

Laws of Eternal Motion

By: Debbie Baumgartner

Everything to be known about God
Can be found in the incarnation
Or in a single drop of water
Or a strand of hair or DNA
Infinities within infinities

Sharply focused on a point in time
All of the energy
And light
And life
Like rays of light through a magnifying glass
Concentrated and refined to a single cell
Confined but not bound
Splitting and expanding
Emerging as a baby
And a star

The energy could not be wholly
Contained
And so it burst forth
Simultaneously
On earth as it is in heaven
Multitudes of fluids
Multitudes of heavenly hosts
Equal and opposite reactions
Conservation of mass and energy
And humanity

The initial singularity
Tearing the space-time continuum
Ripping the sky in two
Just as the crowning skull
Breaks into the atmosphere
Emerging with blood and vernix
The crushed and expanding lungs
Filling with air
A cry of a baby
A cry of the heavenly host
Simultaneous ecstasy and agony
Bodies in motion
Bodies at rest



Creation

Jan Tenth Looney 2013

All that ever was
Exists in that moment
All of time
Stretching forward and backward
From this center

This crux
This stem
This seed
The origin of the species
The firstborn of the spirit





HOUSE NOTES: JUNE – DECEMBER 2023

by Meredith Owensby



Summer marked for us a big transition: 3 of our precious and capable young staff were leaving for planned next steps, completing our Dorothy Day Fellowship. As we saw this time of change on the horizon, we planned several events, including a Norwood Day gathering complete with a magician and cookout. Our crew went together to the parade on Montgomery Road and many of our guests said their goodbyes to Macey, Ebony and Faith.

This was the spirit with which I held our departures this summer. It made it easier, then, to throw a festive party at the home of Maria and Robert Krzeski, where we did a departure ritual and prayers and also welcomed Julie, Debbie and David, our new fellows, who would start formally after Labor Day. In late July our staff left, and as a result, we also stopped admitting new shelter guests briefly. During this time of fallow we took a 3-day trip to Family Camp at Procter Episcopal Camp, where a record-breaking number of former guests turned out for fishing, swimming, and camp songs. Mary Ellen, Jacob and our summer volunteer Melinda also went out to Indiana to help folks at



Every departure hit me hard in the early days of Lydia's House. Even when people left for happy reasons, like they'd obtained housing or gotten into grad school, I still mourned at some level. For someone who likes stability, the constant rotation of personalities was wearying.



Nearly a decade in, I've changed my tune on departures. Now, they seem as natural and necessary as the seasons. When volunteers and guests depart from Lydia's House, it opens space for new people to enter. It's the only way it can happen, and far be it from me to try to stop it!

the Bloomington Catholic Worker, following the leg-break of their matriarch, Andrea. We started August by renting out Once Upon a Child for back-to-school shopping for our aftercare families.

Finally, September arrived, and with it, our new



crop of guests and helpers, including a new Mercy volunteer, Grace and a Brethren volunteer, Ashley. It's almost hard to remember back to August, with all its peace and quiet. Since then, much has happened, and we've been busy at work celebrating and extending hospitality.

Our neighbors joined us in welcoming our five new crew members and they've sweetly continued the welcome them with invitations for meals, walks, and outings. It's been a joy to have all the nice things we say about residing in Norwood proven accurate.

Once our staff was in place, we welcomed four new families into the shelter. Between the four moms, we have eight children at a typical dinner. Our dining room has felt crowded, especially for our three expectant moms, and we are ever more excited about our future larger dining room, with an estimated delivery in the summer of next year.

We started our Atrium program in early September, and our staff rose to meet the challenge. We've got four programs running simultaneously: childcare for the toddlers, Atrium for the three to six-year-olds, an older kid program for ages seven and up, and a gathering for adults. We also offer dinner beforehand. The adults required this season include all seven staff members, leadership from Winton Community Free Methodist church, several trained neighborhood catechists, Xavier students, and often Mary Ellen's two oldest children. However, we all find it worthwhile, and we swap sweet stories at our now-standard staff ice cream debrief afterward.



Ashley's first big outing was to the Camp Joy fall festival, an event we'd never attended. It's quite a drive out to Clarksville, Ohio, but as we've been consistently impressed with Camp Joy's programming, we



decided to make the drive. Ten families came along, and everyone agreed the trip was worth it. "We didn't even get through all of the activities!" was the joyous refrain.

