

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

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Laura Chiu, Ruth Chippendale, George Chippendale, Jean Ramaciotti, Judy Decker, Terry McCaffery, Terry Atkinson

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

2. Approval of November minutes

3. Our Congolese Refugees

We continue to help the Congolese refugees deal with the life in the U.S. We are tutoring the teenager, Chantal, to help her catch up in math. We are applying for discounts with the City of San Jose Utilities. We read to the children on weekends. We are helping them deal with the elimination of SSI payments to the grandmother. Currently we are reminding them that their lease is up on March 1, and they better start thinking about what to tell the landlady.

4. Future refugee resettlement activity

Claire Collins from Catholic Charities was planning to attend to discuss future refugee resettlement activity, but she was ill and could not attend.

5. Death Penalty issues

The "Empty Chair" will be shown on Spirituality Tuesday, February 21. This is a film about four people who lost loved ones who were murdered. Three are against the death penalty and one is for it.

SAFE (Savings, Accountability, Full Enforcement) is the initiative to reform the death penalty so that the death penalty will be replaced by life imprisonment with no possibility of parole. Signatures will be collected at St. Thomas Masses on January 29. SAFE has 100,000 signatures; more are needed.

On February 1 at 7 p.m. at the Channing House, Professor Larry Marshall will make a presentation. He is an advocate for reform of the criminal justice system.

6. St. Vincent DePaul - Report on Thanksgiving and Christmas activities

The Parish Youth Group, STAY COOL, played a major role in the packing of food boxes for 225 families at Thanksgiving and for 325 families at Christmas. Several parishioners participated in the food delivery.

The Giving Trees in the three Worship Centers were a big part of providing Christmas toys to the children of 325 families. Several parishioners participated in packing and delivering the bags of toys.

NEW BUSINESS

7. Letter from the Bishop regarding gathering of signatures.

We received a message From Fr. Matt about a letter from Bishop McGrath concerning the gathering of signatures for two pending ballot measures. He appealed for help from HCC.

We agreed that we would be glad to participate in the gathering of signatures. Terry McCaffery said that he has many signature forms for the SAFE initiative, including forms for Alameda, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo counties.

We think that at least two tables will be required at each Mass for these two efforts and that the two efforts need to be spatially separated in order to achieve maximum impact. The attendees streaming out of church go by very quickly, and the more people, the better. We are prepared to enlist our members to collect signatures for the SAFE initiative at all the Masses for the weekend of February 18 and 19. At least two individuals need to be present at each Mass, and more for OLR Masses where there are several exits. Terry noted that the deadline for submission of the signatures for the SAFE initiative is February 24; therefore the second weekend (February 25/26) would be too late for signature collection for this initiative.

8. What's On Your Mind?

Judy Decker is a new member who expressed an opinion about a "hole in the parish." There are people in our midst who need help but who do not ask for help. For example, trips to the doctor, changing a light bulb, moving, food. What we need is a pastoral home ministry for spiritual needs. The Mormon Church provides a good example of what is needed. We agreed to think about how we might do something about this issue. Roberta Kehret is doing this at one Mass, the 8:30.

George: The Support Trust Act is an attempt to end the separation of families that occurs because of deportation. Bishop Niederauer is calling on Governor Brown and Attorney General Harris to end this practice.

Jean: Fr. Matt suggests that we consider adding two issues to our agenda: Torture, and Human Trafficking.

Jean: Help is needed at Soup on Wednesday nights.

Laura: We need a "Help Wanted" column in the Bulletin.

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

Next meeting - February 28, 2012