



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

Application for City of Las Vegas Historic Designation

Name of Property The Christensen House
 Address (Location) 500 W. Van Buren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106
 Type of Designation (check one) Building ☒ District ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐
 Assessor's Parcel #(s) 139-27-110-044
 Current Zoning Designation _____
 Additional Information _____

APPLICANT/ REPRESENTATIVE <u>GARY CAVALIER for The Widow's Mite, Inc.</u>	Property Owner? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Address <u>500 W. Van Buren Ave</u>	Phone <u>702 647-0728</u> Fax: _____
City <u>Las Vegas</u>	State <u>NV</u> Zip <u>89106</u>
E-mail <u>gary@Lvcw.org</u>	

Required Submittal Material

Statement of Eligibility and Appropriateness for designation.....☐
 Photographs.....☐
 Letter of Property Owner Consent (if property owner is not the applicant).....☐
 Statement of Financial Interest.....☐
 Letter of Request for Action (if designation is for a district).....☐
 Deed/Legal Description.....☐

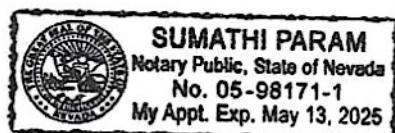
FOR STAFF USE ONLY

Signature of Property Owner or Authorized
Representative of the City of Las Vegas

Gary Cavalier

Print Name Gary Cavalier
 State of Nevada, County of Clark
 Subscribed and sworn before me SUMATHI PARAM,
 This 4th day of January, 2024.

Notary Public in and for
said County and State



FOR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY

Case # _____
 Meeting Date: _____
 Date Accepted: _____
 Accepted By: _____



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

Case Number: _____ APN: _____

Name of Property Owner: The Widow's Mite, Inc.

Name of Applicant: The Widow's Mite, Inc.

Name of Representative: Gary Cavalier

To the best of your knowledge, does the Mayor or any member of the City Council or Planning Commission have any financial interest in this or any other property with the property owner, applicant, the property owner or applicant's general or limited partners, or an officer of their corporation or limited liability company?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please indicate the member of the City Council or Planning Commission who is involved and list the name(s) of the person or persons with whom the City Official holds an interest. Also list the Assessor's Parcel Number if the property in which the interest is held is different from the case parcel.

City Official: _____

Partner(s): _____

APN: _____

Signature of Property Owner: Gary Cavalier

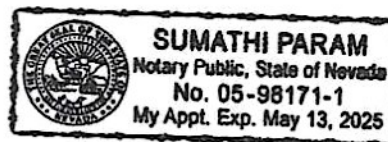
Print Name: Gary Cavalier, Treasurer

State of Nevada, County of Clark The Widow's Mite, Inc.
Subscribed and sworn before me

This 4th day of January, 2024

Sumathi Param.

Notary Public in and for said County and State



Nomination to add 500 West Van Buren Avenue, *The Leroy and Carrie Christensen House*, to the Las Vegas Historic Property Register

January 22, 2024

500 West Van Buren Avenue

The property located at 500 West Van Buren Avenue, known as the Leroy and Carrie Christensen House, is in the Westside neighborhood of Las Vegas, Nevada (Image 1). The Westside is a mixed-income, African American community that reached its peak in the 1940s and 1950s. 500 West Van Buren is situated on the northwest corner of North E Street and West Van Buren Avenue within the H.F.M. and M Addition of Las Vegas. The plat for the H. F. M & M. Addition was filed in March 1924, in a mostly undeveloped area northwest of the Original Las Vegas Townsite. The plat was filed by A. W. Ham, William Ferron, Roy W. Martin, and Forrest Mildren. All four men were early residents of Las Vegas. One of the earliest homes to be constructed in this tract is the Leroy and Carrie Christensen House at 500 W. Van Buren Avenue. (Fulwood, Mooney, and Rayle, 2023).



Image 1: Location of 500 West Van Buren.

The following property description is taken directly from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form dated February 3, 2023 (Mooney and Fulwood, 2023).

