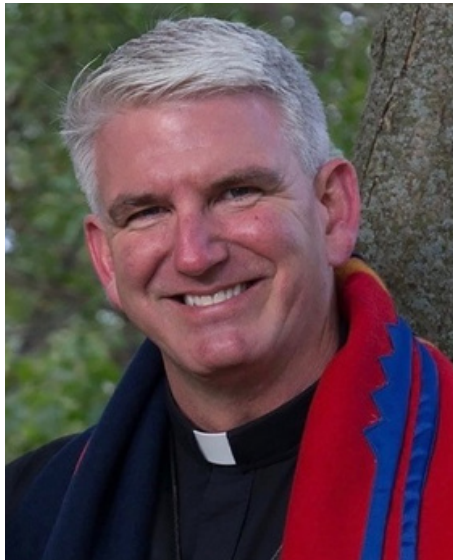


# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

## A MESSAGE FROM FATHER DAVE

I am excited for all of you to read this latest edition of our Social Justice newsletter! I am so proud of all the good work that our parishioners are doing in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! So much of this is being done with simply my encouragement. We have so many talented and faithful people who are taking the lead in the three areas of emphasis within our Social Justice Committee: Neighborhood Alliance, Green Team, and Immigration.



You may recall that Archbishop Lucas and the Archdiocese of Omaha has a big goal: that every parish in the archdiocese become “missional communities” by 2026. They suggest that there are three components that must be met to become and remain a missional community: a clear path of discipleship, a culture of generosity, and collaborative leadership. Two of those three components are clearly being put on display in the pages of this newsletter. The fact that I only need to provide encouragement, and am not depended on for leadership in this good work, speaks to the collaborative leadership we are trying to live out here in our family of parishes. A beautiful culture of generosity is clearly seen in all the articles in this newsletter as well.

Now that we have wrapped up our discernment process and have come up with our four Apostolic Priorities for our Historic 24th Street Family of Parishes, I look forward to how those priorities will be reflected in the work of our Social Justice Committee, and how we can do more partnering with the other parishes in our family of parishes! May God bless you all!

**Fr. Dave Korth**

“Throughout the life of our nation, we have seen at times unacceptable demonstrations of prejudice and hatred, including in recent days mass communications targeting people of color and disparaging comments about immigrant communities. With one clear voice, we reaffirm our unwavering and unqualified recognition of the fact that each and every human life is sacred, that all persons are imbued by God with an inviolable dignity, which no earthly power can deny. The sinful ideologies of racism and xenophobia are antithetical to these core teachings of our Christian faith. No person formed by and committed to the Gospel of Life can harbor such views in good conscience.”

U.S. CONFERENCE  
OF CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS,  
STATEMENT

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## WE HAVE A CHOICE: TO PULL BACK OR TO ACT

This issue of the **Justice from the Heart** newsletter is a collection of prophetic voices. Why prophetic voices? Our spirituality tells us we have a choice in the face of national, societal and global challenges. We can pull back into our comfort zone and hope the storms will pass. Or we can refuse to accept moral decline, cruelty to our brothers and sisters, and the squandering of God's gifts entrusted to our care. We can act.

This second choice is the way of the prophets of old who raised their voices to proclaim God's vision for all in opposition to greed, violence and idolatry. Because we were baptized in the life of Jesus the Prophet, we are all called to share the message we hear in word and in action. These articles show how we are beginning to move in that direction.

The prophets of old are models for us and their truth-telling rings through the centuries. They condemned the unfaithfulness of Israel while extending the invitation to come back to the arms of a loving God. All true prophets are rooted in the deep knowledge of God's love.

Prophetic language flows from demands that love makes. It cannot remain private but must be expressed outwardly by word and action. Prophetic spirituality requires us to go beyond personal needs to address the needs of our communities and the earth. Prophetic spirituality requires us to champion the needs of the poor and vulnerable, addressing causes which are rooted in unjust systems.



Prophets must be people of courage because their message is normally resisted. The prophet says no to that which is not of God. Racism, abuse, rejection of the stranger, consumerism, pollution of the water and skies, and all forms of selfishness are condemned by God and the prophets. The prophet calls us to share our bread with the hungry, protect the earth, and live lives of generosity and love for all.

