

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting
March 15, 2011

Attendance:

Terry McCaffery, Walt Lundin, Paul Chestnut, Mary Fong, Laura Chiu, Nancy Ng, Liz Lilly, Claire Collins

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

Isaiah ch. 8, v. 6-10

2. Approval of February minutes

The February minutes were not available.

3. Refugee Resettlement plans

There was a long discussion about refugee resettlement: what the volunteers would be expected to do, what Catholic Charities will do, and how Catholic Charities runs the program. See more detailed notes below. In the end, we decided that we will write a bulletin insert for March 27, and on the same day give a speech at each Mass urging the parishioners to volunteer for this program. Names of volunteers will be collected, together with telephone numbers and email addresses. Subsequently, we will have an informational/organizational meeting.

4. Walt's retirement

Walt said that he will be retiring soon from the Human Concerns Committee.

5. Death Penalty Update

Terry discussed the petition to the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors regarding eschewing the death penalty.

6. Hotel De Zink

Ruth has a full slate of volunteers for April.

7. Plans for Bread for the World Offering of Letters

We did not have time to discuss.

8. What's On Your Mind?

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

Next meeting - April 19, 2011

Notes from refugee resettlement discussion:

CC's transitional housing is in San Jose and Sunnyvale. Typically it's available to the new arrivals for a month or two.

CC's job sources: Goodwill, Fry's, Whole Foods. We can advertise within the parish for job availability.

Refugees get food stamps and money from the federal government for one month. Also there is mental health (if needed), Medi-cal and dental. Valley Medical Center is the main provider. CC caseworkers help refugees to apply for a social security number and other necessary government service services. A volunteer might "shadow" them to learn the system.

CC finds housing. There are three to four case workers.

Parish tasks: Greeting committee, help in filling out employment applications, small group tutors in conversational ESL. CC could use help on money management, perhaps some legal issues, cooking, cleaning, shopping, baby showers for pregnant women.

CC provides refugees with basic ESL, job training, inculturation.

Time commitment: English tutors should plan for about two one-hour sessions at CC headquarters.

CC has a "tough love" policy with refugees. They provide them with bicycles and helmets (from "Good Karma Bikes"), get them comfortable with public transportation to go to their various appointments. Perhaps we can ask for donations for helmets, bike locks, bike baskets.

St. Christopher, St. Lawrence, St. Martin of Tours, and St. Teresa are participating parishes.

About 75% of refugees are single and mostly male. CC handles about 250 per year, 60 at any one time.

How much time is it expected to take to become independent? The commitment is four months, but it can take longer. A lot depends on whether the refugee speaks English. CC has daily instruction, Monday through Friday, from 8 to 5. They take the bus to CC.

St. Christopher in San Jose has 10 to 15 volunteers.

The program:

Notification of a person's arrival; get ready. Get welcome backpack. Case worker goes to transitional housing in San Jose or Sunnyvale, a six-bedroom house paid for by Presbyterian Church, but it runs out in June. Convent at St. Lawrence with 21 bedrooms, maybe. One or two people do the airport greeting. Two people prepare food at transition house. Others arrange medical appointments, social security cards. Volunteers take people to shopping, doctors; Valley Medical has translators. CC has a partnership with Refugee Transitions, which trains refugees in cooking, English, and the bus system.

Other needs: money management, paying for rent, food, insurance.