The Leroy and Carrie Christensen House (Image 2) sits on a 0.19-acre rectangular lot and is surrounded by scattered residential development and vacant lots. A concrete sidewalk extends around the south (front) and east sides of the property, while a paved alley runs east-west along the north (rear) of the lot. The house is setback approximately 77 feet from the south property line. A small, square, wood-frame storage building is located in the southeast (front) corner of the lot, and a small, rectangular, wood-frame garbage shelter is located in the northeast (rear) corner of the lot. Landscaping around the property consists of mesquite and olive trees located in the south (front) of the lot, as well as wood planting beds situated on the south and east sides of the house. A winding concrete path connects the sidewalk along W. Van Buren Avenue to the front (south) porch. The north (rear) end of the lot is covered in concrete and a concrete patio is located on the west façade. A sign reading “The Christensen Home, One of the oldest homes in Las Vegas built by Elder & Mrs. LeRoy Lyle Christensen in 1933” and “Take Pride in the Westside” is affixed to the chain link fence which encircles the property. A Pioneer Trail marker denoting the property’s historic significance is located immediately southeast of the residence at the intersection of W. Van Buren Avenue and N. E Street.



Image 2: The Leroy and Carrie Christensen House.

The Christensen House was constructed in the French Eclectic architectural style in 1938. The building is a one-and-one-half-story, 2,990-square foot residence oriented with its front façade facing W. Van Buren Avenue to the south. The house has an L-shaped footprint, with a side-gabled main volume and a front-gabled volume at the west side that includes a projecting front ell. The house features masonry construction with rock-faced concrete block, rubble stone, and stucco and a concrete foundation. Its cross-gabled roof is clad in composition shingles and has little to no eave overhang. A large exterior stone chimney is located at the west elevation. Notable decorative elements include an engaged masonry tower near the center of the front façade, subtle faux half-timbering in several gable ends, roof dormers, and concrete lintels with keystones over several windows. The house represents the towered subtype of the French Eclectic style, which is easily identifiable by the presence of a prominent, round tower with a high, conical roof.

The front elevation faces south and consists of three distinct sections: the side-gabled main building volume at the east end of the façade, the shallow front ell at the west end, and an engaged round tower near the center of the façade. The main entry is located on the east side of the house's front-gabled ell. The entry is accessed via a historic front porch consisting of a low, rubble masonry porch wall with a concrete cap. The uncovered porch is approximately 220 ft and has a single concrete step. The round masonry tower is also constructed of random rubble masonry and has a conical roof clad in wood shingles. The tower is attached to the southeast corner of the front ell. Fenestration on the front elevation is varied. The main building volume has a single window opening with non-historic sash at its far east end, and a pair of wood-frame, multi-lite French doors providing access to the porch. The front roof plane on this section contains a shed-roofed dormer with two one-over-one sash windows. The projecting ell has a large, steel-frame, multi-lite window centered on its lower story and a single window with non-historic sash and decorative shutters in its gable end. The tower has one small, three-lite, wood casement window that faces south. Each of the windows and doors on the front façade has a concrete lintel with decorative keystone.

The east (side) elevation faces North E Street. The central section of this elevation is underneath the building's wide gable end. The first floor of the central section has rusticated, rock-faced concrete block walls and a single -leaf entry near the center that was later infilled with wood and a non-historic window. The former door opening retains its concrete steps. To the south of this side entry is a larger window opening with replacement sash. Both the former entry and the window opening have concrete lintels and keystones. To the north of the entry is a stuccoed, three-sided, projecting bay with wood casement windows and a wood-shingle roof. One of the window openings on the projecting bay has a window air-conditioning unit instead of window sash. On the upper floor, the gable end is clad in stucco and contains a wide window opening with non-historic sash, stylized half-timbering, and a louvered attic vent with a pointed top. At the south end of the east elevation, the front porch wall and projecting front ell and main entry are visible. At the north end of the east elevation is the east wall of a shed-roofed enclosed porch or rear addition. The east wall of this rear addition contains a non-historic multi-lite window.

