4 years we have assisted Kasey Asberry by hosting the Demonstration Garden program as part of Faithful Fools. As Kasey's program grew and she brought in more funding we were growing increasingly uncomfortable with our ability to account for the program expenses. The program was moving more towards needing its own infrastructure or that of an established fiscal agent. We as Faithful Fools have a policy not to be fiscal agents as we do not have the infrastructure and resources for the necessary accounting, so we told her that by January 31, 2019 we would no longer receive funds for Demonstration Gardens. This led Kasey to file the paperwork to become her own non-profit. We are happy to say that Demonstration Gardens is now its own 501©3 organization. We will continue to support Kasey as colleagues and collaborators, but no longer manage the funds for the program. We thank Daisy for all the work she did to support Kasey in managing the funds.

### **Fools Court:**

Even without the use of the first floor, Fools Court continues to be used by community groups and other non-profit organizations. Due to the flood damage and not having public bathrooms we have had to relocate Night Ministry's Open Cathedral on Tuesday evenings to YWAM on Ellis Street and Linda Chrisman is doing Somatic Experience around the corner at The Healing WELL. During our December and January immersions, Old First Presbyterian welcomed students to sleep and the Kroc Center and Chinatown YMCA welcomed students to take showers.

### **Street Retreats:**

Monthly Street Retreats continue, as do retreats scheduled for special college and high school groups. We continue to lead an annual retreat for Unitarian Universalist Coming of Age youth. This year was especially strong in our collaboration as **Alex Darr** served as the Coming of Age coordinator (and our partner) for the weekend. We once again did a retreat for staff and volunteers of 826 Valencia, as well as for various college and high school groups. The staff of the Ignatian Center at Santa Clara University came on a retreat with us in August, which led to their greater engagement and a larger immersion group of thirteen in December. We again participated in **Fyodor Ovchinnikov's** Evolutionary Leadership Training in October, facilitating a retreat on the second day.

### **Annual Memorial:**

Carmen again participated in the planning for the Annual Memorial for People Who Have Died Homeless on the Streets. This year the participation of SkyWatchers made it a stronger event. Weeks leading up to the memorial they gathered neighbors to create banners with people's names on them and then they led a procession through the streets, to City Hall and then to the memorial in UN Plaza. This year there were more than 250 names read of those who died homeless in San Francisco.

### **Nicaragua:**

The country of Nicaragua is suffering greatly. Despite intimidation by the government and personal hardships, **Heidi Meza** remains faithful to educating children through the primary school and **Mercedes Gonzales** and **Arlen Casco** continue as leaders of the community-based work. As Faithful Fools we remain steadfast in our commitment to financially supporting the school and the community work.

## **Section II Reflections on 2018 from Ade Kroll**

### **Conversation of Biblical Proportions:**

We have been moving away from using the name Bible Study as it really isn't a study of the bible. It is a time of spiritual exploration and application of the texts to one's life. There is much appreciation of each individual's contribution. There are "the usuals" who come despite rain, and the "unusuals" who don't. ☺ We number around 10-12, depending on the influx of visiting groups. Having Santa Clara and St. Ben's immersion groups participate was great! The loss of a public bathroom may be reduce attendance. We continue to have different people lead the bible study, including **Melissa Fafarman, Ade Kroll, Tammy Lundy, Fred Rabidoux & Merida Wilson.**

We take pride that these conversations aim to welcome all people and all perspectives. The mix of people sometimes gets a little abrasive, causing some participants to get upset or leave. In 2018, we've seen growth among our leaders, especially a gentleness in Fred and an open acceptance in Tammy of others' behavior. We now see a greater appreciation for each other and a greater sense of community within the room.

## **Section III**

### **Reflections on 2018 from Nicole Fusco**

#### **Immersion:**

In the past year, Faithful Fools hosted four immersions. From March 4th to the 10th, the College of St. Benedict & St. John's University (St. Bens) in Minnesota joined us. From June 17th to the 30th, we hosted St. Ignatius High School in San Francisco. In the winter students from Santa Clara University joined us from December 7th to the 14th, and a new group of students from St. Bens joined us from January 5th to the 13<sup>th</sup> of 2019.

