

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - November 20, 2013

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Susan Olsen, Ruth Chippendale, Terry Atkinson, Chris Lundin, Prue Delameter

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

2. Approval of October minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

3. St. Vincent de Paul activities

There will not be a toy collection this year. The Ecumenical Hunger Program, 2411 Pulgas Ave, East Palo Alto, will be taking over that project. There will be a Thanksgiving Day food delivery, but it will be much reduced from previous years: 100 baskets instead of 300. It is not clear whether there will be a Giving Tree.

4. PSC meeting

Chris said that the financial situation has improved mainly because of the reduced budget and a recent gift. Planning for the relocation of St. Thomas Masses continues. Renovation there will go on for two months starting December 28.

5. Social Justice Day Planning

At the October meeting, a date of March 15 was set for the Social Justice Day. Susan reported that she brought up the concept of a Social Justice Day at the September Deanery 2 meeting. It was revealed that March 15 is the date of a meeting of social justice activists in Los Angeles. It is not known whether that would cut into attendance of our event. On the other hand, March 22 is wide open. There is definitely interest in holding this event in Deanery 2. St. Albert the Great is an ideal location, although it is located far to the north of the rest of the Diocese.

We will form a committee with representatives from each parish in Deanery 2. We need contacts for parishes in Deanery 2. Paul will contact Liz Lilly of St. William Parish in Los Altos. Susan will contact the folks at Holy Family who worked on the Social Day in that parish for seven years. Susan suggested that a letter from Fr. Matt, the Dean of Deanery 2, to our contacts would help. The program would consist of 1) A Mass or prayer service, 2) Keynote speech, 3) Workshops, 4) Break for lunch, 5) Workshops, 6) Closing prayer.

We need ideas for workshop topics and speakers. Suggested: Human Trafficking, Scripture and Social justice, Pastoral Ministry, Catholic Social Justice Teaching and the Economy, Housing, Health Care, Hunger issues, Unemployment, Unionization, Food and Agriculture, Inequality: the gap between rich and poor, poverty and the environment, restorative justice, abolition of the death penalty, the transition from charity to social justice. Some suggested speakers: Diana Gibson, David Klein, Eugene Boyle, Sr. Elizabeth Avalos, Sr. Caritas Foster, Michael Carson, Terry McCaffrey. Bishop McGraw for keynote speaker. The workshops ought to include one or two in Spanish.

Chris suggested that for this event, we might confine it to our parish, rather than Deanery 2. Susan thought that it would be better to include the larger group for such an ambitious project.

Several members recommended that a strong effort should be extended to involve the youth of the parish in this endeavor.

The events of the past were successful: almost 200 participants; we seek a similar number for the 2014

event.

6. Advent Recycle Collection results

The backpacks/suitcases/sleeping bags drive collected the following items for the InnVision Shelter Network and Opportunity Center: 15 backpacks, 17 suitcases, 8 sleeping bags, 2 suitcase trolleys, 1 warm blanket, and 1 extra warm like-new large coat.

7. Human Trafficking

Prue had been to the Spirituality Tuesday presentation in October at which Sister Caritas Foster led a discussion of human trafficking within our own country and around the globe. More recently, she attended a meeting at the Diocese at which Bishop McGraw discussed the problem. She was overwhelmed by the facts of human trafficking. The bishop expressed his desire that information about the problem should be spread throughout the diocese. Prue did her part by bringing many pamphlets and flyers, plus small cards that highlighted the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-3737-888). It so happens that the month of January is Human Trafficking Awareness month. "The Catholic Network to End Human Trafficking of the Diocese of San Jose and the Diocese of Monterey has prepared a variety of resources for your use during the four weeks of January. These resources are available in Spanish and Vietnamese as well as English. . . . The Network can provide posters in a variety of languages, if needed. Call us if you would like a speaker." <http://www.dsj.org/social-ministry/human-trafficking-awareness-month/> . The web site has bulletin inserts and homily suggestions. During the next few weeks, we should consider a Human Trafficking Awareness program.

Chris suggested that we organize a publicity campaign through homilies and bulletin notices. Terry suggested that the Elizabeth Seton School could play a role. We all agreed that our goal is to make people aware. Prue brought publicity flyers last month containing the hotline number. We need to educate the parishioners about this.

8. Heart & Home Collaborative

We recently received a letter from the Heart and Home Collaborative, the group that is planning to open a women's shelter in Palo Alto. In this letter, they updated us with their plans.

"It's mid-November, meaning we at Heart and Home Collaborative are one month closer to opening our shelter. We plan to open on January 12, less than two months from now. Since our last newsletter we've finalized two locations for the shelter, Peninsula Bible Church and University Lutheran Church. Now we're focused on raising money to fund our shelter operations this winter.

"Our shelter this year will feature several different programs and collaborations with other services for shelter residents to use. We will offer medical services through a partnership with local doctors and medical students and we are currently developing a job training program. In addition, several Stanford student groups will provide skills training, education on women's health and empowerment, and more. We would not have been able to develop our organization and shelter without the support of this community, so it's exciting to announce that so many local organizations are willing to donate their time and expertise."

From Fr. Matt: "I want us to continue to show our support for this new program. Hopefully HCC will consider ways to inform, educate and solicit support from the parish. Perhaps, something at the Dec or Jan PSC meeting."

NEW BUSINESS

9. What's On Your Mind?

Susan: Right to Life group at STA: We discussed the proposal about a Right to Life group at STA. This concept is strongly supported by the Bishop, and Fr. Matt has also asked that Susan pursue the idea with the HCC, and he has given his blessings to the individual interested in bringing it to STA. At a previous meeting, most of us agreed that this is not a topic that is part of the charter of HCC. However, we agreed that the HCC should support the effort because the concept of the dignity of the human person is part of the mission of the HCC. In particular, we agreed that the Right to Life group is under the umbrella of the HCC.

Paul: Santa Barbara Safe Parking Program: On November 9, there was a meeting at St. Mark's about the Santa Barbara Safe Parking Program. This topic was highly relevant for Palo Altans who are concerned about the recently imposed ban on people sleeping in vehicles. Roslyn Scheuerman, the Safe Parking Program Coordinator, presented details about how the program works. It is run by a non-profit, New Beginning Counseling Center. It began about ten years ago with support from city and county leaders. Nineteen government, church, and private business parking lots have been approved for the program. Those who want to use the spaces, about one to five per lot, are required to go through a review with New Beginnings. There is a long set of rules. A program supervisor checks the lots regularly. The program has been very successful. There were about 80 people at the meeting. There was a strong feeling among the attendees that this kind of program is needed in Palo Alto. Learn more at www.newbeginningcounselingcenter.org.

Paul: In the coming tax season, VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) will provide tax preparation services for low-income folks at the OLR Hall on Saturday mornings from February 8 through April 12.

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

Next meeting - January 15