

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting  
November 22, 2011

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Laura Chiu, Ruth Chippendale, Jean Ramaciotti

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

2. Approval of October minutes

The October minutes were unavailable at this time.

3. Death Penalty issues

4. St. Vincent DePaul

The Palo Alto group was very busy this month. Many people come to the Pastoral Center for food assistance during office hours (Mondays and Thursdays from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM and Wednesdays from 3:00 to 5:00 PM). The food drive is about to begin; food sorting will take place on December 4 after the 10:30 Mass at OLR.

The Advent Giving Tree starts this Sunday, November 27.

5. Clothes Collection Results

The collection last Sunday, November 20, netted 80 coats and 20 blankets, plus miscellaneous clothes items.

6. Our Congolese Refugees

Paul and Rosie Baudo visited the Congolese family on Sunday, November 6. They delivered two boxes of diapers and a rice cooker from Laura. Laura also sent a bag of children's books that she got from the library. Rosie read these to the kids. Paul worked with Chantal (the 13-year-old) on arithmetic. (Kamal Mansour has been working with her weekly on arithmetic.) She had done the exercises on coins that he had given her the previous Sunday. Almost everything was done correctly. We completed the section of the book that dealt with coins, and then worked on addition, using the book that Rosie had brought the previous week. She is able to do addition of integers of any size, and she has mastered the notion of "carrying." She is a little slow on knowing addition facts, but that will improve with practice. We gave Chantal a video tape on Basic Addition. Also, Rosie had found a pair of video tapes on Algebra, which we gave to Emmanuel, who is interested in taking a course in Algebra at De Anza.

On Sunday, November 13, Laura Chiu, Rosie Baudo, Virginia Mensing, and Peggy Nute visited the family. Laura worked with Chantal on her addition homework and went on to practice addition of numbers with three rows and three columns. They also started working on simple subtraction. Next they worked on writing in cursive because Chantal has expressed an interest in this. They did worksheets on the "round" letters - a, d, g, q and c. She seemed really intrigued by the experience and asked Laura for the next set of worksheets when they ran out of time. During the next visit, someone can check her cursive exercises, her money homework (which she did not complete after Paul's last visit) and maybe start to work on either time-telling or subtraction or multiplication. Laura also asked for her school schedule for English and Reading and passed on the info to Roberta Kehret. While Laura was with Chantal, Peggy worked with Daniel, and Rosie worked with Dianne one-on-one with reading. Virginia brought books from her house and entertained the three younger kids (Mediatrice, Patience and Jocelyn). It all went quite smoothly.

NEW BUSINESS

7. PSC meeting notes

Laura discussed highlights of the PSC meeting on November 9.

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

Jean initiated a discussion about the HCC - the first question was "Do we have a process for what we decide to do?" We do not have a formal process. Often we react to external stimuli, such as the request from Catholic Charities to get involved in Refugee Resettlement. Usually our activities are continuations of previous activities, such as Have a Heart Sunday, and the annual Bread for the World appeal for letters to our congress persons regarding alleviation of world hunger. We described how we got involved with several of our activities. Jean wanted to know where among the parish ministries the needs of the needy parishioners among us can be addressed. We agreed that the HCC should be the place where parishioners can go to find relief, but we admitted that we have not participated in such activities. A mechanism for addressing these needs is lacking.

Jean suggested that we get in touch with Judy Decker, an activist who is new to the parish, who wants to help start a project to address our own parishioners' needs, such as corporal works of mercy (meals to the home, rides, help in packing, etc.)

Ruth suggested that we contact Eileen Richardson, who founded the Downtown Streets Team in Palo Alto. Her organization provides work for homeless people in Palo Alto.

Jean also asked for clarification of the parish's connection with the South Bay Sanctuary Covenant. [South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC) is an ecumenical, interfaith, non-partisan organization of churches and individuals in the Bay Area from San Francisco to Santa Cruz. The group is concerned with peace, justice and liberation for the people of Central America and for the refugees who have fled from these areas. SBSC began in 1983 by assisting Central American refugees who had fled to the U.S. to protect their lives. Later they expanded their concern to include crucial problems facing people in Central America, especially El Salvador, that were forcing them to flee to the U.S. SBSC advocates for better local and national policies to improve conditions for refugees here and in Central America. St. Thomas Parish was one of the original founders of SBSC, the others being First Presbyterian Church, Friends Meeting, and University Lutheran Church – all in Palo Alto. Other supporting churches include: Covenant Presbyterian, First Baptist, First Congregational, First Lutheran, St. Mark's Episcopal, Unitarian Universalist Church – all in Palo Alto, and the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Los Altos and Stone Church of Willow Glen, Presbyterian, San Jose. The mailing address of SBSC is 3290 Middlefield Road, which is our Pastoral Center. <http://southbaysanctuary.org/>. ]

We discussed the activities of Night Outreach, a group based at Stanford that works with homeless people. They have several projects at the Opportunity Center. "Night Outreach's mission is to meet and establish relationships with the unhoused members of our community with the belief that compassion and conversation are just as important as food and shelter. Our members act out of the desire to propagate social responsibility, with the willingness to both share with and learn from the people with whom we interact. Night Outreach promotes campus awareness of issues connected with homelessness and engages in outreach in downtown Palo Alto and San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood. We host speaker events, organize clothing drives, and volunteer at the Opportunity Center, a local drop-in and subsidized housing facility. Our members act out of compassion, the desire to understand and connect with the unhoused and unheard, and the need to build a more just and socially responsible community we call home." <http://www.stanford.edu/group/nightoutreach/>

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

Next meeting - January 17, 2012