

Finding the beloved community in San Francisco's Bayview

by Robert Ward

Grace Cathedral, atop Nob Hill in San Francisco, attracts visitors from around the world, drawn by the soaring Gothic Revival architecture, its collection of sacred art, or perhaps for its quiet and prayerful vibe in the middle of a busy city. As a volunteer docent, I enjoy hearing from visitors about how they are experiencing the Cathedral, known as “a house of prayer for all people.”

The Cathedral has a wood-chip crucifix entitled Crucifix III (1966), by local artist Richard Faralla (1916-1996), which frequently inspires visitor comments. The artist has placed a found carved Italian corpus upon a cross made of wood chips.

The shape and placement of the wood chips create a rustic, rough-hewn cross, and the flow of the overall pattern can draw the eye past what is missing from the corpus: both arms and part of one leg.

Faralla's work reminds me of the words attributed to St Teresa of Ávila:



*Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands
Yours are the feet
Yours are the eyes
You are His body
Christ has no body now on earth but yours*

We are reminded to give ourselves over to living out our faith in an intentional, embodied way, to do what Christ in the gospel gave us as the greatest commandment: to love God above all else, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we do this, we find ourselves living in a way that tears down the status quo while building up an alternative: the beloved community.

When I think of putting the gospel into action in this way, I see the work of my good friend, the Ven. Canon Nina Pickerrell at the Bayview Mission, as heeding the call to create the beloved community. The Bayview Mission, a special mission of the Diocese of California with strong support from Grace Cathedral, was established by Nina in the Bayview district of San Francisco, an underserved neighborhood where a large number of residents experience overcrowded living conditions, poverty, and poorer health outcomes.

In a Victorian house once owned by her grandfather, Nina and Mission volunteers have created a place where yes is the

answer, and serendipitous donations seem to arrive just when needed. Visitors to the Mission often are surprised to hear Nina mention her barn. Complete with a hayloft, it housed horses in the days before garages were built, and today provides space for Mission supplies.



The Mission has adapted to the neighborhood's changing population as a growing number of Central American refugees, many of whom are indigenous people for whom Spanish is a second language, have come to make their homes in the Bayview, often with friends or family.

Today the Bayview Mission serves as a gathering and distribution point for clothing and hygiene supplies for eight agencies. It provides supplies for a women's shelter, diapers and wipes for foster children, and monthly support for neighborhood families with infants and toddlers, providing food, clothing, diapers, wipes, and children's books.



Before the school year begins in August, we pass out donated school supplies, lovingly placed in backpacks that have been blessed. At Thanksgiving, families receive turkeys and ingredients for a festive meal. Each Christmas, we distribute presents, books,

decorations, and holiday foods. And there are surprises, such as a Christmas decor company's inventory, or the truckload of donated strollers we received last month.

Through volunteering at the Bayview Mission, I have experienced an irrepressible spirit of abundance, the pure joy of sharing, and finally, just how right it feels when we're able to answer needs with a collective "yes." All of these to me are outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace which flows abundantly throughout the beloved community.



Robert lives with his husband Kit in San Francisco, where they are members of Grace Cathedral, and volunteer together at the Bayview Mission. # # #

