

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 22: LETTER FROM DOROTHY DAY

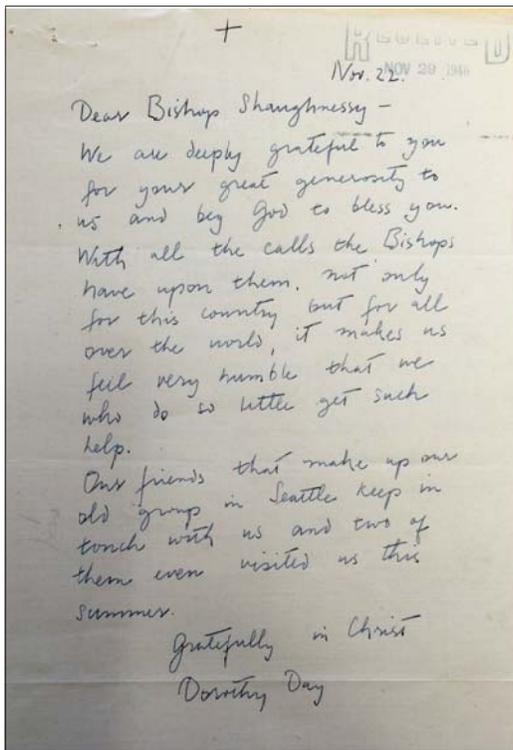
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On May 1, 1933, the first issue of the *Catholic Worker* was distributed at a rally in New York's Union Square. By 1940, the newspaper—which sold and still sells for a penny a copy—had a national circulation of 125,000. Many of those copies found their way to the labor unions—and the Catholic parishes—of Seattle. Before long, Bishop Shaughnessy was receiving letters of complaint. “Wont you, dear Bishop,” wrote a Miss Levy, “do something about the matter before more souls are weaned away from the Church and her Priesthood by the insidious doctrine preached by word of mouth and in the pages of the CATHOLIC WORKER by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin?”

With his usual thoroughness, Bishop Shaughnessy *did* look into the matter. And the more he looked, the more he found to approve in the Catholic Worker Movement. In February, 1940, Bishop Shaughnessy welcomed Dorothy Day to Seattle, and opened many doors for her: with his approval, she addressed students and faculty at Seattle College, St. Martin's College, the University of Washington Newman Club, and St. Edward's Seminary. She also addressed a general assembly of the Holy Names Sisters.

Bishop Shaughnessy also encouraged Day to explore what Seattle Catholics were already doing for the poor. She was impressed with the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and described its local founder, Peter Empt, in an article for the *Catholic Worker*: he wore a “ten-gallon black hat and cowboy boots, a holster and revolver and makes his own bullets,” as well as being “a generous soul.”

Day also visited the Hooverville on the waterfront south of downtown, where 650 shanties had been set up, some perched precariously on pilings to keep them out of the water. Whole families lived in the Hooverville (one of six in Seattle), with children going off to school and returning home to these tumbledown shanties. “Christ is there,” Day later wrote of the visit, “there in the mud, in the shacks with His poor. With them he is trying to find a place to lay his head. With them he hungers and with them He suffers fatigue of body and soul.... Have pity on



Dear Bishop Shaughnessy -
We are deeply grateful to you for your great generosity to us and beg God to bless you. With all the calls the Bishops have upon them, not only for this country but for all over the world, it makes us feel very humble that we who do so little get such help. Our friends that make up our old group in Seattle keep in touch with us and two of them even visited us this summer.
Gratefully in Christ
Dorothy Day



Above: A letter from Dorothy Day to Seattle's Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy, dated November, 1946. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle. Below: Dorothy Day in the 1950s.

them, and on us, who permit such things to be.”

During her visit, Day was in and out of the Cathedral and the Rectory almost every day, since her priest friend Father H. A. Reinhold—who had been instrumental in connecting her with Bishop Shaughnessy—was stationed at St. James.

Before she left Seattle, Day met with Bishop Shaughnessy again. He gave his support to her plan for a new House of Hospitality in Seattle. The house opened less than a month later, with an outpouring of support from all over the diocese. O'Dea High School students came and cleaned out the tumbledown duplex they had rented on King Street in the heart of the International District. A group of seminarians from St. Edward's prepared and planted a vegetable patch. Day's new friends from St. Vincent de Paul provided furnishings and other supplies. And the people of the Archdiocese supplied a steady stream of milk, food, clothing, and much more.

The St. Francis House of Hospitality opened on March 8. The first visitors, Day noted, were two Japanese men in search of jiu-jitsu lessons! But soon hundreds of people in need were finding their way to King Street. By May 8—after just two months in operation—St. Francis House had served 29,381 meals in addition to providing shelter to 22 men every night.

Bishop Shaughnessy remained a staunch supporter of the Catholic Worker Movement even after his debilitating stroke of 1945. On November 22, 1946, Dorothy Day wrote to him: “We are deeply

grateful to you for your great generosity to us and beg God to bless you.... it makes us feel very humble that we who do so little get such help.”

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

Find out more about the Catholic Worker movement and their continuing presence in Seattle at catholicworker.org.