This same prophetic message is ours to share, we who are followers of Jesus the Prophet. How specifically are we attempting to do this? In response to Pope Francis' prophetic encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Fr. Dave and CUES amplified the message by putting up solar panels on the Sacred Heart School. Protecting God's creation is as simple as composting and as complicated as negotiated

loans for technology reducing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. In another way, the preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting of a garden is a testament to care for our earth while feeding the hungry with healthy, fresh vegetables.

Pope Francis also speaks as a prophet on the suffering of immigrants and the moral imperative to reach out and support these brothers and sisters. One way our members are living this out is through intensive efforts to provide instruction to those who are seeking citizenship. OTOC also advocates on behalf of immigrants in Nebraska. They demonstrate how the prophetic voice is expressed in politics.

In yet another example, Jackie Belcher, who was part of delegation from St. Benedict the Moor and Sacred Heart to the U.S. Catholic Bishops conference on Social Ministry, reminds us of essential elements of our Catholic faith. Hearing the prophetic voices of bishops and lay leaders, Jackie shares the prophetic message she wants to pass on.

We invite you to consider how you want to raise your prophetic voice in conjunction with Historic 24th Street ministries. Reach out to any member of the committees or contact me for more information: [nanhemesath@gmail.com](mailto:nanhemesath@gmail.com).

**Nancy Hemesath**

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## MISSIONARIES OF HOPE, ADVOCATES OF JUSTICE

In late January 2025, Father Dave invited me and four others to attend the 2025 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C. The conference, Missionaries of Hope, Advocates for Justice, brought together bishops and social justice experts to guide us in working for justice. They emphasized the importance of hope and practical advocacy for justice. Their message was clear: morality, justice, and policy ought to go hand in hand.

I had never heard it explained this way. I'm a convert; I'm new and late to Mass. I've always been "justice oriented" but my motivation was driven by something I didn't quite understand. In retrospect, I see everything always points to the Lord. He is what makes justice make sense; the Lord Our God points us toward justice. Justice points toward the Good. Bad policy is policy that hurts people, oppresses them, and deceives them. Evil sometimes comes in the form of a bad law.

The bishops gave us glimpses of justice through policy. There were seminars about homelessness, justice that surrounds immigration policy, the importance of nonprofit hospitals around the world, our role in reducing international poverty, humanitarian law and policy (especially for the most vulnerable) and even tax law. The Church is helping make sense of these complex and difficult subjects to give us a path to align policy and faith.

We all really wanted to bring this home to you. When I ask the question, what would Christ do?



**A delegation from Sacred Heart and St. Benedict the Moor attended the USCC Social Ministry Conference in Washington, D.C., titled "Missionaries of Hope, Advocates for Justice." From left to right, Jacques Musavyimana, Julia Knezetic, Thierry Mazimpaka, Fr. Dave Korth, Jackie Belcher and Jamie Schmitz.**

I know I'd go ask a Jesuit. But it turns out - all these different Orders agreed! Justice is not just a policy goal - it is a moral imperative. The bishops made it clear: faith is not separate from action. Politics is our highest form of charity. Foreign aid helps humans here and abroad. All humans have God-given rights. Taxes are meant to serve the common good, from maintaining national parks to ensuring people have homes. This also resonated with me: the Church has worked for justice long before the United States government existed.

The Lord's calling to justice predates the nation. And the Church will continue to advocate for justice as long as it exists in the world.

"Politics is the highest form of charity united in the common good. Ministry begins with the poor, the marginalized, the excluded. They are the heart of the Church."

-CARDINAL PIERRE,  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO  
TO UNITED STATES

Justice begins with us, in our communities, in our conversations, in the policies we shape and the choices we make. We make up our Church. So, I ask you—how will we, as a faith community, answer our call to justice?

**Jackie Belcher**

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## HELPING IMMIGRANTS GAIN U.S. CITIZENSHIP

For the past couple years, there has been a joint effort between members of Sacred Heart and St Benedict the Moor to help meet the expressed needs of some immigrants in St. Benedict Parish. Speakers presented talks on such topics as homeownership, legal rights, and budgeting to immigrants who have been in the country for several years but still need support. One of the needs expressed by several was how to gain citizenship.

A subcommittee was formed to help immigrants at St. Benedict's to become citizens. The citizenship process is available to those who have had their green card for five years (three years if married to a citizen).

The challenge of this process is the need to have enough English language mastery to pass the test. The normal four-part application process is conducted by the USCIS officer in English, without an interpreter. In addition to performing the test, the applicant must understand the meaning of questions and be able to explain them if asked.

