

Social Justice and Caring Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday, December 2, 2021 (via Zoom)

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

Prayer

The prayer was led by Mary Huettl.

American Red Cross Blood Drive

Margaret announced that forty-four units of blood were donated at the American Red Cross blood drive held at the parish on Monday, November 22, 2021, from 1:00 - 7:00 p.m. in Brioschi Hall - surpassing the thirty-seven-unit goal.

Margaret noted that the drive was somewhat inefficient due to the fact that the American Red Cross had fewer staff members working at the drive which resulted in long wait times for the donors.

Margaret said the next drive will be held at Grace Lutheran on Monday, February 7, 2022, from 1:00 - 6:00 p.m. and that the parish will host additional blood drives on Monday, May 2, 2022, and Monday, June 27, 2022.

Angel Tree Ministry

Kim updated the committee members on the Angel Tree ministry, a program that provides the children of incarcerated parents with Christmas gifts. She stated that all the tags containing gift ideas that were hanging on the Christmas tree in the gathering space were taken by parishioners after the 4:30 p.m. Kim said that totes have been placed in the gathering space to collect the donations for this ministry.

Kim stated that she placed a sign in the donation closet indicating where additional donated items could be placed.

Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative

Julie Moore mentioned that Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, an organization working to end homelessness and advance equitable housing in the Twin Cities, will host a convening event on Thursday, December 9, 2021, from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. which will be held virtually and in-person. (The in-person event will take place at St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Bloomington.) She said this event will celebrate the work done by this organization this past year and will discuss its plans for coming year.

Julie Moore remarked that Elizabeth Tannen, Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative's Congregational Organizer, is transitioning to new duties within this organization and her replacement is currently difficult to contact.

The committee members discussed how the St. Paul rent stabilization ordinance that passed on the November ballot may have resulted in some landlords having concerns about building new housing units.

Catholic Charities Giving Tree Ministry

Fr. John reported that staff member Karri Creamer prepared the tags that went on the Christmas tree in the gathering space for the Catholic Charities Giving Tree program - which collects unwrapped gifts for those in need and that there are many tags still available.

Kim stated that she put a bin in the gathering space to collect the donations for this ministry and that she placed a sign in the donation closet indicating where additional donated items could be placed.

The committee members agreed to monitor the bins (as well as the above-listed Angel Tree ministry totes) to determine if they need to be emptied and the overflow placed in the indicated donation closet shelves.

Fr. John reminded the committee members that parishioners can also bring donated items to the Catholic Charities' two-day Warming House collection site at the Mall of America.

Donation Closet

Eileen and Ray informed the committee members that they had delivered two van loads of donated clothes to Freedom House, a day shelter located at the former fire station on West 7th Street operated by the Listening House that was the November donation closet recipient.

Kim reminded the committee members that the donation closet collection for January 2022 will be Brittany's Place, a shelter located on the east side of St. Paul that helps teenagers who are victims of sex trafficking. Martha and Julie Ludden volunteered to submit the announcements for the bulletin and the parish's electronic newsletter, the *Pulse*, and deliver the donations to Brittany's Place at the end of the month.

The committee members discussed that the future of Freedom House may be uncertain due to a new ordinance that has been put in place in St. Paul that may require this organization to obtain a permit and/or variance to continue operating. (The ordinance allows small drop-in centers for the unsheltered to operate without having to obtain a permit but shelters the size of Freedom House may need to obtain a permit and/or variance.)

Meeting with Progressive Baptist

Ann informed the committee members that Progressive Baptist's food shelf will not be operating next Friday/Saturday, Christmas Eve/Day and New Year's Eve/Day. She said the food shelf will resume its normal schedule after the holidays.

Ann remarked that the amount of food that Progressive Baptist receives from its supplier, Second Harvest, is being reduced due to supply chain-related issues and that produce may no longer be available during the winter months.

Ann reminded the committee members that the East Side Community Alliance meetings with Progressive Baptist take place the second Thursday of the month and the food shelf meetings take place the fourth Thursday of the month.

Merrick Community Services - Possible Food Distribution Ministry

Kim updated the committee members on the parish's plan to serve as a possible food distribution site for Merrick Community Services to assist those living on the eastside who are experiencing food insecurity. She stated that she and absent committee member, Mary Weyandt, participated in a Zoom meeting with Joshua Bao, the Food Services Manager for Merrick Community Services, to get some answers to some of the questions raised by committee members.

Kim stated that Joshua said that:

- Merrick Community Services is fine with having the parish be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate background checks are conducted for those who volunteer for this ministry,
- the data the parish will be asked to collect from those who obtain food will be very basic - such as name, address, telephone number, number of people in the household etc. and that questions such as immigration status and sexual orientation will not be asked (People will not be denied food if they choose not to answer the questions.),
- it is recommended that the same volunteers work the entire event instead of splitting them up into shifts;
- Merrick Community Services is willing to be present as needed and
- Merrick Community Services will pick-up any leftover food.

Kim announced that Mary Weyandt has agreed to be the site leader for this ministry and that the parish will begin the food distribution once a month as soon as volunteers have been recruited to work on it - perhaps by January or February 2022.

Catholic Charities Family Service Center Ministry

Kim and Christine noted that parishioner Toni Baker will no longer recruit volunteers (from Grace Lutheran and the parish) to serve meals at the Catholic Charities Family Service Center in Maplewood (which provides a safe environment for those transitioning to permanent housing)

since she has not been able to find any volunteers to serve - even since the pandemic-related restrictions have been lifted.

It was noted that there are still two lunch crews that will continue to serve meals there but that these volunteers will now schedule shifts themselves via Catholic Charities' individual sign-up process.

The committee members acknowledged the many years that Toni has organized volunteers for this ministry.

JustFaith Catholic Program

Ann inquired whether the parish were interested in conducting another JustFaith Catholic program in early 2022. Several of the committee members who were involved in former JustFaith Catholic programs expressed interest in participating in this again.

The committee members discussed which topic to choose (such as civil dialogue, eco-justice, racial justice, spirituality etc.) Ann and Kim agreed to review the available courses and determine which one should be offered.

Next Meeting

Thursday, January 13, 2022, from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. via Zoom (Please note, this is one week later than the usual meeting date of the first Thursday of the month.)

Kim will schedule the Zoom meeting.

Julie Moore agreed to lead the prayer.