Hy and Nicole have taken the lead on planning immersions, with the exception of St. Ignatius High School. For each immersion, we begin with a theme and then find relevant volunteer and learning opportunities. Examples of our recent themes are harm reduction, food justice, and street harassment. With each immersion, we seek to balance volunteering, learning, and opportunities to share time with Tenderloin residents. The organizations we have volunteered with on every recent immersion include Safe Passage, Saint Francis Living Room, The Healing WELL, SF Night Ministry and the Faithful Fools' Thursday programs. The students connect with neighborhood residents while on Street Retreats, at dinners at Fools Court, and often by participating in a Theater of the Oppressed workshop lead by Jiwon Chung. If there is space for more volunteering, sometimes the students volunteer with or visit the SF/Marin Food Bank, GLIDE, Up On Top, The Gubbio Project, Care Through Touch and/or The Boys and Girls Club. Recently we experimented with new programs. For example, we invited Kristen Marshall from the Harm Reduction Coalition to provide Narcan Training and Q&A for Santa Clara students and residents. For both Santa Clara and St. Bens, Hy and Nicole facilitated a Street-Level Peacemaking workshop, offering a nonhierarchical approach to de-escalation. The students especially appreciated the emphasis on community dinners with residents and adding a Street Retreat at the end of the week.

Nicole and Hy learned from experimenting with the structure and formation of the immersions. They have found that by building the immersions around a theme it provides a lens to focus the experience and discussions while allowing unfiltered exposure to an experience of living in the Tenderloin. They learned that concluding immersions with a second Street Retreat promotes the students' awareness of shifts in their own perspectives about the community and about themselves over the course of the week. Overall we feel that the immersions have been successful in creating a meaningful and transformative experience for the students who visit us. We thoroughly enjoy creating and participating in these weeks alongside the students.

#### **Accompanying Alex:**

Alex was one of the first community members I met in the Tenderloin, in mid-2016. In that time, I have seen incredible growth in him, both as a person and in his

relationship to Faithful Fools. When I first encountered Alex, I met a man who had great enthusiasm, but little control over himself or self-awareness. He has found himself banned from many places because of his lack of boundary awareness and difficulties with self control. Despite this, the Fools have been a steady place of learning for him. We have found that Alex responds well to patience and to open and honest communication. For example, when he comes to the door and wants to join a program, we will ask him what his energy level is and if he thinks he is able to participate respectfully. Alex has been receptive to these questions, and is usually capable of giving honest answers and of leaving if it is not a good day for him. We have found that these questions help him to self-assess, thus creating an increase in self-awareness. In addition, Jackie Hider has taken to teaching Alex meditation techniques so he can be a better participant when our Street Zendo re-opens. Personally, I have seen a substantial increase in his self control, respect for boundaries and ability to participate in our programs.

In June, Alex lost his housing. The loss of housing caused a domino effect where he lost access to his money and medication. The direct result the Fools saw was an increase in his time spent in the building. When Maggie joined the Fools in August, she was able to spend time with Alex, and get to know him very well. Eventually, Alex came to her asking for accompaniment and assistance getting back on track. Several fools are participating in this accompaniment. First, Maggie and Elise went with him to a Navigation Center to obtain information on his next steps for housing. Then, I went with him to a doctor appointment to assess his ability to have agency over his money once again. We are all working together to get his ID, discounted Clipper Card and Social Security card replaced. Alex continues to be a dedicated part of the Fools community and despite these hardships, he is working toward improvement.

## Section IV Reflections on 2018 from Hy Carrel

### **Accompaniment:**

2018 was a year of being present with each other. We walked difficult paths this year, through grief and in remembering those we've lost. As we came together to mourn Kay, we explored the meaning of Oscar's Feast without a living Oscar through the prodding and probing of our clown fools Entonces and Afraid. Shortly thereafter, we pulled together to be with Nicole through her loss of family members. In finding space to support her while enabling Sam time for a sabbatical, we can thank **Bianca Huerta** and **Marvin Fourte** for bringing their energetic, loving, and insightful presence to Fools Court during this time. The summer brought more loss, as our accompaniment of long-time fool **Edward Tyler** became mourning and honoring him.

It was an honor to accompany Tenderloin Votes co-founder **Kat Callaway** through her passing in August. Here are Kat's words from a skilled nursing facility in September 2017:

*"The Fools have reached out and reminded me that my community cares and is embracing me in my absence. Sam has helped with practical matters including receiving mail I need and could not access if sent to my hotel. And Hy communicates most days, he and Nicole making the long trip twice to visit despite their many commitments in SF, once leaving me with a beautiful blue fools nose. The Fools have not only cheered me but made me feel remembered, important, and one of my proudest titles, a Fool."*

The fall began with creating space and support for Carmen's sabbatical and also the loss of Donna Gilfert, a fixture outside our doors who became housed but returned to the street for connection. Finally, Peace Phoenix, who found his peace in the friendship of Dorian and others, left us in September. Through memorials, mourning, and juggling we have accompanied each other this year.

Our accompaniment efforts also include walking with people in their efforts to apply for Medi-Cal and Social Security benefits. It requires helping manage the paperwork and often hours of accompaniment to appointments. Carmen and Nicole have gone through the process of becoming IHSS (In Home Supportive Service) workers which has allowed them to formally accompany individuals who qualify for this service and also it is a way to supplement their income.

We also continue to closely accompany Stone Allen as he slowly declines from bladder cancer. We are in close connection with his siblings, Brock & Lissa Allen, and all work together especially with his frequent hospital visits.

Carmen continues to serve as a trustee for the Special Needs Trusts of John Viletto III and Ruvage Seymour, as well as Representative Payee for John's Social Security. We have refrained from taking on any new payee relationships and instead refer people to organizations that have the necessary infrastructure to manage such relationships, which leaves us freer to support people without the complexity of a money-based relationship only.

### **WRITE ON!**

WRITE ON! meets every Thursday. Most of the faces are the same from week to week, and some people pop in for a few weeks or monthly. Each session begins with a check in, followed by a body-awareness meditation and listening to a poem. We free-write for 15 minutes and do a brief check-in before writing on a topic for 15 minutes. Consistent themes of WRITE ON! are checking in with our body to sense into what is our truth and how is our body communicating with us, and then writing our truth in that moment. People find trust in the circle, and use this writing as an opportunity to venture into past experiences and find healing. **Robert-Harry Rovin's** instructions to provide only positive feedback to people's writing leads to encouragement and confidence rising from this circle.

Regular participants include, Ed Bowers, Maggie Brennan, Hy Carrel, John Duke, Darryl Jones, Dee Kylie, Kate Sulzer, Meg Whitaker-Greene, and Elise Youssoufian. As they are available, we are joined by JJ Rush, Lotus Miller, and Sheppard Kominars, whose health has limited his recent participation.

### **Community Dinners at Old First:**

The Fools are in our second year of coordinating Community Dinners on the 4th Saturday of each month for Old First Presbyterian Church. This provides a simple monthly volunteer opportunity for Fools and those interested in volunteering with us, as well as another chance to connect with members of our community who appreciate these meals. Over the past year many of our intentions for these meals have manifested: the dinners have become more peaceful, more guests have joined our opening circle of volunteers, and more volunteers sit, eat and converse with guests.

### **Interns At The Faithful Fools:**

A number of interns worked with us in 2018, bringing many gifts. Often they come to us from California Institute of Integral Studies as work-study students or from Starr King School for the Ministry for Field Education credit.

**Elise Youssoufian** was our work-study intern from California Institute of Integral Studies who was with us throughout 2018 and early 2019. **Kelley Scrimger** was a Field Education intern from Starr King School into the first half of 2018. Kelley provided presence for Thursday programs and was an exceptional listener, especially supportive of the Listening Post program.

### **Volunteers:**

Our programs, advocacy, and accompaniment depend on faithful efforts of volunteers. Since our individual reports highlight many volunteers, here we try to emphasize a few of the others. **Ed Bowers** anchors our Zendo, as much as possible through the construction, and is a constant presence in WRITE ON!, stepping in whenever Robert-Harry is unavailable. **Dee Kylie** had been spending more time at Fools Court, meditating and greeting people at the door. **Ade Kroll** has led a push for more foolishness, and keeps us well-stocked with incredible soup, cookies, and immense smiles.

