

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting -- April 17, 2012

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Laura Chiu, Pru Delameter

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

OLD BUSINESS

2. Approval of March minutes

3. Our Congolese Refugees

We discussed the help that Paul provided to Agnes and Wilson on March 28. We went to the Social Security Administration office on Hamilton Avenue to try to get the SSA to relent in their plan to obtain repayment of the SSI payments that Agnes received in the March to December period. The SSA is demanding repayment because Agnes's account was above the \$2000 limit for that period. We filled out the appropriate form for reconsideration and presented it to an agent. The agent accepted the form but was not encouraging about whether the request would be accepted. The family will be hearing from them within four months.

Secondly, Paul helped Wilson to correct a problem on the submission of his 2011 tax return. Their dependent was rejected because of an error in her social security card, and that fact eliminated the Earned Income Credit and the Child Tax Credit. We called the IRS and explained the problem, and the agent said he would fix it, but he warned that Wilson should have the card corrected in order to avoid a similar problem next year. The result means restoration of the \$2500 refund.

We agreed that our committee should gradually withdraw from this project because the family is nearing self-sufficiency. We will call a meeting of the group to discuss how to go about doing this.

4. Death Penalty issues - Terry

This topic was deferred because Terry was not present.

5. June is Torture Awareness Month

The maintenance people will put up the banners "Torture is a Moral Issue" on all the churches for the month of June. Recently, Fr. Matt recommended that we get involved in torture awareness. The web site of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (<http://www.nrcat.org/>) has resources that we could use. NRCAT is a growing membership organization committed to ending U.S.-sponsored torture. In particular, prolonged solitary confinement is a form of torture that is very common in our prison system; it is an extreme form of punishment that is known to cause physiological and psychological harm. NRCAT created the 20-minute film *Solitary Confinement: Torture in Your Backyard* which we will purchase.

NEW BUSINESS

6. November Ballot Issues

We discussed presenting a forum on ballot issues in October. We discussed whether we should have the forum on all the November ballot issues, or whether to concentrate on the SAFE initiative and the PNI Initiative. There was no conclusion at this time.

7. Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the illegal trade of human beings for the purposes of reproductive slavery, commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, or a modern-day form of slavery. Recently, Fr. Matt recommended that we

get involved in this issue. This is a significant problem in California, and we should call attention to it.

8. Bread for the World Offering of Letters

This year the 2012 Offering of Letters: is called "Expanding the Circle of Protection": "We have an over-all campaign and four mini-campaigns – on domestic nutrition, poverty-focused foreign assistance, tax credits for low-income families, and international food aid programs." We are too late to have our letter-writing campaign in May, so we will consider partaking in this effort in September or October.

9. What's On Your Mind?

Pru suggested that we do a sales job to get people involved in HCC. Paul will write a paragraph for the bulletin. We also considered that the meeting night, the third Tuesday of the month, is a problem for attendance. We considered changing it to Wednesday or Thursday. SOUP is on Wednesdays at OLR, so having our meeting after a SOUP event might stimulate attendance.

Laura said that Terry Atkinson will be working to collect shoes for Soles4Souls. This group is a non-profit organization that collects new shoes to give relief to the victims of abject suffering and also collects used shoes to support micro-business efforts to eradicate poverty. The group receives large donations from footwear companies, retailers, churches, nonprofit ministries, civic groups, schools, and individuals.

Laura said that the PSC Retreat will be held on May 19.

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

Next meeting - May 15, 2012 (after SOUP)