



## INSHA'ALLAH

I don't know when it slipped into my speech  
that soft word meaning, "if God wills it."  
Insha'Allah I will see you next summer.  
The baby will come in spring, insha'Allah.  
Insha'Allah this year we will have enough rain.

So many plans I've laid have unraveled  
easily as braids beneath my mother's quick fingers.

Every language must have a word for this. A word  
our grandmothers uttered under their breath  
as they pinned the whites, soaked in lemon,  
hung them to dry in the sun, or peeled potatoes,  
dropping the discarded skins into a bowl.

Our sons will return next month, insha'Allah.  
Insha'Allah this war will end, soon. Insha'Allah  
the rice will be enough to last through winter.

How lightly we learn to hold hope,  
as if it were an animal that could turn around  
and bite your hand. And still we carry it  
the way a mother would, carefully,  
from one day to the next.

BY DANUSHA LAMÉRIS\*





# HOUSE NOTES

By Meridith Owensby

The first Christmas celebration at Lydia's House will not soon be forgotten. We celebrated not only the coming of Christ but the arrival of a new baby girl, born to a Lydia's House guest. In the midst of the season, we took time to share our favorite Christmas stories, decorate cookies, check out the lights at the zoo, and make our own gingerbread houses. We even went together to the Cincinnati Ballet's Nutcracker with **Rick Boydston** (who also regularly helps guests with legal concerns, plants flowers in the front yard, and makes salads each Sunday night). **Matt & Maggie Coyle** came for an after-Christmas visit, delighting all with their presence and their willingness to clean our grungy kitchen!



Lydia's House alumni and guests experienced many life-changing events. We accompanied one former guest through her surgery, and we were elated when the doctor stated that it had gone well. Another former guest regained her permanent resident card after a lengthy time without identification. Two former guests obtained independent housing and we steered some donations their way, with Elizabeth and Grace schlepping a mattress up three flights of stairs. One former guest is looking at her one-year employment anniversary in July. A former guest passed her nursing exam. And we celebrated the first birthday of our youngest guest, to the delight of all involved!

Many celebrations marked our days, from an 80's-Prom-themed Mardi Gras to birthday parties for our beloved guests and regular volunteers. We were honored to become the collective Godmothers to a former guest's daughter, delighted by the handmade nametags for each guest at Thanksgiving, and touched by the Easter feast that a guest prepared for the house. We also just celebrated our first year of hosting with a Cinco de Mayo feast and karaoke sing-along.

Our regular volunteers continued to faithfully support the house. We had many **Mindy Burger** Wednesday dinners, causing several house members to exclaim happily, "Oh, it's a Mindy Wednesday? You know it'll be good." **Sally Evans** came back refreshed from an end-of-winter trip to Florida ready for her Sunday morning shifts, asking "Anything on the to-do list?" and faithfully tending the ever-wild Tupperware. **Lou Puopolo** had everyone asking for style tips, and the donations from her daughter

clothed many a resident volunteer. **Dennis and Georgia Bishop** graciously received the always-present maintenance list at the main house, tending to light bulbs, paper towel holders, and sticky windows with aplomb. **Cameron Kelley** responded to calls about plumbing and patiently oversaw the "snaking" of our drain. **Sandra Murphy** dropped off several loads of dry goods and toiletries. **Anne Housholder** continued managing our Xavier University student volunteers on Mondays, tending to our medical needs, and hand-stitching an impressive number of merit badges to honor guests, setting a record of three in one week! And **Jill Stoxen** has remained our faithful friend, accompanying guests each Friday and sharing with us her amazing ability to turn last year's frozen produce into delicious soups.

Those of us in leadership sorrowed for the state of our city and worked to discern what sustainability meant for the long haul. Volunteers together started reading *Trauma Stewardship* by Connie Burk and discussing it at our monthly core volunteer meetings. We've also reached out to our faithful companion, **Laura Menze**, for her occupational therapy expertise. Several avenues for training in trauma-informed care are being pursued in order to give us new tools for life together in light of the brokenness we and our guests carry. Each of the three core community members took time away for vacation. We came back from our respective pauses with new energy for the work entrusted to our hands.

These house notes don't have room for all the tiny grace notes that fill our everyday lives, from coming home to a living room filled with song to spirited dinnertime conversations debating the merits of *The Princess Bride*, to discovering that someone folded your load of laundry out of kindness, to watching Baby J take his first steps. The details are ever-changing and the participants come and go, but the light at the core of the community is consistent. It has been such a wondrous gift to be part of this first year, and I thank all of you who have joined in making this wild dream a reality. It is every bit as hard as we thought it would be and many times more incredible than we ever could've imagined. Stop by if you're in the neighborhood; you'll leave with a Lydia's House story of your own!