The Christian Community Development Conference, or CCDA, came to town in early October. Along with CCDA came attendees from the Bruderhof, who stayed with us while they took in all the conference had to offer. We enjoyed our time with Toby and Johanna and their guests and appreciated meeting all their CCDA friends at a dinner hosted by For the Life of the World Café.

As fall deepened, we needed to get outside and enjoy the precious last warm days. Ashley and Grace again organized an outing, this time to Gorman Farm. Lydia's House friends and gracious



Speaking of ice cream, we took our annual trip to The Cone at the end of September. Our out-of-towners got their first introduction to Cincinnati's traditional blue soft serve, and we discovered that Debbie was a whiz at arcade games. Previously unmentioned talents surface the more we get to know our coworkers.



HOUSE NOTES (CONTINUED)



Feast for current and former guests. While all the new staff held down the home front, I headed out to officiate a wedding in North Carolina and visit with my family and friends; Ben, Mary Ellen and the kids drove to Pennsylvania, to visit our new friends at the Bruderhof and learn more about this unique way of doing Christian community.



We are now looking toward Christmas, eagerly anticipating gatherings with our local Mason and Moose Lodges and the sweetness kids counting down the days bring. "Can we have an Advent calendar?" Grace asked this week. "Absolutely," was my reply. What a joy to say yes to possibilities, knowing that we again have the hearts and hands available to accomplish the plans.

hosts Kathy Aerni and Sandra Murphy warmly welcomed us, and the kids in attendance got to climb tractors, pick sunflowers, and pet goats. We also used the fall season to engage deeper in advocacy for better childcare benefits for our families. We invited Commissioner Driehaus and staff to come hear testimony from our guests about their inability to work without childcare and the problems of the voucher system. Mary Ellen and Julie also



attended the Groundwork Ohio advocacy conference in Columbus. As Thanksgiving approached, we were grateful for our former board president Calista Smith, who sponsored a Thanksgiving



10TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN

In 2012 we started with a small fundraiser at Church of the Advent and we raised \$17,000 toward the purchase of our shelter, which cost us \$40,000 and a lot of love. Since then, we bought that building, 2024 Mills Ave (February 2013), renovated with volunteers, opened our shelter (2014), bought another building (2015), expanded our services, bought and renovated two buildings of affordable housing (2017 and 2020), added a children's religious education program (2020), started construction on an addition (2023) and bought another building (2023). Over the years we've served 149 families in our shelter and we estimate that we've served 2,000 meals at our dining table. We'd like to think Dorothy Day smiles down from heaven each time we haul in a bag of donated clothes or sing Happy Birthday to a cake covered 1 year old in our crowded dining room. Our Catholic Worker dream is a reality.

But we're not done. Maybe we're just getting started.

So we're launching a 10 year campaign to do some needed updates and celebrate the goodness of 10 years together. Here's what we've got planned so far and how much we need to raise:

Furniture updates and replacements, aesthetic improvements and needed repairs to the original shelter: \$10,000

Safety improvements to the driveway entry, fencing, garage repairs: \$55,000

Landscaping after the addition and a new playground for the shelter: \$75,000

Renovations on 2028 Mills Ave: our new office, guest space and emergency childcare facility: \$50,000

Educational space buildout in our new addition: \$7,000

Summer camps and special events in the summer of 2024: \$8,000

Exterior paint work and art including a mural and paint job on 1801 Mills Ave, and outdoor Stations of the Cross for our new, expanded back yard: \$20,000

If you'd like to support this campaign please reach out to maryellen@stlydiashouse.org

Let's build something beautiful together.



Our opening celebration, 2014



TALIA'S STORY

My name is Talia and I was a guest at Lydia's House in the summer of 2023.