The west (side) elevation consists of the west wall of the front-gabled intersecting volume, plus the west wall of a small historic volume at the rear of the building. The entire first floor of this elevation has rusticated, rock-faced, concrete block walls. The center portion of the west façade has a shed-roofed side porch with simple 4" by 4" posts. Under the porch is an altered historic entry with a wide concrete lintel and keystone. The entry has been infilled with a single modern door, plywood, and a set of non-

historic wood stairs to the new door. The configuration of alterations here suggests that the side entry once contained double doors and a transom window. South of this entry are two window openings, one of which is original and retains its lintel and keystone, and the other of which lacks a lintel and thus appears to be an alteration. Both windows contain a non-historic sash. Immediately south of the side porch is a wide exterior chimney made of rock-faced concrete block. The chimney has a wider, buttress-like base and a rectangular stack. The original chimney terminated at a concrete coping; however, the height of the chimney was extended by approximately two feet by the construction of a rubble stone section. According to a prior documentation of the property prepared by Bob Wamsley in 1982, the rubble cap on the chimney was added in 1943 and contains the inscription, "LeRoy Christensen 1943." South of the chimney near the building's front corner is a single window opening with non-historic sash. The north end of the west side elevation corresponds to the west wall of a small, gabled volume that extends from the building's rear elevation. There is a single square window opening on its west wall. The opening retains the historic lintel and keystone but has been infilled with wood. The upper floor of the west side elevation has two stuccoed, gabled dormers on the west roof plane. The gabled tip of the east-west oriented building volume appears just above the ridgeline of the west roof.

The rear (north) of the house had two distinct sections – the historic, gabled, projecting section to the west and a shed-roofed section across the eastern two-thirds of the elevation. The shed-roofed section appears to be either an altered, enclosed, rear porch or a small, rear addition. The historic portion on the west side has rock-faced concrete block walls, a single window opening with concrete lintel and non-historic window sash, and a steeply-pitched, stucco, gable end with faux half-timbering. The gable end also contains a small louvered vent that matches the vent on the building's east elevation. The shed-roofed section on the east has stucco walls and a central single-entry door flanked by two non-historic window openings. Over the entry door, the shed-roof plane is broken by a central, decorative gable with a louvered gable vent.

A small, square, wood-frame storage structure (~36 ft) is located in the southeast (front) corner of the lot. The structure is constructed of plywood and has a pyramidal roof sheathed in rolled asphalt. The structure, constructed in 1989, has three window openings on its west, south, and east facades, and a north-facing entry. Additionally, a small (~105 ft) wood-frame garbage shelter with corrugated metal shed roof, is located in the northeast (rear) corner of the lot. Electronic communications with the property's current caretaker, Julia Occhiogrosso, conducted on September 5, 2023, confirm that the structure was located on the property in 2001.

In spite of exterior alterations, the Christensen House retains its integrity of feeling and association, as well as the majority of its integrity of design and workmanship. Alterations to the building's exterior, modern construction on the home's periphery, and demolitions and new development affecting the surrounding urban landscape, have compromised its integrity of materials and setting. However, the building is still able to convey its significance as a 1930s French Eclectic home constructed by prominent citizens in the Westside.

See Appendix A for additional images of the current house.

Leroy and Carrie Christensen

The following homeowner information is taken directly from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form dated February 3, 2023 (Mooney and Fulwood, 2023).

Leroy Christensen was born on June 6, 1904, to Lucretia and Lawrence (Lars) Christensen in Fremont County, Idaho. According to the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Lawrence was a native of Utah and was employed as a farmer. His race, according to the census, was white. Leroy's mother was Lucretia Tanner Christensen, a native of Salt Lake City, Utah. Although Lucretia was from a multiracial background, the 1900 U.S. Census identifies her as Black. Lawrence's father passed away suddenly in 1906 at the age of 32 when Leroy was just two years old.