The process includes an interview, some reading, and some writing of sentences related to citizenship. Applicants study 100 specific civics questions about which they may be asked. Citizenship classes started last August, and meet every Saturday from 12:30-2.

There are five students in the current program. Students speak Swahili or Kirundi. Margie Boston presents the material, and students practice with the help of volunteer tutors.



**Volunteers teach citizenship candidates about the voting process.**

With the help of an interpreter and these volunteers, students are mastering the material for citizenship requirements. The biggest hurdles are the language barrier, English competency in social settings, and transportation for the students.

The volunteer committee is also committed to helping citizenship candidates pay the fees related to gaining citizenship. It can cost as much as \$710 per application to apply for citizenship, an amount most applicants cannot afford.

Our volunteers appreciate your prayerful support as they continue these efforts. We will keep you updated on the progress of our students.

**Margie Boston**

A subcommittee was formed to help immigrants at St. Benedict's to become citizens. The citizenship process is available to those who have had their green card for five years (three years if married to a citizen).

CITIZENSHIP  
PROJECT

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## THE BOUNTY OF OUR GARDEN

What would you like to be remembered for? As I look at my attempts to find my prophetic voice, I find I search for answers. My vocation as a registered nurse guided me to comfort and heal those who were sick and injured or dying. But now, I find my prophetic voice guides me to care for our common home: the earth.

Through the Bounty on 24th Street Garden (Sacred Heart's Garden), we are producing healthy food, educating children, beautifying our neighborhood, and feeding neighbors, school families, and immigrants. Many volunteers are also finding their prophetic voice in the garden. The garden is the work of many. During the 2024 growing season, over 650 hours

were donated. We produced over 1,312 pounds of vegetables and herbs. We shared zinnia and sunflower bouquets with the school staff and the Alpha prayer group. With the financial generosity of our parish family, we expanded our in-ground garden space with vertical planting. We added watermelon, okra, different squash varieties, and cabbage. To supplement our water needs, we are harvesting rainwater via a 275-gallon IBC tank from the adjacent school building roof.

We added additional soil to reduce the grade and to reduce stormwater runoff. We sowed a winter oat cover crop to nourish and aerate the soil and planted native flower plants. We also added a compost bin.

To avoid using insecticides and pesticides we adopted a Korean gardening technique. We also shared 2023 zinnia seeds with parishioners. Like all years, weather plays a factor in the harvest. We are excited for the 2025 growing season. Come find your prophetic voice in the garden by helping to protect our earth and feed our neighbors.

We accept all kinds of support: prayers for weather that promotes an abundant harvest, financial donations, and in-garden help. Feel free to reach out to me at 402.639.5283 (m) or oconnor\_desanto@cox.net with the subject line: "Sacred Heart Bounty on 24th Street".

**Jane O'Connor**

## OMAHA TOGETHER ONE COMMUNITY (OTOC)

Omaha Together One Community is a 30-year-old organization of 30 Omaha congregations and community groups. Sacred Heart and St. Benedict the Moor were founding members under the leadership of Denny Holland, Dennis Walsh, and Pat Bass.

OTOC is strictly nonpartisan. We support issues, not candidates. The issues arise out of conversations among members. Last year OTOC worked with other groups to gather signatures. Nebraskans voted by a large margin to secure paid sick leave for workers. In 2010 Nebraska discontinued funding for prenatal care for pregnant women who were undocumented. In response, OTOC formed an action team to address immigration and refugee-related issues. OTOC and other groups successfully worked to restore prenatal care funding for all Nebraskans and successfully advocated for immigrants with DACA

(often called "Dreamers") to obtain driver's licenses and professional licenses in our state. Immigrants with Temporary Protective Status (TPS), many from El Salvador, have worked in Omaha for decades. They are partners in OTOC's efforts to address immigration reform with our federal delegation. OTOC organizes sessions to ask candidates to address issues such as OPPD's increased use of clean energy, abandoned housing, and improved mental health programs.

In late 2021 and 2022 business leaders were calling Nebraska's workforce shortage "desperate." To learn more about this issue, OTOC members conducted individual meetings throughout Nebraska with over 60 leaders of the Chambers of Commerce, trade associations, advocacy groups, foundations, faith communities, agricultural interests, union members, immigrants, attorneys, educators, and healthcare providers. OTOC and allies

have also hosted group meetings with more than 100 Nebraska leaders in Lincoln, Omaha, and North Platte.