My story starts when I was 3 months old and I was placed with my grandmother and 4 siblings to live apart from my mom. She is schizophrenic and was addicted to drugs and couldn't raise us. My grandmother was a hard core Baptist and loved us very much. We all slept in one bed and we felt safe with her, and we went to church every week. When I was 9 my grandmother got very sick and went into a coma. We kids were all sent to live with my Aunt Sandy. She had 2 kids and we were all in a 2 bedroom apartment. Her boyfriend made me feel weird, and later I learned he sexually abused my sister. We were all struggling. When I was 13 I tried to commit suicide and, eventually, I was sent to my Aunt Tricia. She was verbally abusive and I spent most of my time caring for her baby. We fought a lot and she called me "fast" but also gave my number to boys. It was confusing and I desperately needed to leave. At the same time, my grandmother passed away. In my sadness, I was sent to my Aunt Michaela and Uncle Jordan's house. They were happily married and the first "normal couple" I ever really knew. With them I finished high school and got my STNA and phlebotomy training. When I turned 18 I got an apartment with a friend and a job at a nursing home.

I really loved my nursing home job and was known for caring well for memory care patients. I worked my way up and got a good reputation for doing thoughtful

work and being reliable. People asked for me by name to care for their loved ones. I took a lot of pride in my work.

When I was 21 I got my own place and a boyfriend. I soon found out I was pregnant. My boyfriend tried to step up and help me create a family but I didn't know how to do that with him. I felt hesitant as he was trying to commit to me and our child. I was immature. When our son, Tae, was born I realized we were fighting around him all the time and he would cry. We broke up, and he got a new girlfriend. Eventually we got back together and lived together for a time, trying to make a go of it for Tae. I got pregnant again. He asked me to get an abortion and we fought more. He then asked me to move out, so I went back to my aunt and uncle, feeling awful and like a failure. My aunt offered to pay for an abortion and I really didn't have anywhere to turn. It was very lonely.

I looked on the internet and found Lydia's House. I, honestly, thought it was a scam. I'd heard of emergency shelters but I had never heard of anything like it. It looked really nice but I wondered if it was safe to give them my information. I read a lot of the website and opened newsletters and read "Monica's story," by another guest. I thought she seemed to have a good experience so I took the risk and applied.

When my family found out I was going to a shelter, my aunt Tricia invited me back. I remember how hard it was to live with her and how

depressed I was then. I spoke to Mary Ellen on the phone and she explained that Lydia's House was a community with rules, a curfew, and required dinners. I knew it would be a sacrifice and hard but when I considered my options I also thought Lydia's House would be the best for my son. I decided to move in for him. I knew that we could do better with help; it just needed to be the right help.

While at Lydia's House they helped me pay off housing debt and avoid an eviction. They helped me get an ID, my driving temps and a Section 8 voucher. More importantly though, they helped me learn how to live in a new way. I gave up overnight shifts and worked during the day. Tae and I got on a schedule and ate real meals together at a table. He loved every minute of living at Lydia's House.

When I arrived my family was still pressuring me to have an abortion. I spoke a lot with staff and volunteers about it. They left the decision to me but said they would support me as much as they could if I chose to have the baby. It gave me the space to say yes to my second pregnancy.

Now I have my own place in their Virginia Coffey apartment building. It's my first apartment with just me and my son. Tae is in daycare. I have a day shift at a new nursing home that Lydia's House connected me to. It's much closer to my place, and pays well. Tae and I eat meals at a table, taking our Lydia's House habits into our new home. I can breathe.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: GOOD SHEPHERD CATHOLIC MONTESSORI

By Debbie Baumgartner

On Saturday, October 28th, a group of Good Shepherd Catholic Montessori middle school students and their families had a day of service at Lydia's House. We started with a reflection on the Catholic Worker values of the Works of Mercy and then broke up into work groups. One group went to work in the rain - cleaning out one of the garages, raking leaves, and cleaning the garbage area. Other students made Halloween decorations and prepared crafts for the atrium. Other groups cleaned the stairwells, rolled quarters and did some yard work. A lot of tasks were completed by these hard-working young people! We were grateful to have them.

After working for several hours, we took a break to have a delicious lunch provided by the Shepherd and Zlatic Families. To end our time together, Mary Ellen led everyone on a tour of Lydia's House's playspace, housing, and shelter. The students had thoughtful conversations and questions about the work we are doing. It was a great day, and we hope it becomes a tradition! Thanks Good Shepherd Catholic Montessori for partnering with us on this work day, and also for support with furniture and materials for our atrium.