**Kim Mosteiro** has been an active participant in programs, and has particularly joined immersion groups, sharing her experiences being a grandmother in the Tenderloin. **Julie Roberts-Fong** engaged in a TL Think Tank and is an active partner moving conversations on racism and equity forward with our students groups and with the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC). **Brian Darr** maintains our monthly movie night with compelling films, relevant to local and national themes. **Jon Sadrgilany** and **Emily Basnight** are consistently among our shadowers for youth on Street Retreats and the Coming of Age program led by **Alex Darr**. Alex Darr and **Kirsten Hove** created most of the decorations for Oscar's Feast, while **Daide Fabbian** and **Kate Sulzer** took on the Feast's food preparation. A devoted team made Oscar's Feast engaging.

**Barbara Meyers**, a UU minister who was a Faithful Fools intern in 2003-04, and her spiritual direction colleague, **Karolyn Stenlund**, have nurtured their "Listening Post" outside the Turk & Hyde mini-park every Thursday afternoon. They make themselves available to listen to whomever stops by and wants to talk. Mary Ganz sees them every week when they arrive and when they leave, and Sharon, Maggie, Elise and others sometimes sit with them.

**Jesse Johnson** continues active leadership in Tenderloin Votes, as he also has worked on political campaigns and more resident advocacy. **Dorian Rhodes** stepped up her leadership in TL Votes and a TL Think Tank, being the primary force maintaining those organizations during Sam's sabbatical. Dorian's weekly emails keep people informed and active. Throughout the summer and fall, Dorian planned visits by candidates for supervisor, voter registration tables, and voter information parties. **Kasey Asberry** is an active partner with Demonstration Gardens, the monthly Art-in-the-Park music/poetry, and continued daytime activation of the Turk & Hyde mini-park. The activation provided an opportunity for **Bianca Huerta** and **Marvin Fourte** to play music with kids and lead adults in a discussion of *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*. **Nieves Moreno** has been less available recently, which reminds us of how much we depend on him. He continues to say "yes" when we need him, and he was engaged and earnest in his accompaniment throughout Edward Tyler's final years.

## Section V Reflections on 2018 from Jackie Hider

### **Being a Volunteer-At-Large:**

When I reflect on my role at Fools Court, I call myself a volunteer-at-large. There are activities where I have a leadership role. I am a steady presence at the San Francisco Night Ministry's Open Cathedral gatherings on Tuesday nights. I work with volunteers **Sharon Weld** and **Elizabeth Hill** to make sure everything goes smoothly, to accompany community members who need a someone to talk to, and to fully participate. I join the check-in each week and connect with the CPE students (ministers in training) and USF students, providing the meals via their Food Recovery Network. I sometimes I take leftover food out on the street or next door to the Midori Hotel. Open Cathedral welcomed Night Minister Valerie McIntee, who joined Rev. Monique Ortiz as a second group leader. As I walk around the Tenderloin, it is an extra treat to meet my friends from this group.

I am an active member of the Fools leadership team and an enthusiastic presence at Movie Night.

A second part of being a volunteer-at-large is being available when something comes up. This involves being flexible, paying attention to what needs to be done, and figuring out if I am the best person to do it. Here are some examples. On the day of the flood, I was able to get to Fools Court, and Maggie Brennan and I spent two hours using a wet vacuum to move water out of the building. When the students from Santa Clara High School were at the with us in December, they slept at Old First Presbyterian Church on Van Ness, which is about a mile from Fools Court. Several mornings, I walked up to the Church and accompanied them as they went to different volunteer activities. When I am at the Fools, I often help out with food preparation and clean up. I answer the door, engage with people, sort through problems, and when possible, help out with an appropriate action. Sometimes, the other volunteers and I get together and just talk through something that has happened earlier in the day. These mini-reflection groups are always appreciated and give a grounding to what we do. In reality, there is always something coming up at the Fools.

