

Social Justice and Caring Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday, December 3, 2020 (via Zoom)

Present: Martha Arko, Kendall Doom, Bill Dorgan, Mary Huettl, Ann Karner, Christine Malec (minute writer), Margaret Malec, Fr. John Mitchell, Kim Roering and Mary Weyandt

American Red Cross Blood Drive

Margaret announced that forty-six units were donated at the American Red Cross blood drive held at the parish on Monday, November 23, 2020, but she did not think the parish met its goal. She stated that the next blood drive will take place on Monday, February 1, 2021. Margaret said that this blood drive is scheduled to take place at Grace Lutheran but she believes it will probably be held at the parish since Grace Lutheran has not yet reopened since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

“We Were Made for These Times: Where Do We Go from Here?” Event Follow-up

The committee members resumed their discussion on continuing the momentum that began as a result of the “We Were Made for These Times: Where Do We Go from Here?” virtual event facilitated by parishioner Anne Weyandt (Associate Professor of Education at St. Catherine’s University) and Sr. Sharon Howell, CSJ (the Director of the Center for Spirituality and Social Justice at St. Catherine’s University) that took place via Zoom on Tuesday, September 15, 2020, - for planning both charity and justice-related activities.

Chris mentioned that absent committee member, Anna DeCrans, notified her that Anna still plans to contact all those who participated in this event to invite them to join the committee as soon as Anna contacts Kim to obtain the names of those who were present. Kim stated that Anna did contact her about this. The committee members thought it would be a good idea for Anna to invite these people to the committee’s January 7, 2021, meeting so that all participants could spend some time brainstorming ideas.

It was noted that the recently formed partnership with Progressive Baptist and the parish’s possible collaboration with Beacon Interfaith Housing are some examples of action items that have developed as a result of the above-listed event. (See below for additional information on these topics.)

Committee members also suggested the following ideas:

- opening the gym after school as a place for children from the community to spend time (It was thought that the parish and/or school would have to examine issues associated with this idea - such as who would be responsible for cleaning the gym after it was used and how security would be managed. It was also determined that such an idea probably could not be acted upon until after the COVID-19 pandemic.) and
- organizing an outreach ministry to contact parishioners who may be experiencing a sense of being disconnected to the parish (such as seniors) since they may not participate in virtual events or masses - especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. (Several

committee members volunteered to assist with contacting others as well as to perform other needed services for them - such as shopping. Fr. John said that he was thinking of mailing a letter to parishioners asking anyone who needs assistance to contact the parish and that this might result in having a list of those who would appreciate being contacted. The committee members liked this idea but noted that it would require a lot of coordination - including establishing expectations for the caller and the person being called, creating talking points that could be used for the telephone calls, training of the callers etc. It was discussed that some parishes have similar programs and that it may be helpful to connect with them for information and input. It was also suggested that the parish reach out to new parishioners as a way of establishing connections with them and, once the COVID-19 is over, to reconnect with parishioners who were not at church during the pandemic. It was decided that the committee members would resume this discussion at their next meeting since the parish may have received some names of those requesting assistance as a result of Fr. John's letter.)

Faith & Blue

Fr. John mentioned that he has not had an opportunity to contact Officer Kurt Hallstrom of the St. Paul Police Department to let him know that the parish would be interested in participating in a "Faith & Blue" event (whose goal is to facilitate law enforcement officers connecting with members of the public in the communities in which they serve in order to build a mutual understanding). He stated that he would probably wait to do this until the parish has chosen a date for this event - whether it is held in-person or virtually.

Fr. John said that when he contacts Officer Hallstrom, he would let him know that the parish would like the event to be a listening session that would give parishioners the opportunity to ask questions, share their thoughts/feelings/perspectives regarding what troubles them, what gives them hope, what they see as strengths and weaknesses etc.

The committee members discussed that, given recent events, it may be important to have this meeting since it is relates to current issues.

Catholic Charities Giving Tree Program

It was noted that parishioners have been taking wish list ornaments off the Catholic Charities Giving Tree that has been put in the gathering space outside of the church. (The Catholic Charities Giving Tree program collects unwrapped gifts for those in need and these lists contain suggested gift ideas of clothing for adults, housewares, miscellaneous items and personal items.)

Ann reported that she has already delivered donations from parishioners to the Catholic Charities Giving Tree program. She stated she will continue to make deliveries as more donations are collected at the parish.

The committee members determined that the parish would collect donations until December 25, 2020.

It was recommended that Fr. John make another announcement regarding this program at all the masses this coming weekend.