My advice to a person reading this, if you're like me and thinking about moving to Lydia's House:

- Do it
- Some things are hard or not what you want to do, but it's worth it
- It will help you learn how to live a normal life and set you up for success

- Have a mature mindset about the rules
- Pay attention, because they model positive ways of being

On December 18 I'm expecting my daughter to arrive. I have a postpartum doula lined up to help me and I feel prepared. My ex

boyfriend and I are on better terms and he's going to help me when the baby is born. Where once I had no idea how I would do this, I now know I can. I am ready for her, and Lydia's House played a big part in that. I'm actually excited.

WE'RE GROWING IN GOD'S LOVE

By Mary Ellen Mitchell

In late 2019 a small group of our staff took the Level One Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) Training, introducing us to the magic of Sophia Cavalletti's Montessori methodology for teaching religious education. Since then, we've been running a catechesis program for 3–6-year-olds in our shelter, aftercare and neighborhood. Each week we end our class by asking the level one kids to get into a tiny seed and grow as we sing our theme song together, Growing in God's Love.

In Spring of 2023 I decided that I would like to get training for the Level 2 and began the long journey of getting the certification to teach 7–10-year-old catechesis. At the same time, our commercial space in the apartment building became available and we began renovations to turn it into 2 classrooms; one for level one and one for level two. **After many hours of training and piecing together a classroom, we're pleased to announce that we'll be rolling out level two CGS to a group of enthusiastic 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders in January of 2024!** We are indeed "growing in God's love."

In order to create our new classroom space and gather the many complicated and (at times) expensive materials needed to run this program we've called upon the help of many people. Thank you to the following good people:

Dan Aerni, Dane Miller, Steve Whitlatch and Dennis Bishop for construction and painting

Ben Eilerman for architectural services

David Baumgartner, Julie VanBergen and Ashley Martin for painting and material making

Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati for funding

Dan Teller for training, material making and support

The Montessori Teacher Training Step Up program for material making

St. Timothy Episcopal Church for material and furniture donations

Good Shepherd Catholic Montessori for observation hours, furniture and material making

Beth Bronsil for gathering materials and funding

Xavier Montessori Lab School for furniture

Anne Housholder for altar cloths

Renee Westrich for furniture and materials

St. Margaret of York Parish and Amber Lapp for materials

Laura Menze for material making

Organized Living and Carol Carlin for storage shelving



CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

You may remember that we held a ground breaking in May 2023. It was a great event and included staff and community members past and present and a variety of neighbors and friends.

Shortly after this we learned that we were facing on-going delays with our contract with Hamilton County, our principal funder. We called everyone we could think to call! We were offered support through Commissioner Denise Driehaus' office (thank you!) and continued handholding from Over the Rhine Community Housing. We then learned that our original chosen contractor was disqualified so we had to move to the next contractor. To make a months long story short, we finally landed with 8k Construction and on 11-15-23 a digger arrived!

We expect to open our addition, which will include a large dining room to seat 40 people, a children's educational space and a staff living space in late summer 2024, just in time for our 10th Anniversary Celebration.



CATCHING THE WAVE

By Meridith Owensby

When Mary Ellen and her family went on sabbatical last year, they spent their last month down in Sayulita, Mexico. I accepted their invitation to join them for a week that December. Sayulita's a pretty little spot on the Pacific coast, with long stretches of beach and candy vendors roaming the sands. It's the type of place where you have your favorite gelato stand and your favorite taco spot, and you spend the days oscillating between the two until the sun sets. At that point, you visit the churro cart.

Though my typical beach activities are limited to walking followed by dozing, I tagged along for the family surf lesson last December. The instructors obviously loved surfing, and the tiny dogs they had with them loved it too. I felt weirdly competitive watching the canines born aloft, and I concluded I would try it myself. While I was nowhere near as talented as the kids, I managed to stand upright on a wave or two.

The thing that struck me about surfing, honestly, was the large amount of time you spend waiting and watching. It's the rare wave that is fit for human conveyance, and attempting to rise to greet each wave would leave one frustrated and exhausted. You've got to be ready at any moment, anticipating but not anxious. You'll still misjudge occasionally, but that's just part of surfing, rueing the good waves you miss.

I've seen this quality of attentiveness in several other activities: watching for meteors. Releasing a kite. Catching lightning bugs. Photographing cats. There's the silence and the waiting, with the pleasure of having the thing you waited for rise up to meet you at last.

