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THE WATTS TOWERS COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

WWW.WATTS TOWERS COMMON GROUND.ORG

COMMUNAL TABLES: PRACTICING HOSPITALITY & SUSTAINABILITY

MARCH 18 – 20, 2011



*From the “St. Joseph’s Table” curated at the
UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, March, 1998*

Dear Friend of the Watts Towers Common Ground Initiative,

Sabato (Sam, Simon) Rodia named the Watts Towers “Nuestro Pueblo” and although we do not quite know what he meant by it, we are fairly confident the name had to do with **community**. We are in the process of organizing the culminating event in the **WATTS TOWERS COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE: ART, MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT**, a program focussing on community—communal tables, practicing hospitality & sustainability—to take place March 18-20, in Watts. This program will include a food altar and communal meal, lectures, visits to community gardens, and exhibitions at the Watts Towers Arts Center: http://www.wattstowerscommonground.org/festival_food.html.

Based on Sicilian tradition, **St. Joseph’s Tables*** are meant to feed the poor, to practice hospitality, and to welcome the stranger. A table is laid out and all are welcome to partake. In the Italian diaspora these tables both commemorate a time when Italians represented a community in need, but as a springtime recurrence, they also celebrate abundance. A critical part of “giving a table” is to engage in the “ritual begging” of food, collecting what is needed from friends, family, and community, in order to re-distribute it to those who most need it. In Sicilian villages, in previous times, one would have done this barefoot, knocking on doors and publicly humbling oneself. It may represent an act of empathy with those who must do this daily. Today instead, we are begging **you**, via this e-mail communication, to personally help, however you can: by contributing food, by making a monetary donation,* and/or by volunteering in some more direct way.

This very ambitious project is just around the corner and we will need *many hands* to collect donations (see below) and to serve approximately **800 meals** (*pasta e fagioli*--Italian bean soup) to the parishioners of the historic church of St. Lawrence of Brindisi Church in Watts (founded in 1908 and in the care of Capuchin Franciscans since 1922). **All** donations will be distributed to local Watts residents through the food pantries of St. Lawrence of Brindisi Church, the Watts Senior Citizens Center, and the Watts Towers Arts Center. The beautiful food altar inside the church will feature ritual and decorative breads, foliage, and Spring's first fruits. It is offered by the Italian community of Los Angeles, the Italian Academy of Cuisine, and created with the assistance of artists from the Watts Towers Arts Center. It will be on view from March 18, 3:00 p.m. – March 20, 5:00 p.m.

Join us—students and colleagues from UCLA and Loyola Marymount University, artists, food professionals, journalists, advocates, spiritual leaders, to name only a few—in creating communal tables in Watts and celebrating *nuestro pueblo* – our town.

Peace,

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*Curious about this tradition? Read more: “Rituals of Charity and Abundance: Sicilian St. Joseph's Tables and Feeding the Poor in Los Angeles.” *California Italian Studies Journal*, 1(2). 2010. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/56h4b2s2>.

Illustrated lectures on St. Joseph in Mexico and the Hispanic World, Sicilian, Italian diaspora (and Louisiana Creole) traditions, will be given on March 19 (St. Joseph Patron Feast Day), 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., in St. Lawrence of Brindisi Parish Hall, by Professors Charlene Villaseñor-Black and Luisa Del Giudice.

DONATIONS

All donations are fully tax-deductible.
All donors will be recognized online (unless anonymity is preferred).
Please send **by March 17**.

MONETARY DONATIONS:

Please make check payable to: “St. Alban’s - Discretionary Fund” and send to:

St. Joseph in Watts
c/o St. Alban’s Episcopal Church
580 Hilgard Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90024.

FOOD DONATIONS:

Preferred foods: non-perishable food items, including canned tuna, meat, vegetables, fruits, peanut butter, pasta, rice, beans, etc.

*Food may be dropped off either **in Watts**:*

Mudtown Farms
c/o Watts Labor Community Action Committee
10950 South Central Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90059
<http://www.wlcac.org/>

Or in Westwood

St. Alban’s Episcopal Church
580 Hilgard Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90024
<http://www.stalbanswestwood.com/>

(Please state when dropping food off that it is a donation for the: “Communal Tables in Watts” food drive.)

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WATTS TOWERS COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE: ART—MIGRATIONS—DEVELOPMENT

The extraordinary Watts Towers were created over the course of 3 decades by a single-minded artist-artisan, Sabato (Simon, Sam) Rodia, an Italian immigrant who wanted to do “something big.” Now a National Historic Landmark and internationally-renowned icon, the Towers are both a personal artistic expression and a collective symbol of *Nuestro Pueblo*—Our Town/Our People. The **WATTS TOWERS COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE: ART—MIGRATIONS—DEVELOPMENT** seeks to celebrate the common ground of the Towers, a locus of creativity, of sustained resolve in adversity, and of positive public transformation. With an eye to renewing

civic commitment to art in community contexts, this **INITIATIVE** encompasses a range of public events throughout the city, including an international conference at the University of California at Los Angeles and Watts, and a festival of art, film, theater, music, communal food tables and city tours. Our goal is to address modes of sustaining art and community development within a civic environment of meager resources. We also aim to promote hospitality and partnership across geographic, social and other boundaries.

Both festival and conference carry forward the conversation begun at the international conference, **ART AND MIGRATION: SABATO RODIA'S WATTS TOWERS IN LOS ANGELES**, jointly sponsored by the University of Genova and the UCLA International Institute (Italy, April 2009), which examined the monument's multiple resonances within the milieux of local and global migrations, of contested social and urban spaces, and of the rapport between art and economic development. How are these divergent discourses and goals best bridged? How is "common ground" fostered around the Watts Towers? The continued well-being of the Towers and their adjacent Art Center, as well as the divergent communities which sustain and are sustained by them depend upon how well we answer these questions.

SPONSORS: Department of Italian at the University of California at Los Angeles; UCLA International Institute; City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Italian Cultural Institute of Los Angeles (IIC); Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles; Armand Hammer Museum; Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments (S.P.A.C.E.S.); Watts Towers Arts Center (WTAC); Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC); Museo Etnomusicale, I Gigli di Nola (Gigli of Nola Ethnomusicological Museum); St. Alban's Episcopal Church; Dept. of Special Collections, Young Research Library, UCLA; Accademia Italiana della Cucina – Italian Academy of Cuisine Los Angeles; Mudtown Farms; Loyola Marymount University

Under the Auspices of the Consul General of Italy in Los Angeles

www.WattsTowersCommonGround.org