These meetings have resulted in the same response: Immigrant workers are the solution to Nebraska's workforce shortage and dwindling population in many towns. A diverse broad-based statewide coalition was needed to accomplish this goal. The Alliance for Thriving Communities is the result. The Alliance is a statewide coalition of 70 organizations from the Cattlemen Association and Pork Producers to Heartland Labor, Nebraskans for Peace, the Aksarben Foundation, and OTOC. The Alliance agrees that Nebraska communities and economy need immigrant families and workers. We are promoting a set of proposals to achieve reform. This kind of cooperation is unique and hopeful.

**Jeanne Schuler**  
**Sacred Heart OTOC**

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## GUIDANCE, LEADERSHIP, ACTION

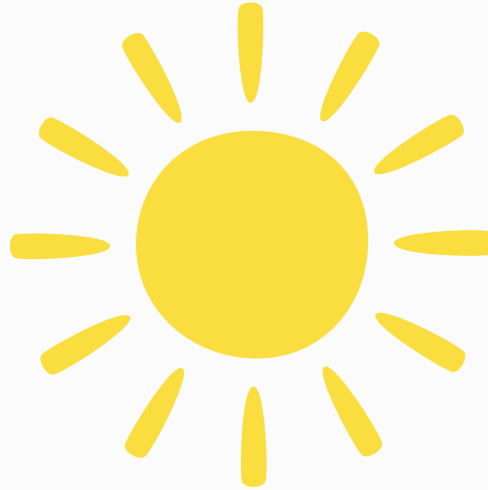
During the summer of 2015, an Encyclical from Pope Francis, titled *Laudato Si*, was issued. An Encyclical's purpose is to guide the Catholic Church on issues of faith, morals and social justice. *Laudato Si*'s message is best described by its subtitle, "On Care for Our Common Home."

During a speech in 2018, Pope Francis said, "In my Encyclical *Laudato Si*, I appealed to all persons of goodwill for the care of our common home, and specifically for an energy transition aimed at averting disastrous climate changes that could comprise the well-being and future of the human family and our common home."

What does one do with this guidance? It's a choice; you can dismiss it, make it political, find scientific reasons why it isn't sound, or garner support on why not to take action. Or, you can do what Fr. Dave Korth and CUES chose to do-- have faith in the guidance, show leadership in preparing a plan, and take action when the opportunity presents itself for the betterment of the home you govern.

Based on *Laudato Si*'s guidance, Fr. Dave and CUES took action, seeking out possibilities, working hard to obtain information, and assessing different opportunities that aligned with the guidance but supported CUES's future.

CUES, on behalf of Sacred Heart, immediately contacted engineers, developers, and consultants to assemble options for energy reduction and production, reducing their carbon footprint and supporting their financial future. Plans and ideas were created and communicated, and conversations were started. Due to financial constraints, the project went dormant



Today, 70kw of solar panels sit on top of Sacred Heart School, generating energy without fuel costs or inflationary pressures.

### CUES SOLAR PROJECT

for a while, but a plan was in place, and opportunities presented themselves based on that preparation. Then things changed; energy demand increased, electric rates increased, and new funding opportunities were created for tax-exempt entities. In addition, Creighton University offered solar panels and services based on a project that had to be decommissioned. Creighton's commitment to sustainability drove them to identify options for panels they couldn't use anymore, and CUES' preparation

positioned their organization to take advantage of the opportunity. Guidance, leadership, and action....

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided the new funding opportunities. As well, CUES turned to a longtime friend of CUES, Adam Herink, who had just started a new renewable energy company called Afton Energy. Adam has been helping Catholic churches, schools, and dioceses around the country have more "care" for our common home by introducing renewable energy plans.

The financing plan he created for CUES was brilliant. It took into consideration the best possible uses of the IRA, the donated panels from Creighton, and a financial investment from Sacred Heart Parish that offered the same rate of return that they were currently getting on that money. This created a win-win-win situation: for CUES, the parish, and the environment!

Today, 70kw of solar panels sit on top of Sacred Heart School, generating energy without fuel costs or inflationary pressures. If electric rates rise, the project's value increases accordingly, acting as an inflation hedge that protects the school's operating dollars.

The CUES solar project reduces CUES' carbon footprint, supports CUES' financial future through energy independence, generates a portion of energy through renewable technologies and shows CUES' commitment to care for our common home.