Meeting with Progressive Baptist

Ann reminded the committee members that a partnership with Progressive Baptist developed as a result of one of the action items suggested by participants of the last JustFaith Catholic program to have the parish collect items for Progressive Baptist's food shelf. Ann said that, when she contacted Progressive Baptist to discuss this, she was informed that its food shelf received ample supplies from other sources but that this congregation would be interested in working together on other issues - such as homelessness.

Ann stated that this meeting took place and those present discussed the needs of the under-sheltered/unsheltered on the eastside and they discerned actions that could be taken to address their immediate needs as well as to create long-term solutions to address the issue of homelessness.

Ann said that some members of Progressive Baptist bring clothing to the unsheltered in the camps on Mounds Boulevard and Shepherd Road so she has put announcements in the parish's bulletin and electronic newsletter, the *Pulse*, asking for donations.

Ann stated that this group has continued to meet and discuss homelessness and that it has considered partnering with Beacon Interfaith Housing to work on this issue. (See below for information on this topic.)

Ann mentioned that the next virtual meeting with Progressive will be held on Thursday, December 10, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. She said if any committee members would like to participate in this group to let her know and she would have their names added to the group distribution list to receive meeting invitations.

Beacon Interfaith Housing

Ann informed the committee members that the above-described Progressive Baptist/St. Pascal group members have been discussing the possibility of partnering with Beacon Interfaith Housing as a way of addressing the issues of homelessness in the Twin Cities. (Beacon Interfaith Housing is an organization working to end homelessness and advance equitable housing in the Twin Cities.)

Ann stated that she received a telephone call from Elizabeth Tannen, a Congregational Organizer for Beacon Interfaith Housing, who told her that this organization has launched "Bring It Home, MN" to address the root of the housing instability crisis in the state and to propose legislation that will provide rent subsidy to every low-income household who qualifies - with the hope of ending homelessness in the state.

Ann said that Elizabeth also informed her about some upcoming virtual meetings:

- **“Rent is Due: Day of Action”** on Tuesday, January 5, 2021, from 8:30 - 9:00 a.m. which will discuss the growing housing crisis and reflect on how to take action and
- **“Legislative Launch & Action”** on January 21, 2021, from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. which will kick-off Beacon Interfaith Housing’s state legislative work to advance its vision that all people have a home.

Fr. John noted that he will be speaking with Elizabeth Tannen this coming week.

Ann stated that if Progressive Baptist and/or the parish decide(s) to partner with Beacon Interfaith Housing, this organization would probably want the group and/or parish to form a committee that would disseminate information to the congregation(s). Ann recommended that a decision be made regarding whether to have a partnership with this organization.

Ann suggested that the committee members view Beacon Interfaith Housing’s website to learn more about this organization.

Freedom House

Ann remarked that the City of St. Paul has hired the Listening House to operate a day shelter called Freedom House at the former fire station on West 7th Street.

The committee members discussed the possibility of donating funds to this organization via a future We Care Campaign. Ann agreed to look into whether it is seeking monetary donations.

Immigrants and Refugees Assistance

Fr. John informed the committee members about the United States Council of Bishops’ Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR) program that recruits parish volunteers to assist refugees adjust to their new life in the United States - by providing them with things such as employment assistance, language lessons, legal counsel, medical services etc.

Fr. John said that there are two local organizations associated with POWIR:

- **Arrive Ministries** - which provides resettlement services and care for displaced refugees, immigrants and asylees who call Minnesota home and
- **International Institute of Minnesota** - an organization that delivers culturally accessible services and resources to assist refugees as they strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency and full membership in the American life.

Fr. John stated that both these organizations provide many volunteer opportunities - both short and long-term and that getting involved with these could be part of continuing the momentum that began as a result of the “We Were Made for These Times: Where Do We Go from Here?” event.

Fr. John told the committee members that he would send them links to additional information regarding these organizations.

Care for Creation Team

Fr. John announced that the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has formed a Care for Creation Team. He said that this team will use a Catholic approach to care for creation within parish communities.

Fr. John stated that the Care for Creation Team members will be hosting two Zoom meetings to introduce themselves, to share ideas about how to activate care for the environment within the archdiocese and to ask parishes for input on what types of things are working for them, what their goals and concerns are etc. He said these will take place on Wednesday, December 9, 2020, from 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. and on Thursday, December 10, 2021, from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Fr. John stated that it is hoped that parishes will form their own Care for Creation committees.

Fr. John agreed to send the committee members information regarding the Care for Creation Team.

Next Meeting

Thursday, January 7, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

Kim will schedule the Zoom meeting.

Ann agreed to lead the prayer.