A third part of being a volunteer-at-large is attending workshops and other activities at the Fools or sponsored by Fools. Because I have been spending lots of time at Fools Court for eight years and have lived across the street for more than two years, I have a sense of the Tenderloin from a good block of experiences, which informs my questions and comments in all the groups I attend. I participate in most Street Retreats. I attend sessions of Theater of the Oppressed. I was able to attend two Narcan Trainings with Kristen Marshall from the Harm Reduction Coalition. Her knowledge and presentation about drug use and overdose prevention was framed in a deep understanding of the harm reduction model. It was inspiring. I attended Hy and Nicole's Street-Level Peacemaking workshop and participated in the community

dinner at Fools Court with residents. In July I accompanied Carmen to Woodside Priory School where she led a service and engaged with instructors. In April, Sam, Carmen and I co-lead a service at the Sierra Foothills Unitarian Universalists in Auburn, CA.

**The Zendo:**

During 2018, I have spent less time in our Zendo than I would have liked. When I am working at the hospital, attending classes and meetings, I do not get a chance to meditate at the Fools. I do meditate several other places. Ed Bowers continues to be a steady presence as timekeeper. Dee Kylie comes on most days. Others come and go. I still work with my original questions. What is street ministry? What is a street Zendo? How do we make our Zendo a place where people feel invited? Is that important? Is it fine just the way it is? These questions may be a good place to start our inquiry.

**Stretching out into the Tenderloin community and beyond:**

I have continued volunteering at San Francisco General Hospital as a multi-faith chaplain through the Sojourn chaplaincy program. In the fall, I attended a nine-hour workshop on spiritual assessment. Many of the patients I visit live in the Tenderloin and are in the hospital because of health issues caused by or exacerbated by their living situation. Doctors, nurses, and social workers report the emotional distress of having to discharge patients back to the streets or a shelter. It is the chaplain's job to be present to everybody's stories, listen deeply, and help each person find some comfort. The chaplain is also called to discern whether to take appropriate action. This continues to be a rich training ground for me as I continue to explore what it means to be a street chaplain.

I also attend the San Francisco Interfaith Council breakfast every month. This is a great place for me to connect with other faith groups. Each meeting includes a presentation about some relevant service being offered in San Francisco. For example, we heard from the Bay Area Refugee Support Group and the International Rescue Committee, the SFPD Community Chaplaincy program, and San Francisco In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority. On several occasions, I have taken students to these meetings and they have told me they appreciate chatting with people from a multiplicity of faith traditions. Also, I always have interesting and useful information to bring back to the Fools.

During the summer I attended many sessions of a course put on by Hospitality House. This is an advanced version of their Healing, Organizing, and Leadership Development (HOLD) course, which they've named HOLD Plus. Nine people were training to become political activists in our community. All of the attendees were Tenderloin Community residents. At one point in the course we created and passed around petitions to give to our new mayor, requesting clean and supervised bathrooms 24/7 to be made available to people living on the streets. I learned a great deal in this course about our community and about myself. I examined my communication style. I got lots of feedback about my sense of entitlement and how it

shows up. It was a valuable and humbling experience. From my time in the HOLD Plus course, I realized that I really want to spend my time and energy on spiritual/chaplaincy issues and on the specific activities of the Fools. Also in the course, I began to explore what it means, “to belong.” I gave a presentation on belonging to the HOLD Plus group and wrote a companion piece for the 2018 Fools Fables.

I attended a one-day training on trauma care for critical incidents with the San Francisco Police Department’s chaplains. This is the first training module for people interested in serving as volunteer SFPD community chaplains. In the course, the presenters described what it is like to “police,” especially during a critical incident. The police are definitely a part of our Tenderloin community; their presence is always felt and there are generally strong opinions about the work that they do. It was invaluable hearing their concern for the people living in our community and the stresses of their job. At this point, I have chosen not to complete the whole program because it involved a big time commitment and covered the whole city. I want to remain focused on the Tenderloin.

2018 was a difficult year and a year of some big changes. We all had to be flexible and in touch with our places of resiliency. We had to step up and not turn away from our losses. It was tough. I learned to trust and really appreciate my friends. In the end, I am happy with the balance I am finding by working with the Fools and in the community. Each supports the other. I can step back and see a bigger picture and at the same time focus on some small delicate issue. This works well for me.

