

Matthew 25



June 2024

A journal on ministry and service to the margins in western Oregon

Catholic Charities

‘Books are common ground’

From two ground floor rooms at Catholic Charities’ St. Francis Park Apartments, a small organization uses literature to humanize life on the streets.

Street Books, founded in 2011, sends small bicycle-driven libraries around Portland’s Old Town, offering books and conversation to people who are homeless. Back at St. Francis, residents can come down to the office to borrow and chat about a good plot. If disabled, they can have a few novels delivered right to their rooms.

In this outfit, talking about literature -- and anything else that comes up -- is as important as the books.

“Books are common ground everywhere it seems,” says Kerry Robison, one of the street librarians. She knows personally what it’s like to be a homeless book lover.

Robison recalls the thrill of seeing the Street Books bike for the first time. “I had some bad times when I was younger,” she says. “My only solace sometimes was a book. . . . It’s something that engages your whole self, your whole mind.”

Robison became an avid patron and then was hired.

Ben Hodgson, widely known as “Hodge,” serves on the Street Books board. He also once was homeless and knows there are some keen intellects out there.

He tells the story of a man who



Diana Rempe (left), community outreach director for Street Books, hugs a patron.

asked for a work by Friedrich Nietzsche, a demanding German philosopher. Amazingly, the book was on board the trailer. The man leafed through it, frowned and said, “No thanks. This is the wrong translation.”

Laura Moulton, the Portland artist who founded Street Books, says books are full of dreams and stories that can transport a person out of their current reality. “Books are a way of developing empathy, a way of living inside someone else’s existence,” Moulton says.

She describes the power of a street librarian calling patrons by name, remembering what they like to read and mentioning details of their lives they once shared.

“Street Books is an opportunity for us to re-see each other,” said Moulton.

Street Books is thriving in its home at St. Francis Park Apartments, a 106-unit development completed in 2017. “Having a little hub that people can come to is enormous,” says a grateful Moulton.



Laura Moulton, founder of Street Books, works in the organization’s office, on the ground floor of Catholic Charities’ St. Francis Park Apartments.

“It feels like a rare and beautiful partnership.”

Diana Rempe, a street librarian and community outreach director, has been involved with Street Books for a dozen years.

“I thought, ‘Well, I’ll talk about books with people,’” says Rempe. “What I ended up doing was just talking about everything.”

SEE THE VIDEO:





Kennedy Hedges and Tim Schroeder of Amazon heft donated items into Kenton Women's Village.

Amazon donates

Crews from a North Portland Amazon warehouse and distribution center donated household items to Catholic Charities' Kenton Women's Village, with a promise of more to come. Amazon also wants to create a job pipeline from the tiny home village.

As he was dropping off the collection of toilet paper, paper towels, sheets, laundry soap, scarves and socks, Amazon logistics area manager Tim Schroeder said the company carefully trains drivers who start at about \$22 per hour.

Val Peterson, program coordinator at Kenton Women's Village, gave a tour of the 20-pod site to Schroeder and Kennedy Hedges, workplace health and safety specialist at Amazon. Both were impressed and Peterson welcomed the proposed partnerships.

In nation's capital

Leaders from Catholic Charities agencies around the nation were in Washington,



Natalie Wood, in glasses, waits with other Catholic Charities leaders to meet senators.

D.C. this spring to advocate for the needs of the most vulnerable. Among those on the delegation was Natalie Wood, leader of Catholic Charities of Oregon.

New imagination on migration

One of the world's foremost religious thinkers on migration will speak in Portland in June.

Holy Cross Fr. Daniel Groody's latest book, "A Theology of Migration: The Bodies of Refugees and the Body of Christ," includes a foreword from Pope Francis.

In a talk organized by Catholic Charities, Fr. Groody will speak at 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 12, in Brian Doyle Auditorium at the University of Portland. Catholic Charities is one of Oregon's lead agencies in resettling refugees and helping migrants navigate the provisions made for them in U.S. law.

A professor and administrator at the University of Notre Dame, Fr. Groody has for decades traveled worldwide, met with migrants and deeply plumbed what migration means for life, society and faith.

"Jesus became the prototype migrant," Rev. Groody said last year in an interview with Orbis Books.



Fr. Daniel Groody, CSC

Jesus came to reconcile humanity, Rev. Groody said, positing that the Christian life overall is a migration from brokenness to oneness.

People often ask Rev. Groody how to solve the migration problem. He admits that he is not a political scientist but says that a good start would be seeing the humanity of migrants.

To attend the talk, which costs \$10, scan the QR code at right or pay at the door.



REFUGEE HOUSING

NEEDED: FAMILY APARTMENTS

Federal authorities have approved a number of large refugee families for arrival in Portland and Catholic Charities of Oregon has been asked to help them resettle.

Facing Portland's housing shortage, the agency is asking independent owners of housing to consider renting 3- and 4-bedroom units to the families.

"We'd like to reach more independent renters in general for all types of housing, people who understand the barriers our clients face and are willing to rent to them," said Peter Vins of the Catholic Charities refugee program.

Recently, the U.S. has been welcoming refugees from conflict and persecution in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan and Venezuela.

"These families have survived

great ordeals and are so happy to find safety in Oregon," said Ed Langlois, communications director for Catholic Charities. "We have seen how they have enriched neighborhoods and contributed to their communities."

Catholic Charities and its volunteers provide social services to the families. Owners interested in renting properties can contact Vins at pvins@ccoregon.org.

Have a story about Catholics reaching out to those on the margins? Contact Ed Langlois, Catholic Charities communications director, elanglois@ccoregon.org or 503.539-6333.



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