## THROUGH OUR GUEST'S EYES: INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA

From October to April Andrea was one of the long-term guests living at Lydia's House. She brought life to the community in so many ways, whether through her amazing sense of honesty and compassion or by bringing humor to the dinner table. Before she left she was kind enough to share some of her experiences living in community (the joys and the difficulties) over the past six months.

### **Who are you? What are your interests, talents, hopes?**

My passion in life is nursing. I have devoted the past six years to studying and preparing to be a nurse. I really have struggled a lot in the past, and from my experiences I know that I want to help others. I have a caring and compassionate side for others who can't help themselves. When they're sick, they need someone to advocate for them and take care of them because they are vulnerable.

I enjoy running. I'm very competitive. I also enjoy spending weekends with my significant other, being with friends, and going to dog parks. I also enjoy all the daily living of the community – the events we have going on. We celebrate special accomplishments, and we take time to celebrate Catholic/Christian traditions. We incorporate that in our living – we pray at dinner, at night. We celebrate all the holidays together. It's a lot of fun.

### **What have been some of the joyful moments for you at Lydia's House?**

Moving in the first day was really joyful for me. It was like "holy crap! I'm going through with this!" It was a bit scary, but it was very joyful. My sixty-day celebration was momentous. I felt loved. I loved the volunteer day across the street fixing up the new house. I love meeting volunteers who come here: I love Grace. I love Janet. I love Sally.

One of the joyous things I've experienced is earning trust. I had lost that through my difficult past and my struggles. That's a huge thing that I've earned back. I have a lot of respect for everyone here, especially Mary Ellen. She's not scary,



but yeah ... she is scary. She's not afraid to throw the hammer down. Now that I'm farther along in my recovery, I understand what she and the staff are trying to do. It's like running a race. They want me to win, and they're helping me train. I want to make everyone proud and win.

### **What has been difficult during your stay at Lydia's House?**

For me, it was hard being in a new place and surrounded by strangers. I had to make this my new home, and I just wanted to go home, but there was no home. I had nowhere because I was... homeless. It's a confusing feeling.



It was also hard balancing everything. I was nervous about messing up here, breaking a rule or forgetting my responsibilities, which were a lot: volunteering, getting a job, taking the bus, doing my part here. At some points, it was a little overwhelming. But as I got better and better, it was like: "Oh yeah, this is a busy day, but that's what it's like." You just do it...

### **What was it like to live in an intentional community?**

I had responsibilities that I was accountable for. That included being involved, being home for dinner. To me, it was important to be at our worship and to be engaged in events that we did.

I've found that the staff, well, I've never met such nice people. I've even asked them before: do you know how nice you all are? When I moved in here, I thought their life was solely Lydia's House: eat, breathe, and sleep Lydia's House. That's what they do, that's who they are. And now... they are, like, human? They have their own wants and desires.

### **What were some of your goals while at Lydia's House?**

I accomplished a lot of goals in six months! First, I landed the volunteer position at Mercy Ministries, which built my self-esteem. Then my goals were to get a job and pass my boards. I did those, too! Most recently, I ran the Flying Pig half marathon. My future goals are to get a job as a nurse and save my money. Later in life, I want to have a family and be a really good mother and caretaker.



# THE JEAN DONOVAN HOUSE: MAKING ROOM TO SERVE

Elizabeth Coyle

It has been over six months since 2005 Mills Avenue has been in our possession, and renovations have been ongoing since January. Yet it seems like a sudden miracle that a once-abandoned home across the street from Lydia's House is now a place of such beauty. Live-in volunteers are packing their bags for the short move across the street as we make way for more women in need. With the opening of the Jean Donovan House as an extension of our ministry, we are now able to house up to four live-in volunteers, reach guest capacity at Lydia's House, have a guest room to provide further hospitality, and have space for a functional new office.

Named after a Catholic lay missionary who lived and worked alongside the poor, the new home will be a refuge for our lay volunteers but also a living memorial to the sacrifice made by Jean Donovan. Though Jean grew up with much privilege, she felt called to a life of service. She left her Cleveland-based accounting job in 1977 and moved to rural El Salvador. While advocating for the rights of the poor and standing against injustice, Jean was martyred by the US-backed repressive Salvadoran government in 1980. In life and in death, she stood in solidarity with the nearly 80,000 innocent civilians who were killed during 12 years of civil war. Though Jean died 35 years ago, she inspires the work of Lydia's House today. The values of the Associate Volunteer program are the values that Jean modeled so clearly: solidarity, spirituality, social justice, simplicity, and hospitality.