**Adam Herink and Fr. Dave Korth**

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## DOING THE RIGHT THING PAYS OFF FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE TEAM

“Love your neighbor” is the foundation that underlies the efforts of the Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team. It’s also one of the core values of the Empowerment Network.

Founded by Willie and Yolanda Barney, the Empowerment Network has worked tirelessly since 2006 gathering input from the North Omaha community to identify issues and priorities in order to implement solutions. This approach has led to successful initiatives that have addressed and reduced gun violence and youth unemployment, expanded entrepreneurship, and spurred community development.

The Empowerment Network was one of the first organizations the Neighborhood Alliance Team reached out to as part of an effort to be better neighbors in the North Omaha community. Over the last six years Sacred Heart parishioners, with the Neighborhood Alliance Team leading the way, have partnered with the Empowerment Network, developing relationships and learning about our community while showing up to support Network initiatives like Christmas in the Village.

In January 2024 the Empowerment Network was awarded a \$10 million grant by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to develop and expand capacity for its successful community-building programs. In its plan to utilize those funds the Empowerment Network set aside nearly \$400,000 to be shared by 16 North Omaha churches. Sacred Heart is one of those churches. Jonathan Chapman, the Empowerment Network’s Vice President of



**Neighborhood Alliance Team members Kathy Gast and Phyllis Jeanetta-Brill greet volunteers for the Empowerment Network’s 2023 Christmas in the Village.**

Community Collaboratives, explained the reasoning behind carving out a piece of the overall grant monies for faith-based organizations in North Omaha. “Churches are one of the constants. They are consistently on the front lines and are in it for the long term.” Chapman added that Sacred Heart has been one of those constants, showing up and doing the work to improve the lived experience of its neighbors.

Chapman also emphasized an expectation that the grant would serve as a catalyst to further enhance Sacred Heart’s connections to, and collaboration with, those same neighbors.

Sacred Heart’s director of discipleship Matt Boland is managing the grant for the parish and agreed with Chapman’s assessment. “While this grant is an exciting validation of the efforts

already made by parishioners, it also serves as a bonus incentive to keep up the good work,” Boland said.

The Neighborhood Alliance Team has done the work of “loving your neighbor” because it is the right thing to do – a command given over 2,000 years ago. That hasn’t stopped team members from taking pride in having their efforts acknowledged in such a meaningful way, with Neighborhood Alliance Team leader Denise O’Gara reflecting, “Obviously, it is wonderful to have that recognition in our church neighborhood.”

As Sacred Heart pastor Fr. Dave Korth put it, “I really don’t think they would have desired to have us be a part of this grant without the good work of the Neighborhood Alliance Team over the last few years.”

**Matt Holland**

# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

## A LETTER FROM POPE FRANCIS

I am writing today to address a few words to you in these delicate moments that you are living as Pastors of the People of God who walk together in the United States of America.

The journey from slavery to freedom that the People of Israel traveled, as narrated in the Book of Exodus, invites us to look at the reality of our time, so clearly marked by the phenomenon of migration, as a decisive moment in history to reaffirm not only our faith in a God who is always close, incarnate, migrant and refugee, but also the infinite and transcendent dignity of every human person.

***“The family of Nazareth in exile, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, emigrants in Egypt and refugees there to escape the wrath of an ungodly king, are the model, the example and the consolation of emigrants and pilgrims of every age and country, of all refugees of every condition who, beset by persecution or necessity, are forced to leave their homeland, beloved family and dear friends for foreign lands.”***

**Pope Pius VII**

Likewise, Jesus Christ, loving everyone with a universal love, educates us in the permanent recognition of the dignity of every human being, without exception. In fact, when we speak of “infinite and transcendent dignity,” we wish to emphasize that the most decisive value possessed by the human person surpasses and sustains every other juridical consideration that can be made to regulate life in society. Thus, all the Christian faithful and people of good will are called upon to consider the legitimacy of norms and public policies in the light of the dignity of the person and his or her fundamental rights, not vice versa.



I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations. The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality...

The act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness. This is not a minor issue: an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized.

The true common good is promoted when society and government, with creativity and strict respect for the rights of all — as I have affirmed on numerous occasions — welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates the most fragile, unprotected and vulnerable.

I exhort all the faithful of the Catholic Church, and all men and women of good will, not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters. With charity and clarity we are all called to live in solidarity and fraternity, to build bridges that bring us ever closer together, to avoid walls of ignominy and to learn to give our lives as Jesus Christ gave his for the salvation of all.

Fraternally,  
Francis