## **Section VI**

### **Reflections on 2018 from Sharon Weld**

#### **Reflections from a Seminarian:**

Initially I was drawn to the Fools by a Street Retreat for students at Starr King School for the Ministry. When I arrived last June as a self-invited volunteer, I was given the freedom to participate, to watch and listen, and to learn through experience in this extended family. Undoubtedly I have learned and been given much more than I have been able to offer, but I have enjoyed trying to be helpful in a lovely variety of ways. I have become a regular presence at both Conversation of Biblical Proportions on Thursdays and SF Night Ministry’s Open Cathedral on Tuesdays. I have attended TL Votes, spent regular time with folks who wanted a listening ear, and have pitched in with a miscellany of household tasks – washing a homeless bear’s “fools gold” is a task I doubt I would do anywhere else! Most importantly, however, I am learning invaluable lessons about how to “be” in the world, the Fools’ mission, and what accompaniment, hospitality and generosity really look like. I am still in search for the particular work that is mine to offer here – it seems that freedom is both a gift and a challenge – but in any case, I am hoping to shift further from student toward volunteer in the time ahead. I am permanently grateful for this community and its mission.

## Section VII

### Reflections on 2018 from Sam Dennison

#### **Sabbatical Thoughts:**

This last year was anchored for me in three months of sabbatical time. From May through July, I spent time away from the city and away from the Fools. My goal was to consider what the first 7 years of my life at the Fools has been for me and to ponder what the next period of time might be as well. It was an appropriate year to consider such things. Between Kay's death and my own impending 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, there was good fodder for my unruly thoughts. A year ago, everything was on my mind, thoughts in boisterous queues awaiting attention. So the months between May and July opened the space to attend to them and to my health. Knowing that I am entering a time when both body and mind shift, it was important to me to create longings for exercise and other practices of good health.

I spent a large portion of the time on road trips—to New Mexico, to Nevada, and throughout Northern California. I went to places I hadn't been in many years (Santa Fe, the loneliest road in Nevada) and places I'd never been. I was moved to find myself in Tule Lake where Americans of Japanese descent were interned during WWII. I understood something new about what is happening at our southern border and what is happening outside our front door—how internal and external refugees share (with internment camp residents) a lack of statehood and human rights. As a backdrop to that experience, I went hiking in many forests that I'd never visited before. Within weeks, fire had broken out where I had been, devastating the landscape. The ravages of wildfire include legacies of fear—I learned a great deal through my travels. I will be thinking about these things for a long time yet to come.

Practices for the sake of keeping my body healthy are now pretty strong. I've improved my posture, adding 0.40 of an inch back to my height and I've improved my exercise and eating, removing an additional 10 pounds from my weight. Practices have much improved my sleep, patience, and general sense of wellbeing.

That attention to body in turn provided attention to my life of the mind. I know many a person who would speak to a spiritual renewal, but for me it is indeed intellectual. I had time to think and I've become committed to keeping a practice of time to think, to read, and to write. While the fall was very busy and culminated in the great sewer back up of 2018, I have moved with resolution to a schedule that allows me two to three hours each morning to think, read, and write.

“What is mine to do?” We often ask ourselves this question. A year ago, I stumbled upon the notion that mine is to be a citizen philosopher, rather than citizen activist. I now know more about what that means. Not only is it about defining better what it looks like to be engaged philosophically and thoughtfully with the problems around us, it is also a call to nurture the wisdom and thoughtfulness of the people around us. As the new year dawns, I am asking myself to address these questions more

deeply. As I do so, I will be seeking more and more places to do that thinking out loud and in public.

**The Institute for Street Level Learning:**

An important tenet of the Institute for Street Level Learning is this: Ours is not to teach, but to create a learning environment. With each passing year, we gain greater experience in how to do that with greater depth. The immersion programs (**University of Santa Clara, St. Benedicts/St. John's, St. Ignatius High School**) are now mature enough that we have a strong sense of the differences among the students and their interests. We are able to shape the volunteer experiences and content of discussions/workshops so that each group can focus on questions that meaningfully shape their stay with us. We now have a wide base of guest speakers from our sister service organizations as well as workshop presenters that we can offer a variety of program focuses including food insecurity, harm reduction, among other topics. These resources provide both direct experience and reflection such that students return to their home campuses with the ability to articulate how their wellbeing is bound up with wellbeing of those who live in a place like the Tenderloin.