It has been pure gift that our friend and supporter Sandra Kelley has been our project manager during renovations, generously sharing her many talents free of charge. Like Jean Donovan, she too left her day-job as an Engineer for GM to intentionally choose a life that allows her to serve others fully. Her faith is always about putting the hammer to the nail and building something meaningful – literally. Over the past 5 months, she has worked with electricians, general contractors, plumbers, city officials, and the list goes on. Her expertise in home renovation now shows in

each and every room. Without her, the Jean Donovan House would not exist. Thank you Sandra for all you do and for who you are! We are forever grateful.

Lest we forget the many hands that resurrected it, we also acknowledge others who have made the Jean Donovan House a home:

- Students from Xavier University Center for Faith and Justice under the leadership of Greg Mellor
- Many faithful students from Xavier Navigators
- Our friends at Brendan's Bridge, a young-adult community stewarded by the Episcopal Diocese Fresh Expressions Program
- Confirmation students from St. Monica/St. George Catholic Church
- Our faithful renovation volunteers, including but not limited to Dennis and Georgia Bishop, Tom Cunningham, Russ Nixon, Emily Chambers, Tony Eilerman, Ben Eilerman and Drew Allan.
- Lydia's House board member Rick Boydston
- The Episcopal Christ Church Cathedral, under the leadership of Dean Gail Greenwell
- The generous donation of Bill and Marge Dejonckheere

We are excited to see how this new space sustains the ministry of Lydia's House, and we look forward to the ways God will continue to bless us in this new season.

**Please join us for our  
House Dedication  
of the Jean Donovan House  
May 31 • 5 – 7 pm  
2005 Mills Ave.**

*This includes a potluck, so bring a dish to share as we enjoy the bounty of spring and celebrate this next chapter of life at Lydia's House.*



# GRACE, MERCY, LOVE, HEARTBREAK, CHANGE: OUR FIRST YEAR OF LIFE TOGETHER

MARY ELLEN MITCHELL-EILERMAN

*It's a Sunday night in Lent, and I walk into the Lydia's House living room to hear Grace Marshall playing "The Wondrous Cross" on the guitar and all of the regulars singing along. Singing together tonight is followed by a reflection on the theme of the day: mercy. "What's mercy?" asks our newest guest, watching her roving 11-month-old out of the corner of her eye. "Mercy," I respond, "is when you don't suffer the consequences of what you deserve. It's the outcome of grace." All around people are quick to chime in. One guest shares that mercy is what the police showed her when they down-graded her felony to a misdemeanor. She is earnest in her gratitude for this act, which will allow her to work. "Mercy," says another, "is what Lydia's House offered me when no one else would take me in. I called shelters in five counties, and literally they all said no." "Mercy," says someone else, "is what Rick offers me weekly, taking me to court and helping me try to move forward from the problems in my past." "Mercy," adds Meridith, "is what was showed to me all week when I skimped on my house chores." We all laugh, mostly because Meridith does more work than the rest of us put together. And then Rachel continues our Lenten service by asking, "Can we offer a prayer of gratitude by naming one person that exemplifies mercy?" We go around and, mostly, we name each other.*

It's hard to describe the first year of hosting at Lydia's House, but the best metaphor I have is the first year of my daughter Annie's life: sweet, impossible, exhausting, traumatizing, transformative, lovely... a blur. It's something I would never give back and never ask to do again. It was a year marked by God's grace and the generous extension of mercy.

By the numbers, we housed 10 women and three children for between 30 days and six months. We saw two women give birth to daughters, went to the emergency room 10 times, hosted 51 Sunday dinners (typically with 14 or more around the table), and bought 30 pounds of ground meat, got into one controversy that attracted national media, and, as a result, had one apartment building donated to us. We responded to 97 calls from women who were homeless

and hoped to live with us, cheered for one six-month recovery anniversary and two 120-day employment celebrations. We grieved as one woman returned to a past abuser and two relapsed into long-held addictions.

THIS IS OUR LIFE,  
THE LIFE WE'VE  
CHOSEN, LIFE  
TOGETHER.

