

Community Cornerstone: Maryhouse

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Maryhouse at 55 East 3rd Street. Image via Flickr/Jim Forest.

With the approach of Thanksgiving this week, we here at *Off the Grid* are taking stock of all the things we have to be thankful for. For many, the Thanksgiving holiday is a time to share with friends and family. It is also a time for reflection and giving. So I thought I would begin this week by exploring Maryhouse, a community that works in service to others 365 days a year.

Since 1974, the building at 55 East 3rd Street has served as Maryhouse, a place that offers hospitality to “the homeless, the hungry, and the forsaken.” Run by volunteers of the Catholic Worker, Maryhouse shelters women, runs a soup kitchen, distributes clothing, provides shower facilities, and publishes issues of the Catholic Worker newspaper. The house, along with St. Joseph House on 1st Street, comprises the Catholic Worker in New York City.

The Catholic Worker was founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. According to the Catholic Worker website, the original ideal was “grounded in a firm belief in the God-given dignity of every human person . . . their movement was committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, and the Works of Mercy as a way of life.” There are many other hospitality

houses across the country, but the New York City Catholic Worker also continues to publish *The Catholic Worker* newspaper. Day, who was a journalist before she entered the Catholic Church, edited the paper until her death at Maryhouse in 1980.

Maryhouse continues to be a center for social justice activities, as it was when run by Day. It sponsors talks every Friday evening and opens its doors to those working in other social justice groups.

The building itself has an interesting connection to service. From 1903 onwards, it was the home of the Society of Music School Settlement, later named the Third Street Music School Settlement. (Learn more about the Settlement in this past *Off the Grid* post.) The current building was originally three separate Greek Revival homes built in the 1830s. Maryhouse is part of the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, a new Historic District designated in 2012. You can access the designation report for the district [here](#).

While Maryhouse and other Catholic Worker hospitality homes are part of the larger Catholic Worker Movement, it cannot quite be called an organization in the traditional sense. Day and Maurin eschewed traditional organizational forms and the organization is not an official part of the Catholic Church. However formal or informal, Maryhouse has been operating in service to the community for forty years. It is truly a Community Cornerstone.



Dorothy Day in 1916. Image © Bettmann/CORBIS.



A Friday night meeting at Maryhouse. Photo via the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee.