

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - January 20, 2016

Attendance:

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

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

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

2. Approval of November minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Community Plan to End Homelessness in Santa Clara County

Fr. Matt sent us a message asking us to review the "Community Plan to End Homelessness," an extensive plan to end homelessness in Santa Clara County. We discussed the document at length. It has a long history; many constituencies have been aligned to pull together to solve this vexing problem. The plan sounds extremely confident of being able to solve the problem of homelessness. The vision invoked by this plan is impressive.

One question that we were concerned with was how our committee can help.

Chris pointed out that Steve Carter commented at the last PSC meeting that he is a member of the "Out of Poverty Action Committee" led by Catholic Charities. The Committee's charge is "to discover how to best coordinate the efforts of many of the nonprofits who serve the poor, and coalesce all of these groups, as well as local politicians, cities, and municipalities, to find a common theme and concentrated focus on poverty." We plan to invite Steve to a meeting of the HCC.

4. Social Justice Day - February 20

We planned for the Social Justice Day, to be held on February 20 at St. Albert. The theme is "Praise Be! A Call to Live Mercy in Our Common Home." The keynote speaker will be Fumi Tosu of the San Jose Catholic Worker, A house of hospitality for homeless women, and women with children. There will be six workshops in two time intervals. The keynote will be held in the St. Elizabeth Seton school auditorium; the workshops will be held in the classrooms and the Hospitality Room. There will be no lunch this time, but snacks and coffee will be provided. All are asked to encourage people to come.

5. Drones Quilt Project

The Drones Quilt Project was created to raise awareness about the illegal and immoral use of weaponized drones by the United States, which are responsible for the deaths of thousands of people, primarily in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Each block of the quilts bears the name of a drone victim and was created by a different individual. The Drones Quilt Project exhibit has been seen by thousands as it has traveled around the country for the the past 18 months, visiting 20 cities. This event is part of Campaign Nonviolence, a nationwide movement of over 200 actions and events taking place across the country. Locally, Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice (MVPJ) has joined with several local organizations and congregations in sponsoring three months of local displays. In Palo Alto, quilts will be on exhibit from January through March at various times in different congregations, including First Congregational Church, Unitarian Universalist Church, and two Catholic Churches.

The idea for a Drones Quilt came from some women in the UK who started the project as a way to memorialize the victims of U.S. combat drones. The idea traveled across the Atlantic. The idea is to collectively create a piece of artwork which connects the names of activists with those killed. The names

humanize the victims and point out the connectivity between human beings.

We plan to place one or more quilts at locations in the parish over a period of about one month.

6. Death Penalty News

7. Have a Heart Collection

The HCC is sponsoring Have a Heart Sunday. Normally this event is held on the Sunday closest to February 14; we decided to change the date to Saturday February 20 and Sunday February 21 because of a conflict with _____. At each Mass we will be collecting new, unopened underwear and warm socks for people who receive services at the Opportunity Center in Palo Alto. Donations are distributed to those clients in most need. A spreadsheet identifying the volunteers for each Mass will be set up.

8. Response to terrorism

There has been a great deal of divisive rhetoric about Muslims and how their faith tradition is incompatible with American culture and ideas. A good way to break down stereotypes and misinformation is to engage with those we do not regularly interact with. The Thomas Merton Center is planning for a family potluck luncheon some time in the last two weeks of March. We noted that Easter is March 27 and schools are off the week of April 4. The venue will be one of the parish's hospitality centers, depending upon the number of people who plan to attend. Bishop Patrick McGrath, Fr. Matt, and the Muslim Imam will be joining members of both our St. Thomas Aquinas Parish as well as members of the local Muslim community.

NEW BUSINESS

9. SESS Books for Summer Reading

We want to collect books again this year for our first and second graders as they leave school for summer vacation. Dates to be determined.

10. What's On Your Mind?

MVPJ is planning an Interfaith Peace Walk during Campaign Non-Violence, some time in September. Chris would be interested in our parish participating. MVPJ has talked about walking from the Muslim temple in south Palo Alto, to the Jewish Community Center on San Antonio Road, to churches on Middlefield, to OLR.

Paul noted a new book on human trafficking: "*Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World*" by Kevin Bales. "A leading expert on modern-day slavery, Kevin Bales has traveled to some of the world's most dangerous places documenting and battling human trafficking. In the course of his reporting, Bales began to notice a pattern emerging: Where slavery existed, so did massive, unchecked environmental destruction." In this way, the book reflects one of the main themes of the Pope's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si: The world is in crisis, and the roots of the crisis are in the "technocratic paradigm,"* which is the technological culture which dominates modern thinking. This technological culture leads to the spoiling of nature and the exploitation of people, especially the most vulnerable.

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

Next meeting - February 17, 2015