I believe it's this kind of watchful attentiveness that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 25:1-13 (NRSV):

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later the other young women came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

In this scripture, all ten bridesmaids fell asleep. The sleeping, however, wasn't the problem. It was the not anticipating delay, or obstacles, or anything other than life proceeding smoothly. As the kids say, "You had one job." The five who didn't bring extra oil failed in their one job.

I can say that anything that has been built in the last 10 years at Lydia's House has been built because of that watchful anticipation, the combination of preparation with timing. We've known what we were watching for, even if we didn't know what form it would take. We had our oil ready. We could rise up when the moment presented itself, prepared to greet that for which we waited.

The origins of Lydia's House reflect this posture. Both Mary Ellen and I had gathered skills without knowing exactly how they would aid us, her in affordable housing, and me in shelter management. We'd spent years in nonprofits, learning the ropes and seeing what did and did not work.

We had also, independent of one another, been saving our money. She and Ben had some excess tithe that they had not allocated. I had the same amount of thousands in the bank for no clear purpose. Once the Lydia's House wave peeked over the horizon, we were watching, ready to join the energy provided by others and move.

When it's been right, it's never felt forced. It's always felt exhilarating. Sure, sometimes there's some paddling to get the orientation lined up, but there's a surge, a lift that I can only attribute to God carrying us. For a time, we fly, only to be returned to the surf to await the next trip.

Previously I had nothing but sympathy for the

women without oil. Being rejected from the wedding for such a seemingly minor detail seems, well, harsh. But after all these years of watchful anticipation, I hear it more as missing their moment. It's done, ladies. You weren't ready for it. You missed it. There will be others, but this wave has already gone by.

Recently, we caught another wave in the form of our neighbor Dee mentioning she was putting her house up for sale. By the time you read this, we will be owners of that house. It's right next to the shelter, a great yellow behemoth with a garage out back and red shutters. If you've ever visited the shelter, you know the one I'm describing, the one we've consistently walked beside to retrieve stray balls and frisbees (and occasionally kids). Friends, this is now part of Lydia's House holdings.

We've got plans for this space, but in the short term, it will serve as a temporary home to our

guests during the renovation of our current shelter space. We can continue services uninterrupted while walls are being knocked out to make room for our larger dining area and staff housing. This is a great joy to us, and the timing couldn't be more perfect as we head into construction with the shelter expansion this month.

2024 will also mark our 10th year of shelter operations. Next fall, we're planning a big celebration where all will be invited to see the new (or new to us) spaces and join us in marveling at God's goodness.

God has been so good, and the form of that goodness has been those of you who are reading this, have served with us, or have sought shelter with us. What a thrill, what a ride it's been. Let's give thanks together for how profligate this generosity has been.

THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE LYDIA'S HOUSE FAMILY: 2028 MILLS AVE

By Mary Ellen Mitchell

In late summer of this year, we happened to be outside noting that the house next door to 2024 Mills was being painted. The owner, a friend of ours, was surveying the work. I said "Dee, what are you planning to do with this?" and she replied "I need to sell it." Alas, never one to pass up the opportunity I said "Would you sell it to us?" And the rest, as with many things Lydia's House, is history. Actually, it was kind of complicated, but with the help of our board and our amazing, long suffering pro-bono lawyer Jeannette Maxey and of course, many donors, we made it a reality. On December 1, 2023 we closed on 2028. With our addition now under construction this means we're poised to have a full campus of homes and flexible spaces by Fall 2024.

Since this property came to us as an act of the Holy Spirit, we're now discerning the best use. On the table of things that may find a home at 2028 Mills are:

- 1) Our offices, currently across the street at 2005 Mills
- 2) A permanent home for our Level two atrium
- 3) A childcare center for the guests of our shelter
- 4) Staff housing for our Dorothy Day Fellows, with hopes that some will choose to stay longer than 2 years(!)
- 5) Transitional space for our shelter while our original shelter is under construction for the addition
- 6) A chapel
- 7) A woodshop/workshop
- 8) A garage arcade/ kids game room (there's a 4 car garage)
- 9) Additional guest housing

We can't do all of this but we will do some of this! And we're excited to find out where the spirit leads us from here.



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LYDIA'S HOUSE

Save
The
Date

**It's hard to believe but in 2024 we'll celebrate
10 years of Lydia's House serving families with shelter and support.**

**Please save the date for our expansion opening and epic celebration:
October 6, 2024**