By 1912, Lucretia was living in Idaho Falls with her two sons Ray and Leroy. That year, she got remarried to Ernest (Earn) Stevens. By 1920, the Stevens/Christensen families lived in Twin Falls, Idaho. The 1920 U.S. Federal Census indicates that Leroy was approximately 15 years old at that time. Interestingly, the 1920 census misidentifies the entire family's ethnicity as "Mexican." The census recorded the occupation of his stepfather, Earn, as a laborer at a "loading house" and his older brother, Ray, as working at the UC Ranch. The family had added several more children by that time, including Leroy's younger brother, Orien, as well as two younger sisters. Three years later, in 1923, the family relocated to Las Vegas, Nevada, where they joined the city's burgeoning African American community in the Westside.

By 1930, the Stevens/Christensen family is listed as living in Las Vegas at 646 N. Fourth Street in the Biltmore neighborhood. According to the U.S. Federal Census conducted that year, Leroy and his stepfather were both employed as laborers performing "odd jobs." The 1930 census correctly identifies the family's race as "negro." Within a few years, 25-year-old Leroy got a job as a stationary fireman for the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad, where he also played baseball for the company team. Christensen may have gotten this job through his half-brother, Orien Stevens, who had been employed by the railroad since 1925.

In July 1933, Leroy married Carrie L. Moody in Reno, Nevada (Image 3). It is unclear how Leroy and Carrie met; however, they were both members of the Church of Christ Holiness. At the time of his marriage, Leroy was employed as a mechanic at the El Rio garage. A newspaper article in the Las Vegas Review-Journal indicates that Leroy and Carrie lived on S. Fifth Street (now E Street) as early as 1935; however archival research suggests that the home at 500 W. Van Buren Avenue was not built by Christensen until 1938.

On May 25, 1938, Leroy and Carrie acquired title to Lots, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of Block 10 in the H.F.M. and M. addition—which includes the current location of the Christensen House—from M.M. Sweeney of the Pioneer Title and Insurance Company. A month later, in June 1938, Leroy was issued a building permit, in the amount of \$2,000, to construct a residence at "Fifth and Van Buren, Westside..." The house that Leroy built was one of the first permanent single-family residences built in the Westside. Although Leroy had no professional experience as an architect, he incorporated many elements of the French Eclectic architectural style into his home's design and utilized durable building materials, such as rock form concrete block and locally sourced river cobbles that were obtained from the nearby railroad yard.

In 1942, Leroy's WWII draft registration card provides his address as "West Fifth and Van Buren," suggesting that the couple lived in the house by that time. Leroy's occupation in 1942 is listed as the El Portal Theater in Las Vegas. Later that same year, the couple purchased Lot 5 of Block 10 in the H.F.M. and M. addition from Leroy's mother and stepfather. A date of "1942," inscribed on the home's chimney, suggests that the house underwent some renovations that year. Two years later, in 1944, the couple welcomed twin sons, Lloyd Keith and Loyal Kenneth Christensen.



Image 3: Leroy and Carrie Christensen.

Following the birth of their children, Leroy and Carrie Christensen joined an emerging population of middle-class African Americans on the Westside. Like many middle-class residents of the neighborhood, the couple were actively engaged in the life of the community. Leroy, in particular, joined numerous civic organizations and held several community leadership positions throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s. In 1944, Leroy was elected to serve as the assistant chairman of the Westside USO. He also served as president of the Westside Federal Credit Union, was a member of the Las Vegas Art League, and was an active member in the Community Concert Association and the Ministerial Alliance. He served as deacon, trustee, and assistant pastor of the Pilgrim Church of Christ Holiness, located at 1515 D Street in the Westside. The Christensen home also frequently served as a community gathering place for residents of the Westside community. In the late 1940s, the Christensen family hosted lawn parties at their “beautiful home” at 500 W. Van Buren Avenue that included swimming in the family’s private pool. In 1948, a televised fashion show was produced at the Christensen House that featured local celebrity, and later Moulin Rouge casino owner, Sarann Knight-Preddey (Image 4).