Offering **Women, Poverty, and Catholic Social Thought** with **Dr. Erin Brigham** continues to be a very rich experience. This year was particularly powerful and the students' final reflections demonstrated that the course had a profound impact on each of them. The invitational process of beginning the first few days on campus and walking together to the Tenderloin provides experiential material before the students dive into complex theories of justice. With the visceral experience so close at hand, students enter the analysis of poverty on individual lives and on society as a whole with a felt sense of the complexity of the issues. Beyond the academic achievements of the class, students demonstrated that the class provided them with the means to understand how their own lives are changed by conditions of poverty in the lives of others. One student talked about how (as a marketing student) success is measured by profit. She now feels that if you have enough already, more is greed. Another student came to understand that the danger in the TL is not the homeless people, it's the inequality and injustice. These kinds of insights are based in deep reflection. They are not superficial and this gives us hope that this learning experience will have a lasting impact on these students.

Another remarkable outcome of this class transpired slowly over the last year. Carolyn Cox, a TL resident and long-time Fool, came to the class last year to share her experiences with The Healing WELL and as a woman who has experienced poverty. As she left the class that day, she realized that she too wanted to go to college and that she is as smart and able as the students with whom she had just spoken. As a result, she enrolled in City College and is working toward her AA degree. Her intention is to go on to earn a bachelor degree. She participated almost daily in the class this year and was an important member of the community of learners. Carolyn has demonstrated for us that it is very possible for classes on site

at the Fools to provide entry to higher education for residents of the TL who might not otherwise think they can succeed academically.

We are now connected with **UC San Francisco**. Through our relationship with **Paula Fleisher**, I have been invited to join a Center for Community Engagement committee, which is designing programs for service learning. I've only just begun this work, but already it's clear that our experience with creating embedded learning experiences will be helpful.

**Advocacy:**

We remain deeply engaged with **Market Street for the Masses** (MSMC) as I continue to be co-chair and a member of the steering committee. The coalition is focusing more on developing the power and voice of TL residents as well as monitoring the progress of various development projects. Through that work, I remain in contact with various developers and continue to seek ways to engage them in mitigating the displacement that comes with each project that breaks ground. The Twitter Tax Exemption (the original reason that MSMC formed) will soon be phased out and with it the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC), which I also chair. It will be with no small relief that I will be able to disband the CAC sometime this spring.

I was appointed to the **St. Francis Memorial Hospital & TLHIP** (Tenderloin Health Improvement Partnership) advisory committee last fall. While it is early yet to understand what role the Fools will play in this group, it is clear that as one of few residents in the group, it will be significant to have a voice informed by daily life on the streets.

We continue to host TL Votes and a TL Think Tank. Both groups provide community-building alongside learning and organizing. **Dorian Rhodes**, who lives across the street and has been involved with the Fools for several years now, is taking on more and more responsibility for organizing/communicating with the participants of these groups. She is also interested in taking a more active role in editing an annual magazine that would focus on topics that flow from TL Votes and Think Tank discussions.

## **Section VIII**

### **Reflections on 2018 from Maggie Brennan**

#### **Being a Mercy Volunteer at Fools Court:**

I chose to spend my year with Mercy Volunteer Corps at Faithful Fools because I was drawn to a ministry that “acknowledges each human’s incredible worth” and “meets people where they are.” Almost 6 months into my time at Faithful Fools, I have spent a lot of my time being present and learning.

This type of service manifests itself in many different ways for me at the Fools. One of my weekly commitments is to talk with a woman in the community who needs a listening ear. She is processing a lifetime of trauma and has few people in her life to whom she can talk. I find that I can give her a safe space where she can feel heard and this gives me the pleasure of being able to be present for her.

I have also gotten to know a man who is recently homeless and often needs support. Over the second half of 2018, we have grown in mutual friendship and he has come to see the Fools as a place he is welcomed and loved. These are just two of the many people I have the pleasure of interacting with, from familiar faces at programs to anyone else who might come to the door. I enjoy getting to know people in programs like WRITE ON! and Conversation of Biblical Proportions. I enjoy the moments I get to learn from and about others, “seeing the light, courage, intelligence, strength and creativity of the people we encounter.” Many people express their gratitude for the Fools because this is a place they can build relationships and feel heard. And I am grateful for the chance to get to know them because I have the opportunity to learn from them and grow with them.

