

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - November 18, 2015

Attendance:

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

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

Mary read an inspiring passage from "Small Things Count" by Jackie O'Connell.

2. Approval of October minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Social Justice Day - February 20, 2016

We discussed planning for the Social Justice Day. The goals for this event are:

- To find our own way
- To be people of justice
- To light a fire
- To engage our parishioners

Uncertainties: workshop list; whether to have a lunch; whether to include specifically Hispanic workshops.

The list of workshops is in the process of creation. The DSJCGI (Diocese of San Jose Catholic Green Initiative) wishes to participate.

4. Current needs at EHP (Ecumenical Hunger Program)

Christmas and Thanksgiving activities are being planned. Ruth will take care of the Giving Tree at St. Thomas, and Anne Barry at St. Albert. It was suggested that we talk to Chris Mardesich about getting the youth group involved.

NEW BUSINESS

5. Signature gathering for an initiative to overturn Physician Assisted Suicide Law.

Fr. Matt had sent the following message from Msgr. Francis V. Cilia:

“Bishop McGrath is allowing pastors to decide whether to engage in signature gathering for an initiative to overturn the recently-passed Physician Assisted Suicide Law.

“Information on this is contained in these three documents. As soon as we get the information on where expenditures are to be reported, I will forward this to you.

“To be clear - the decision to participate in this is yours. I hope that you find the background information helpful.”

A “memo to pastors” from Msgr. Cilia and a document entitled “Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action Catholic Social Teaching” were included.

Fr. Matt passed this message to the HCC for advice and counsel.

In our discussion we separated our ideas about the law and our responsibility to make an objective decision about whether to join the signature-gathering effort. We were unanimous in our opinion that timing of this effort is disadvantageous. The deadline for completion is January 4. To quote from the memo: “Concerned citizens have filed a referendum to ask voters to overturn this dismal law. To succeed it must first receive enough

signatures by January 4, 2016 to qualify for the ballot.”

The next six weeks are the busiest time in the calendar year for us. It is impractical to embark on a time-consuming effort to change the law. We agreed to recommend to Fr. Matt that the parish should decline to join the signature-gathering effort.

6. Community Plan to End Homelessness in Santa Clara County

Fr. Matt wrote to us about a document entitled “Community Plan to End Homelessness.” He asked for a review and information.

The document is an extensive plan to end homelessness in Santa Clara County. The mission statement is: “WHAT WE WANT: A community in which all residents have access to appropriate and affordable housing and the support they need to retain it. We can end homelessness. WE KNOW HOW.”

The introduction to the document states:

“This plan exists to create a community-wide roadmap to ending homelessness for the next five years. This plan will guide governmental actors, nonprofits, and other community members as they make decisions about funding, programs, priorities, and needs. This plan was created in April-August 2014 after and through a series of community summits related to specific homeless populations and homeless issues in Santa Clara County, including summits related to: Youth, Families, Veterans, North County, South County, Environmental advocates, Discharging institutions (health care, mental health, corrections), Nonprofit board members, Disruptive thinking about housing.” An implementation body will use this plan as a guide to create an annual community action plan that will provide the “how” to this plan’s “what.” In 2014, the annual action plan has been heavily informed by the information provided by community members at the summits.”

Some history is given:

“Over the last decade, Santa Clara County has gradually organized around a community-wide effort to address homelessness. In 2003, the City of San Jose completed a Homeless Strategy designed to eliminate chronic homelessness by focusing on prevention, rapid rehousing, wraparound services and proactive efforts. That led to Santa Clara County’s 2005 Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and the 2008 Blue Ribbon Commission culminating in the establishment of Destination: Home as the public-private partnership vehicle to implement these strategies, resulting in a 2011 campaign geared towards ending chronic homelessness. Time and results have taught us that of the strategies laid out in 2003, access to housing is what works.

“Ten years of progress has brought Santa Clara County to this point in time. We have **new collaborative cross sector partnerships**. We have a track record of success with **a new housing system**. We have **new tools** to engage both public and private sector funders. The public is demanding a real solution to homelessness and we are dedicated to delivering one. It’s time to reimagine homes and rebuild lives. **We can end homelessness**. This is how we start.”

The document is signed by members of The Destination: Home Leadership Board.

We take it that our job is to review the plan, gather information about it, and embark in a conversation with Fr. Matt about it.

7. Response to terrorism

The HCC believes that it is necessary to protest the current overreaction against refugees. Chris had sent out an email message from the organization *Justice for Immigrants*. The message: “Tell Congress & Your Governor to Welcome Syrian Refugees! CATHOLIC ACTION IS URGENTLY NEEDED.”

Chris placed two items on the ebulletin for this week. One of the messages is:

“Our parish Human Concerns Committee encourages all parishioners to consider the following: A Prayer for this Week:

“We pray for all the people and places that have experienced the terror of violence this week...
- for the 43 people in Beirut and 129 people in Paris who were killed by Daesh;
- for the untold number of Syrians who have died in retaliation attacks;
- for Muslims around the world who are targets of renewed and vicious Islamophobia.

“We want peace for these people and places...”

Also, five web site addresses were given which extend similar messages.

8. Drones Quilt Project

The Drones Quilt Project is meant to remember the victims of US combat drones. “The quilt is a work of advocacy. It’s a really simple project designed to raise awareness about drones and remind the government that those killed by drones are human beings, whose lives are sacred. Each square of the quilt is made by someone like you, who writes their name and then the name of a victim on a square of fabric. By doing so you advocate for that person, you put your name next to theirs as a sign that you stand in solidarity with them. These are then sewn together to create a visual petition.” We considered the participation in the project by displaying several quilts at one of our churches, along with informational posters describing the illegality of the combat drones program as well as the real damage they are causing.

9. Holiday meal project

We did not get to this topic.

10. What's On Your Mind?

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

Mary volunteered. Her suggestion for next meeting is the Jubilee Mercy prayer.

Next meeting - January 20, 2015