Image 4: Sarann Knight-Predy modeling in front of the Christensen House, ca. 1948.
(Photograph courtesy of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, Las Vegas, Nevada)

By 1950, the U.S. Federal Census lists the occupants of 500 W. Van Buren Avenue as Leroy Christensen, his wife Carrie, and their 6-year-old sons. Leroy was 45 years old and was working as a custodian at the First National Bank. His wife, Carrie, was 46 and was employed as a “kitchen helper” at a drug store. The family’s race is again identified as “negro.” According to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, during the early 1950s, Leroy also worked as a plasterer and carpenter and was employed by the Southern Nevada Telephone Company and the White Cross Drug Store. In addition to his professional responsibilities, Leroy was also selected as the chairman of the Westside district of the Clark County chapter of the American Red Cross.

Leroy remained actively involved in the Westside community until his untimely death in February 1953, at just 48 years old. The cause of death listed on his death certificate is a “coronary insufficiency.” Leroy’s obituary noted that he lived with his family at 500 W. Van Buren Street, “...in a house that was constructed by him and...was considered one of the most picturesque and outstanding on the Westside.”

Following her husband’s death Carrie Lee Christensen retained ownership of the family home and continued to occupy the residence with her two young sons. Little is known about Carrie’s activities

following her husband's death; however, a review of building permits available online through RISE, the city's search engine for public records and information, indicates that she oversaw minor improvements to the home, including the installation of aluminum patio covers on the north (rear) and west facades of the building in 1974, and the construction of a shed-roof addition on the north façade. Neither aluminum patio cover remains; however, the addition is still extant. Carrie continued to live at 500 W. Van Buren Avenue until 1976 when she sold the family home and returned to her native Kentucky.

The home's new owners—Cornell and Myra Fields—quickly resold the property to Iva MacDonald and Lucille O'Brien just a year later. O'Brien, a real estate agent, listed the property for rent in May 1978, describing it as a "privately fenced, 3 or 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, 2 story home with hardwood floors, formal dining room and fireplace. In July 1978, the house was purchased by Pedro Delgado and his son, Valiant. Later that year, a complaint was filed with the Las Vegas Building and Safety Division that referred to the home as an "attractive nuisance" and "dangerous," suggesting that it had fallen into disrepair. The Delgado family retained ownership of the property until at least 1983.

In 1989, the Christensen House was purchased from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by its current owner—the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. At the time of the sale, the house was abandoned and sold for just \$25,000. The organization fully renovated the home for use as a transitional housing facility, including interior alterations to accommodate a larger kitchen and create office space. Exterior renovations included replacing the original wood shingle roof with modern composition shingles and restoring most of the original casement windows, particularly on the south (front) façade. In recent years a few of the original casement windows were replaced with one-over-one double-hung windows.

Additional information was provided by the current homeowners who advised that Carrie Christensen met with the new owners in 1989 and provided an oral history of the house, describing how she and her husband acquired the stones that still adorn the house. The stones were near the railroad yard, and while Mr. Christensen was examining the stones, the railyard manager approached Mrs. Christensen and advised her that that she could have the stones at no cost. Mrs. Christensen also provided information about the interior of the house, as well as the fruit trees she planted in the front yard (Drueding, 2021; Occhiogrosso, n.d.). The Christensen House is part of the Pioneer Trail, a collaborative government initiative that identifies sixteen historically important properties that were developed during the city's formative years (City of Las Vegas, Clark County, and Preserve America, 2007).

Historic Resource Survey and Inventory

In 2023 the city's Historic Preservation Commission received a grant from the National Park Service's Underrepresented Community Grant Program to fund an intensive level architectural inventory and survey of resources associated with the African American community in West Las Vegas covering the years 1930 through 1979. The Commission hired North Wind Resource Consulting to complete the survey, which also included a requirement to complete a NRHP Nomination. The intent of the survey was to determine the eligibility of the resources for the City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register based on criteria included in Las Vegas Zoning Code Title 19.06.090, as well as the NRHP criteria. Forty-five historic aged properties were surveyed, of which nine properties were recommended individually eligible for listing in the NRHP. Of these nine, three were recommended eligible under Criterion A for their contributions to the broader patterns of historic development within the West Las Vegas

neighborhood. The property located at 500 West Van Buren Avenue was determined one of these three properties (Fulwood, Mooney, and Rayle, 2023).