In June of last year, we welcomed Elizabeth Coyle as a core community member, and Rachel Kohl and Grace Marshall in a role that we've named "associates." A year later we are preparing our hearts to say goodbye to Elizabeth as she steps away from this work to return to campus ministry in her home town of Nashville. Although she found moments of deep joy and growth during her time here, she also struggled

to prioritize self-care and balance in her life while living with guests who have often experienced so much trauma. With gratitude for her many friends at Lydia's House, she has decided not to extend past her original one-year commitment. We are sad at the prospect of her leaving but grateful for what she gave us in 12 months: the faithful accompaniment of two guests through childbirth, long-suffering pastoral companionship to two guests with mental illness, patient volunteer coordination, the beautification of and name for the Jean Donovan House, impromptu guitar sing-alongs on the porch, dance parties, thrift store outings, emergency room overnights, spontaneous joy, neighborhood ballet classes, an unlimited supply of Fun Dip, readings by Rumi.

As of March, we learned that Rachel will also be leaving us in August to attend Loyola University of Chicago's pastoral ministry program. From Rachel we've gleaned



Elizabeth (right) will transition out in June. Anne (middle) will join us in September, just as Rachel (left) begins a new life in Chicago.

*Continued on next page.*

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a steady and peaceful in-house presence, monthly e-newsletters, our first scrapbook, the hard and thankless work of managing pledges, a sweet love of the community's children, and a heart that's been open to, literally, whatever needs doing. We are thrilled for her and not-so-secretly disappointed for us. The world will be better as she continues to live into her vocation of ministry.

As we look ahead, we realize that change will be a constant at Lydia's House. The hard work that we do will necessarily mean that most volunteers will make a one-year commitment or less; guest stays are more typically 30-60 days rather than eight months. The reality of this is sometimes heartbreaking, but each woman that we get to know is a gift, even if we only know her for a brief time. The opening that each absence leaves is an opportunity for hope. This

fall we'll welcome new associates, including long-standing community member, Anne Housholder: dermatologist, theologian, expert baker, merit badge maker. She will live in the newly opened Jean Donovan House. We are also so grateful for the constants: our Norwood neighbors, the faithfulness of Vineyard Central Church, The Episcopal Diocese and Bellarmine Chapel, Rick Boydston every Sunday night (and any other time we need him), our board members, outside volunteers who come weekly, and meal angels who come monthly.

This is our life, the life we've chosen, life together. As we celebrate its first birthday, we look to our liturgical traditions for a bit of guidance, saying whole heartedly, "Lord Have Mercy." Then we pause for a moment and conclude, "Thanks be to God."



## ASSOCIATE PROGRAM

Lydia's House is currently seeking two year-long Associate Volunteers to live in a communal setting and work alongside core community members and guests. The term of service is August 2015 - July 2016 with the possibility of extension. We ask that all applicants for the Associates Program be at least 21 years of age and possess a willingness to be challenged and grow. We are seeking people of faith who desire to embrace life in a Christian community and commit to regular prayer and service. Volunteers should be passionate about living alongside the poor and living simply. For more information, visit our website at [www.stlydiashouse.org](http://www.stlydiashouse.org) or contact Mary Ellen at [maryellen@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:maryellen@stlydiashouse.org).





## HOPE FOR NORWOOD

In January of this year, we were saddened to see negative press about our city, Norwood, streaming on the local news channels. The bad news resulted from our mayor releasing a public letter, calling out “race baiting black leaders” and “cowardly elected officials,” in response to national tragedies involving shootings of unarmed black men and boys. As a Catholic Worker house, we felt compelled to join our neighbors in a public action. We sought to call our city and leadership to account, strengthened by the admonition of Pope Francis: “The Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, Section 182).

What followed was a heartbreaking and invigorating journey into meeting our neighbors, co-authoring a letter that shared an alternative vision of our city, and testifying to our beliefs about inclusion and justice in front of city council. We were key organizers of a forum that allowed neighbors to share their experience of race in Norwood, and our eyes have been opened to the history of racial injustice in our small city. We also continue to learn each day of actions that lead to exclusion, most recently the removal of the basketball hoops in public spaces.

At the same time, we are grateful for the grace that we’ve seen in all of this sadness. We would like to thank the **Pastors’ Stroud** for meeting and praying with the mayor; **Josh Stoxen** and **Angela Pancella** for their ongoing diligence in seeking the common good for our city; **Kirsten James** and **Danielle Burris** for their work in organizing neighborhood walks; Councilwoman **Sarah Allan** for speaking publically against racial exclusion; **Nathan Myers** for advocating for the return of the basketball hoops; **Chief Kramer** of the Norwood Police for collaborating with us at the public forum; and **Christina Brown** of Black Lives Matter for bringing her

organizational expertise and passion.

