

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - July 22, 2015

Attendance:

Anne Fillin, Terry Atkinson, George Chippendale, Mary Fong, Chris Lundin, Terry McCaffrey, Paul Chestnut

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

2. Approval of June minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Buena Vista update

From notes of Winter Dellenbach: On Monday, June 29, the Palo Alto City Council unanimously voted to support saving Buena Vista by setting aside \$14.5 million from the Housing Fund to match the County's funding. Added to County and Caritas funds, that makes \$39 million. Council members were finally able to speak freely about BV since they were out from under the need for neutrality during the Appeal and closure process. It was quickly apparent that they strongly and enthusiastically supported Buena Vista. What's next? Probably on Monday, August 17, the Council will fill in the details of what they did Monday night. If they get a deal with the owners to buy BV, Council will also need to approve that deal. It is very rare to save a mobile home park and its affordable housing from gentrification.

4. Torture Awareness update - Letter on SB 124

At the prompting of NRCAT, we decided to send a letter of support for SB 124 which aims to prevent and limit the use of solitary confinement in state and county juvenile prisons. A letter was written by Paul and all present signed the letter. It will be sent to Loni Hancock, Chair of the Public Safety Committee, and to the bill's author, Senator Mark Leno.

5. Current needs at Opportunity Center

Terry Atkinson noted that there are continuing needs at the Opportunity Center for socks and underwear. She suggested that some of the \$426 left over in the Have A Heart fund for the Opportunity Center be spent for this purpose. There was no objection.

6. Death Penalty news

The Thomas Merton group at St. Thomas is focusing on the Death Penalty. Dick Placone recently met with Bishop McGrath with a view to getting the Bishops' Conference onboard.

Terry has been working with the Monterey Diocese. There will be a breakfast on October 10 pushing for the concept "Clergy Against the Death Penalty."

Amnesty International Group 19 will hold a regular meeting at Mitchell Park from 6:30 to 8:00 in the Green Meadow Conference Room. Guest Speaker will be Robert Bacon, defense Attorney, who will discuss the case of death row inmate David Raley.

As part of the Channing House Speaker Series, on August 4 at 7 pm on the Eleventh Floor, District Attorney Jeffrey Rosen will discuss his accomplishments since he took office in January 2011 and his priorities for the future.

There was a Supreme Court decision recently (June 29) on lethal injection drugs used in executions. See excerpt from the Washington Post below.

NEW BUSINESS

7. Community forum on racism

On Monday, July 6, about 140 community members gathered at University AME Zion Church to discuss our feelings around the tragic church killings in Charleston, South Carolina.

On Monday, July 27 at 6:00 p.m. there will be a planning meeting for our children's event. The goal is to expose our kids to different racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds. We are looking for all organizations and individuals that are involved with children in the Palo Alto area to send a representative to be a part of the planning process.

On the same evening at 7:00 p.m. we will watch the film, *White Like Me*. The film is about white privilege and how it impacts our perspective on race. Chris will lead the group discussion directly following.

Both events will be held at First United Methodist in Palo Alto at 625 Hamilton Ave.

#### 8. Pope's Encyclical on Climate Change

Paul read a message from the web site of the Interfaith Power and Light organization about support for the Green Climate Fund, which was conceived to help poor and vulnerable countries adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change, such as changing weather patterns, sea level rise, and extreme weather events, and to build more resilient societies. The message: tell your senator: \$500 million for the Green Climate Fund is essential to combating global climate change! Paul said that he would send the link ([http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50836/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action\\_KEY=14018](http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50836/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=14018)) to the group so that members could send the message to our senator.

#### 9. Annual report submitted

Anne, our liaison to the PSC, reported that the annual report, written by Paul, was submitted to the PSC at the meeting the previous week. The council was impressed with the detail in the report.

#### 10. What's On Your Mind?

Terry: An event is planned at Lytton Plaza for World Day Against the Death Penalty in October.

Chris: Michael Sullivan is the new Youth Minister. We should find ways to get the youth of our parish involved in activities.

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

Next meeting - September 16, 2015

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"A divided Supreme Court on Monday turned aside claims by death-row inmates that a drug to be used in their executions would lead to an unconstitutional level of suffering, a narrow but unequivocal ruling that made clear that states have leeway in carrying out the death penalty. The justices ruled 5 to 4 against inmates in Oklahoma, who alleged that the use of a sedative called midazolam has resulted in troubling executions that violate the Constitution's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. Executions in Oklahoma and elsewhere have generated national headlines about inmates writhing in pain or taking hours to die when the drug was involved.

"The relatively limited issue gave way to a broader dispute among the court's nine members, one that reflects the debate in society: Can the ultimate punishment for the most horrendous acts be equitably and humanely applied and confined to the truly guilty?" Two justices who have been on the Supreme Court bench for decades wrote a long dissent saying it was time for the court to take another look at whether the death penalty could ever be carried out in accordance with the Constitution." (Washington Post)