

Social Justice and Caring Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday, January 7, 2021 (via Zoom)

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

New/Returning Committee Members

The members welcomed a new member to the committee, Julie Ludden as well as returning members Ray and Eileen Muetzel.

Beacon Interfaith Housing

Fr. John reported that he, Ann, Bill, Kim, Julie, Martha and some other non-committee members attended a Zoom meeting with Elizabeth Tannen of Beacon Interfaith Housing, an organization working to end homelessness and advance equitable housing in the Twin Cities. He stated that Beacon Interfaith Housing's work includes building homes for the unsheltered, doing legislative work (such as trying to obtain rent subsidy legislation) and partnering with community groups and parishes to work on housing-related issues - such as building affordable housing for people at the lowest income levels and advocating for the state to deepen its investment in housing to ensure that everyone can have a stable home.

Fr. John said that Beacon Interfaith Housing hopes to have parishes create a core group of parishioners who will work with its organization and have this group communicate with the entire parish, inviting parishioners to participate in housing-related issues either individually (such as by choosing to be added to Beacon Interfaith Housing's e-mail distribution list to receive information on various action items that can be taken) or with the core group.

The members discussed the possibility of forming a core group with those from the committee who would like to work on this issue as well as interested members of the Council of Catholic Women and the Men's Club. They felt that if the core team included members from various parish groups, it would be easier to disseminate information to the entire parish.

Fr. John asked Ann to send some information regarding Beacon Interfaith Housing to Christine so that she could forward it to all the committee members - including details regarding an upcoming "Bring it Home, MN" virtual meeting on January 21, 2021, from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. that will launch Beacon Interfaith Housing's legislative advocacy. Ann and Christine agreed to do this. It was felt that the committee members could use this information to learn more about the work done by Beacon Interfaith Housing to determine if this is something in which they or the parish should become involved.

It was also suggested that information regarding Beacon Interfaith Housing (and other social justice-related issues) be placed in the parish's electronic newsletter, the *Pulse* - with the hope that this would help inform parishioners about the unsheltered and housing issues and cause some of them to get involved with this work.

Ann, Mary Huettl and Julie agreed to participate in a core team and Kim volunteered to serve as the parish support person.

Care for Creation

The committee members resumed their discussion regarding the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis' Care for Creation Team that will use a Catholic approach to care for creation within parish communities. They spoke about the possibility of forming a sub-committee to work on such issues. Fr. John mentioned that parish Business Administrator, Theresa Ruttger, had begun implementing some environmentally-friendly practices at the parish (such as using compostable cups) but that these were suspended when the parish shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The committee members briefly discussed having the parish do other environmentally-friendly activities - such as organizing clothing swaps, setting up a giveaway table or establishing supply exchange networks similar to those run by the "Buy Nothing" social media sites.

The committee members decided to table discussion on this issue until the resumption of normal parish life after the pandemic.

Catholic Charities Giving Tree Program

Ann reported that she delivered many car loads of donations from parishioners to the Catholic Charities Giving Tree program. (The Catholic Charities Giving Tree program collects unwrapped gifts for those in need.) The committee members felt that the parish supported this program very well - especially during the time of the pandemic.

The committee members briefly discussed whether to donate to this organization again next Christmas or to return to participating in the Angel Tree ministry - a program that provides the children of incarcerated parents with Christmas gifts.

We Care Campaign

Christine stated that Theresa Ruttger provided her with the results for the "We Care Campaign" held the weekend of October 24 - 25, 2020. She said that a total of \$1,460.00 was donated to the Campaign and that, individually, the following amounts were raised for each of the options:

- **Catholic Charities Disaster Relief for Louisiana** - given to the Catholic Charities Disaster Relief for Louisiana to assist those affected by Hurricane Laura - \$470.33
- **Salvation Army HeatShare Program** - a voluntary, non-governmental program that helps low and moderate-income families pay their energy bills by providing cash grants and emergency assistance with utility and heating bills on a year-round basis - \$500.33 and
- **St. Mary's Health Clinics** - established in 1992 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet to provide free health care services to the uninsured and medically underserved people in the Twin Cities and surrounding metro area - including assistance

in applying for governmental subsidy programs and other community resources, clinic visits, diagnostic tests, prescriptions etc. - \$490.33.

Christine reminded the committee members that the next “We Care Campaign” will be held the weekend of March 6 - 7, 2021, and that they should choose the options for this Campaign at their next meeting.

Faith & Blue

Fr. John mentioned that he contacted 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 informed Officer Hallstrom 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 and perspectives regarding what troubles them, what gives them hope, what they see as strengths and weaknesses etc. Fr. John said that Officer Hallstrom is willing to participate in such an event - which could be held in the spring or summer.

Meeting with Progressive Baptist

Ann announced that the next virtual meeting with Progressive Baptist will be held on Thursday, January 14, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. She stated that the members of this group are still in the process of discerning what they would like to do. Ann said that the topic of partnering with Beacon Interfaith Housing would probably be discussed as well ways to minister to those who have been living in the camps that are in the process of being dismantled.

Ann remarked that 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.

“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.

Christine noted that absent committee member, Anna DeCrans, notified her that she had contacted all those who participated in this event to invite them to serve on the committee - which resulted in Julie, Eileen and Ray joining. She also mentioned that Anna suggested sending another e-mail to the participants asking them about their commitment level and whether they would like to network with the committee on social justice-related issues.

Fr. John reported that, as proposed at last month's meeting, in an effort to reach out to parishioners who may be experiencing a sense of being disconnected to the parish as a result of the pandemic, he did send a Christmas letter to all parishioners asking anyone who needed assistance to contact the parish. He stated that, although several parishioners volunteered to work with those asking for assistance, he did not receive a lot of calls from those requesting help. Fr. John said that he also received some monetary donations to the St. Pascal Family Emergency Fund.

The committee members spoke about the importance of continuing with this effort. A suggestion was made that greeting cards could also be sent to those who are feeling disconnected from the parish. The committee members liked this idea but agreed that they would like to continue pursuing reaching out to parishioners via telephone - whether calls were made on an individual basis or volunteers gathered to make calls phone bank style.

It was noted that, in order to be successful, this effort would require coordinating volunteers who would like to assist with this effort. Mary Weyandt and Martha said that would be willing to work on this but stated they would need some assistance from the parish - such as having the parish provide the contact information of those who would like to receive a telephone call.

The committee members decided to continue their discussion of this issue at their next meeting.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Open Wide Our Hearts* Letter Study Opportunity

Kim reminded the committee members that the parish will offer sessions on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Open Wide Our Hearts* letter regarding the topic of racism in February 2021.

Next Meeting

Thursday, February 4, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

Kim will schedule the Zoom meeting.

Margaret agreed to lead the prayer.