We are hopeful about the many things that will unfold in the coming year. We are continuing to learn dependence on God to provide for our needs. And as we recognize our need and dependence on the Greater God, we offer prayers and petitions for Lydia’s House, West Norwood, and the larger Norwood community.

### **Please Join Us in Prayer:**

For the long journey towards racial reconciliation in our city; that all would be welcome and heard at the table and that Norwood would be a place that celebrates our African American and Latino neighbors

***Lord Have Mercy***

For the public spaces of our city; that our parks would be welcoming and beautiful, that our streets would be safe and maintained, that our sidewalks and thoroughfares would be accessible for those who walk and those with disabilities

***Lord Have Mercy***

For our city officials; that the people of Norwood would boldly stand up and elect officials who care deeply for the common good

***Lord Have Mercy***

For our police; that they would be safe and have what they need to make our city a better place to live, and that these and all public servants would look to the future believing that there can be justice and reconciliation in Norwood

***Lord Have Mercy***

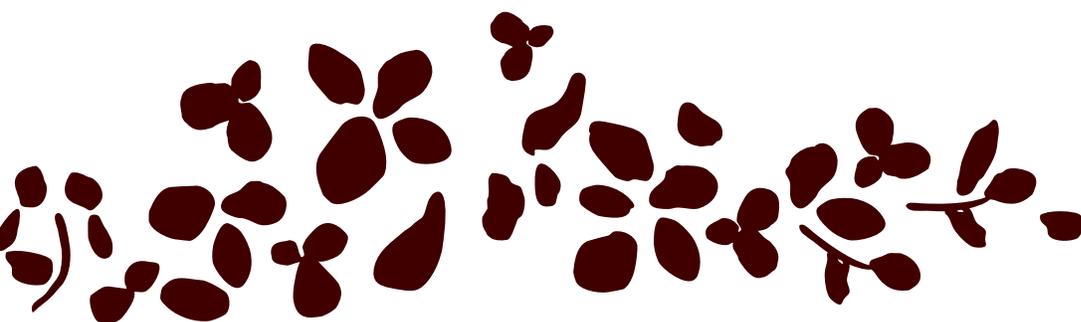


March’s “Walk the Wood” unity event

LYDIA'S HOUSE  
PO Box 128808  
Cincinnati, OH 45212

**STLYDIASHOUSE.ORG**  
**513-549-7752**

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
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## CALENDAR

May 31, 5pm: **House Dedication of The Jean Donovan House**, 2005 Mills Ave. Please join us as we pray for the good that will come in our new property and stay afterwards for a potluck supper. Bring a dish to share.

June 14, July 26, September 27, 5pm: **Summer Monthly Worship**. Join the core community, guests, and associates of Lydia's House as we celebrate scaled-down worship services in our backyard with music, shared prayer and readings. Potluck supper to follow. Bring a dish to share. In case of rain, these events will be in the living room.

July 9-12: **Wild Goose Festival**. Join the core community of Lydia's House in Hot Springs, NC as we camp, listen, and learn with other progressive Christians. [wildgoosefestival.org](http://wildgoosefestival.org)

August 23, 5pm: **Annual Mass of St. Lydia** with our friends from Bellarmine Chapel. Celebrate a Catholic Mass with us and a catered dinner to follow. We'll be accepting donations of canned goods or toiletries for our house needs.

September 19, 6pm: **Women for Women dinner, fundraiser and concert**. Celebrate with us as we unite with women across the city to remember the good work of the last year at Lydia's House and raise funds for our general operations at the home of Maria Krzeski. RSVP to [maryellen@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:maryellen@stlydiashouse.org)

October 25, 5pm: **All Saints Worship Service and Teach-In**. Join us as we celebrate the saints that our rooms are named for and remember their witness of faith. Kid-friendly prayer service and teaching in the living room followed by soup and bread. RSVP to [maryellen@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:maryellen@stlydiashouse.org) if you plan to stay for dinner.



## PRESSING NEEDS:

- Clothes Dryer
- Wireless Monochrome Laser Printer with Copy Machine, HP or Brother Brand
- Gas Oven/Stove (30" wide), above range Microwave (30" wide), either white or stainless steel
- Porch Furniture including a Porch Swing
- Mulch and Perennials
- Projector and Portable Screen
- Carpet Cleaning Machine

Please contact  
[Grace@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:Grace@stlydiashouse.org)  
if you can help us!

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