A result of the survey was the recommendation to nominate the property at 500 West Van Buren Avenue to both the NRHP and the Las Vegas Historic Property Register. The history property named “Leroy and Carrie Christensen House” is significant under Criterion A at the local level in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Community Planning and Development for its association with the development of the African American community in Las Vegas in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The period of significance for the property begins in 1938, when the home’s original owner—Leroy Christensen—began construction on the residence, and ends in 1976, when Leroy’s widow, Carrie Christensen, sold the property to new owners. During their occupancy, Leroy and Carrie Christensen were influential members of the Westside neighborhood—a predominantly African American community that formed on the west side of the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake (SPLA&SL) (later Union Pacific) railroad in the early 1920s. The Christensen House was one of the first permanent single-family residences constructed in the Westside and is one of only a few remaining pre-World War II (WWII) residences in the area. Since 1989, the Christensen House has been used as transitional housing by the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, a charitable organization affiliated with the Catholic Church. For this reason, the Christensen House is also recognized under Criteria Consideration A (Mooney and Fulwood, 2023).

The Christensen House also has significance at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its association with residential growth in the Westside during the mid-twentieth century. The construction of the Christensen House occurred during a transitional time in the Westside’s history that was enhanced by the economic prosperity of the post-WWII period. Prior to the house’s construction, residences occupied by African American families in the Westside generally consisted of a scattered collection of tents, shacks, and other temporary structures. The Christensen House was among the first permanent homes constructed in the neighborhood and is representative of the way in which the newly emerging and economically empowered African American middle class worked to develop their own version of suburban homeownership amid a period of widespread discrimination and residential segregation in other parts of the city (Mooney and Fulwood, 2023).

Criteria for Designation

To be eligible for listing on the City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register, the proposed addition must meet the criteria under Title 19.10.150(I) Designation of Historic Landmarks, Districts, Sites, Buildings, Structures and Objects:

1. An individual landmark, district, site, building, structure or object may be designated on the City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register if it demonstrates exceptional historical significance by qualifying under Subparagraphs (a) or (b) below:
 - a. It meets the criteria for listing on the State or National Register of Historic Places*; or
 - b. It is determined to be of exceptional local significance and expresses a distinctive character because:
 - i. A significant portion of it is at least 40 years old;
 - ii. It is reflective of the City’s cultural, social, political or economic past; and
2. It is associated with a person or event significant in local, state or national history; or
3. It represents an established and familiar visual feature of an area of the City because of its location

or singular physical appearance.

*For a property to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, it must meet at least one of its four main criteria:

Criterion A: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

Criterion B: Associated with the lives of significant persons in or past

Criterion C: Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

Criterion D: Have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory

The house located at 500 West Van Buren meets Criterion 1.a. above as it meets the NRHP Criteria A as having local significance of the African American community in Las Vegas in the early-to mid-twentieth century. It also meets Criterion 1.b.i and 1.b.ii as it is 85 years of age having been built in 1938, as well as reflection of the city's cultural and social past. Lastly it meets Criterion 3 as its unique French Eclectic architectural style is a familiar visual feature in the Westside neighborhood.

Appendix A



Detail of round tower on south façade



Porch on south (front) façade



North (rear) façade



West façade



West façade showing chimney detail



East façade



Small wood frame shed (ca. 1989) southeast corner of front yard

References Cited

City of Las Vegas, Clark County, and Preserve America (2007). *Pioneer Trail*. Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

Drueding, M. (2021). *Las Vegas' Westside Neighborhood Holds Essential Pieces of the City's Black History*. *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*. Spring, 2021, pp. 36-43.

Fulwood, K., Mooney, C., and Rayle, G. (2023). *Intensive Level Survey of Historic African American Resources in the West Las Vegas Neighborhood*. North Wind Resource Consulting.

Mooney, C. and Fulwood K. (2023). *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: The Leroy and Carrie Christensen House*. North Wind Resource Consulting.

Occhiogrosso, J. (n.d.). *The Christensen House: Built in 1932 by LeRoy and Carrie Christensen*. The Las Vegas Catholic Worker.