I enjoy participating in various Street Retreats, immersion trips, and classes being taught at Fools Court. Learning with both students and community members has allowed me to gain a better understanding of current social and political injustices, as well as the importance of solidarity in community.

Some of my time here has been spent updating Sam’s video project, both digitizing interviews from 2011 and conducting new ones. The project’s goal is to document various fools: How did they connect here? With what are they involved? I enjoy getting to know the people who choose to spend their time here, and thinking critically about what it means to participate in this community.

Interestingly enough, I have been able to use my architecture degree at the Fools. After the flood damaged the ground floor, I worked with the architect to develop and draw new plans. Our goal is to make the downstairs, especially a restroom, accessible for a person in a large wheelchair. I am glad that my gifts in this area are valued and appreciated, and that I have been able to contribute to the future of Fools Court. In addition to architecture, I have found that Faithful Fools encourages me as an artist, allowing me to do painting and graphic design projects. These include

assisting with graphics for the Fools Fables, posters for events, programs for memorials, and various art projects.

My time at the Fools is helping me to develop my leadership skills both by participating in weekly Jugglers Circle and by taking on various duties around the building. I am also learning the importance of community, solidarity, and relationship.

## **Section IX**

### **Reflections on 2018 from Elise Youssoufian**

#### **On Being a Work-Study Intern and a Fool:**

From January through December of 2018, I had the fine fortune of being a work-study intern with the Fools, while in the Bachelor of Arts Completion (BAC) program at California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). This experience altered the course of my life for the better, and expanded my understanding and practice of courage and solidarity. In these challenging times, being simultaneously immersed in two learning communities centered on personal and social change was a fitting way to finish the work I began at UC Berkeley two decades ago. Awarded scholarships and work-study grants, I am grateful the program was accessible to me as a low-income woman of color and navigator of chronic pain and intergenerational trauma, with a keen focus on healing paths forward, personally and collectively.

Reflecting on last year, I am moved to reach farther back. In 2016, I crossed paths with Kay Jorgensen at Chaparral House, where I worked as a therapeutic musician. Quickly, multiple threads of connection began to weave themselves together. I soon learned of the Faithful Fools and of my friend Damien Weldon's connection with Kay. That winter solstice, I participated in my first Street Retreat and in the Annual Memorial for People Who Have Died Homeless on the Streets. At the time, (as the call to deepen my arts activism and active peacemaking grew stronger) I also longed to become more involved with the Fools but did not know how. I will never forget the moment in late 2017 I learned the Fools are a work-study partner with CIIS. The rest, as they say, is history.

In January of 2018, I received the strange gift of beginning my work-study internship with the Fools a few days before Kay's passing. I found myself juggling my personal feelings about her death with being present with, and for, an intimate gathering to celebrate her life. During the preparation for the gathering, I was invited to make "ants on a log" (celery sticks with peanut butter and raisins), deeply moved to be told they were a favorite snack of Kay's and to be of service in such a sweet and humble way. The warm welcome I received, and the opportunities for learning and connection which abounded even during such a singular time of loss, set a tone for the rest of the year, inspiring further integration between life and work, the likes of which I had sought but had not previously known.

Since that time, much has happened within and beyond the Fools community -- beautiful and hard moments of connection, loss, healing, laughter, and creativity, with which I continually practiced being present, thanks to the Fools' embodiment of witnessing and accompaniment, both in giving and receiving. My education extended far outside the classroom, taking me onto the streets and into my heart more openly and intently than ever before. Being invited into Fools programs such as Conversation of Biblical Proportions and WRITE ON! gave me space in community to talk across difference and to grow, both as an artist and as a human being with my fellow human beings. Along the way, I was also invited into the Jugglers Circle, guiding me toward continuing as a Fool post-BAC, and to take my learning and my talents into the world-at-large.

During the first half of 2019, I will be doing just that. I will be participating in a social justice artist residency in Chiapas, Mexico, then embarking on an ancestral healing journey to Turkey and Armenia, and then engaging in human rights work near the Arizona/Mexico border. As a fellow Fool recently proclaimed, "Fools walk through borders!" May it be so, and may I make my way back to Fools Court as swiftly as can be.