

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - April 15, 2015

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Anne Fillin, Terry Atkinson, Ruth Chippendale, George Chippendale, Mary Fong, Chris Lundin, Susan Olsen, Jean Doten

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

Jean Doten, our new member, offered an extemporaneous reflection.

2. Approval of March minutes

The Minutes of the March Meeting were unavailable at this time.

3. Welcome to a new member

Tonight we welcomed Jean Doten, our new member. Jean was a teacher at St. Elizabeth Seton, and has been a teacher for most of her life. She graciously discussed her life and her objectives in joining the HCC.

OLD BUSINESS

4. Buena Vista Update

Meetings were held regarding the Buena Vista Trailer Park on Monday and Tuesday of this week by the Palo Alto City Council. The objective was to determine whether the plan to relocate the tenants complies with the law. Chris provided the details.

The HCC is on record for favoring the preservation of affordable housing; the Buena Vista housing is in danger of being lost. We are opposed to the residents being forced from their homes, schools, and jobs by redevelopment. We believe that the economic and ethnic diversity has a value for the community and for our church.

The room was packed on both nights. Many organizations were represented by speakers at the meeting, including our own Chris Lundin, representing St. Thomas Aquinas.

The result of the meeting was that the previous tentative decision was affirmed. The owner's relocation plan was found to be adequate, including payments for loss of property and costs of relocation to BV households. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to acquire the BV property by a buyer whose objective is to maintain Buena Vista as affordable housing. If the property is sold to a developer, then it will no longer provide affordable housing. Supervisor Simitian is actively leading the fundraising effort to save BV. Every Council member stated a strong commitment to work on a solution. We will be following developments, as will many churches and organization in Palo Alto.

5. Minimum Wage effort

We have discussed Palo Alto's Minimum Wage Increase initiative at previous meeting. The Peninsula Peace and Justice Center is going to sponsor a public forum on the topic. They have asked Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice (of which our parish is a member) to be a co-sponsor. Prior to this meeting, Chris conducted a poll of core HCC members about whether we are willing to support (advertise/attend, etc.) such an event. He discovered that we are willing. Chris checked on the availability of SESS for a public forum, and he made arrangements for a forum there on May 19 at 7:30. Our parish Human Concerns Committee will be listed as a cosponsor of this event.

6. Hotel De Zink results

Our parish provided meals on 15 nights during the past two months to 60 homeless families.

NEW BUSINESS

7. Planning for our future activities and opportunities

We discussed at length ideas for our future activities. Our mission is ". . . to inspire the parish community to discern and act in ways that make the works of peace, justice, and mercy integral to their daily lives. To become salt of the earth and light of the world, we work to alleviate the distresses of hunger, homelessness, disease, lack of housing and health care, and other human needs." We talked about many examples of resources that are available to help people in their hour of need, and how one of our functions is to publish what resources are available for specific needs.

The mission of the Pastoral Home Ministry is "to offer spiritual and social support for the sick and homebound parishioners of all ages." Mary volunteered to tell us more about the activities of the Pastoral Ministry at the next meeting.

Jean brought up Avenidas. She had been in need of health insurance and other issues and had looked into that group. Avenidas provides support, information, and community to enrich the lives of older adults and their families. In addition, Avenidas Village "is a membership program offered through the non-profit agency Avenidas, designed to help people remain in their homes as they age by providing personalized assistance, services, and amenities." Jean was confused about the difference between the agency Avenidas and the Avenidas Village program. She didn't understand that the basic services provided were similar and that there was a big difference in the cost of the agency and the membership program. Jean made the point that here was "an example of me, an intelligent, computer-wise person who, depressed and under stress, was not able to find the help I needed because at that time my ability to process information and think rationally was pretty much gone. That's why, I think, the more often and more prominently the availability of helpful resources are publicized, the more people like me will be able to find help."

Jean volunteered to discuss the Stephen Ministry at the next meeting. "Stephen Ministry is a program of lay counseling that supplements pastoral care. . . Reasons for requesting a Stephen Minister's visits may range from grieving the loss of a loved one, experiencing a major illness, going through a divorce, job loss, struggling with substance abuse, or other life difficulties." (Wikipedia)

Chris will continue to update us on the Buena Vista problem.

Finally George brought us back to the Vincentian ideal of considering the dignity of each individual that God places in our path.

8. What's On Your Mind?

9. Volunteer for Faith-sharing/Question of the Week

Next meeting - May 20, 2015