

JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

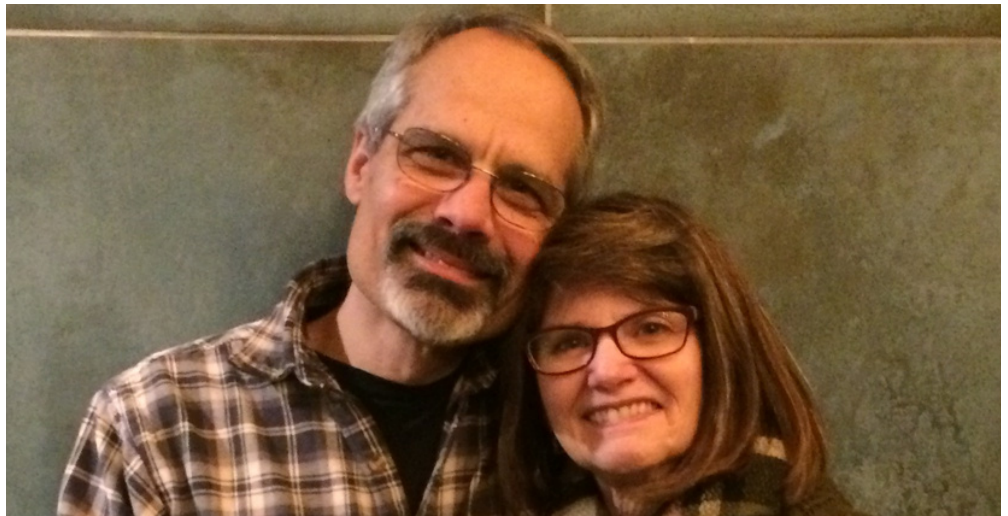
A SACRED HEART LOVE STORY

By Nancy Hemesath

Donna and Phil are one of the many couples who met and married at Sacred Heart. Donna Fleming-Alcocer joined the parish in 1987; Phil Alcocer joined in 1998. They both were members of the Freedom Choir and, as they say, the rest is history. They married in 2000.

Both are long-time educators, Phil in secondary science and Donna in the primary grades. They both retired in 2019. Retirement has allowed them to pursue their passions and interests while contributing time and talent to our parish and to others.

Phil is a founding member of the Peace and Justice Committee. He then joined the Green Team and chairs that group. His dedication to renewable energy and his science background have been a driving force behind the solar project. Shepherding this initiative has been no small task, but he expects to see its completion in the next few months. Phil says he loves hands-on physical labor so he's called on to help build raised garden beds and to haul compost. Donna is active on the Green Team and the Refugee-Immigration Team. On behalf of the Green Team, Donna took the lead in the application to Cool Congregations. (See *article on Green Team page*.) Donna has supported Afghan families sponsored by Sacred Heart by tutoring and "doing whatever needs to be done." This ranges from getting cars serviced to driving to appointments. Phil serves as a lector, and Donna participated in the parish discernment process.



Phil Alcocer and Donna Fleming-Alcocer

They both participate in an ongoing Faith Sharing group. Together Donna and Phil volunteered for one week at the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, Texas. They also spent a week with Afghan refugees at Fort McCoy, an outgrowth of Donna's participation with the Franciscan Way of Life and her preparation to become an Associate of the Dubuque Franciscans. Other outreach they have pursued is with the group, Mothers and Others: Justice and Mercy for Immigrants.

When asked where they get the energy and motivation to do this work, they both said they are particularly sensitive to "welcoming the strangers." Phil's mother was an immigrant as are almost all their grandparents. Donna herself was a "stranger" at a young age when she was adopted into a loving home. Donna grew up in a rural community in which farmers supported one another and families came together through 4-H, Grange, PTA, and church.

Both had formative experiences during college years at Catholic universities.

Phil and Donna have made a commitment to reducing the carbon footprint in their daily lives. They use wood, electricity and solar to power their home. They have an extensive garden and drive an electric car when possible. They do have to use their hybrid car sometimes. Phil and Donna share centering prayer and spiritual reading as part of their daily routine. Phil says it does not make him holy, just less crazy. Donna knows that without that time, she gets off-center and her priorities get mixed-up. Her favorite scripture phrase is the one that calls us to "Act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

She says, "I want to see God in everyone, in everything, and in all situations, with the recognition that we are all connected. I am a work in progress."

NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

MAKING IT PERSONAL



NOMA board chairperson Mike (Woz) Wostoupal with wife Meaghen



Beth Van Ornam and Margie O'Hanlon working at the volunteer check-in table for Christmas in the Village

By Matt Holland

Four years and 27 meetings ago the Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team began its efforts to “develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha.” Over those four years team members have been successful in making a number of connections with organizations and businesses.

We have learned from, worked with, marched with, and prayed with businesses and organizations ranging from the African-American Empowerment Network, Styles of Evolution clothing store, the Global Leadership Group, North Omaha Music and Arts, the Great Plains Black History Museum, and St. Benedict the Moor parish — efforts that have indeed served to increase Sacred Heart’s presence in our parish neighborhood and North Omaha.

It is important to note that team members also have developed personal connections with amazing people like Willie and Yolanda Barney, Don and Yvonne McPherson, Dan and LaVonya Goodwin, Dana Murray, Eric Ewing, and the late Al Goodwin. Getting to know, and in some cases become friends with, these fellow Omahans has made us better.

North Omaha Music and Arts

Located on the northwest corner of 24th and Lake and led by executive director Dana Murray, NOMA’s goal is to become Omaha’s premiere center for music education and performance. It has already made strides toward that goal — sponsoring performances and master classes by world-renowned musicians, including Wynton Marsalis, and holding the successful NOMAfest music festival at 24th and Lake.

Mike (Woz) Wostoupal, a member of the Neighborhood Alliance Team who has worked closely with the Global Leadership Group and the North 24th

Street Business Improvement District, recently voted chairperson of the NOMA board. Woz is excited to be a part of NOMA’s growth and looks forward to forging connections between NOMA and Sacred Heart.

Christmas in the Village

Urged on by the enthusiasm of Neighborhood Alliance Team member Margie O’Hanlon, 15 Sacred Heart parishioners volunteered their time on Dec. 3 at the Empowerment Network’s 12th Annual Christmas in the Village at 24th and Lake.

These parishioners made a difference as they signed in volunteers, surveyed attendees, monitored raffles, and assisted with carriage rides while thousands of Omahans braved the cold to witness Santa and Mrs. Claus riding down North 24th Street in a horse-drawn carriage followed by the Burke High School drill team. Families meandered along North 24th Street to enjoy free snacks and hot drinks and a variety of family-centered activities.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: *To develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha.*

GREEN TEAM

COOL CONGREGATIONS CHALLENGE

By Donna Fleming-Alcocer

Interfaith Power & Light is a nonprofit organization that strives to inspire people and congregations of faith to become models of energy-efficiency and sustainability. They have an annual nationwide, *Cool Congregations Challenge*, that awards money to a few participants. Entering the contest allows us to look back at what we've accomplished, motivates us to build on it, and to see how other communities of faith are approaching some of these issues. This is a summary of what we told the committee.

Over the last few years, the Green Team has worked on a number of issues including: the amount of waste generated by our church functions; the need for food scrap composting and more recycling; a large empty lot with lead-contaminated soil; and our location in a designated food desert. We have listed the various ways we have worked to make improvements.

School

1. Worked to bring a food scrap composting program to the school.
2. The Pastor recruited a donor for campus-wide composting bins.
3. Installed a donated commercial dishwasher at the school.
4. Replaced the Styrofoam trays with washable clamshell trays.

Church

1. Held a parish festival, The Green Jamboree, with a goal of zero waste.
2. Gave talks explaining the importance of food composting and created a poster to reinforce presentations.
4. Handed out donated reusable water bottles to parishioners.
5. Wrote articles on related environmental issues for the parish quarterly Justice Newsletters.



Sacred Heart School children help with recycling at the school.

Parish Center

1. Placed recycling bins in all parish center offices.
2. Installed a donated Energy Star dishwasher.
3. Bought reusable, second-hand plates, cups, and eating utensils for smaller groups.
4. Used compostable plates and compostable serviceware for funeral luncheons.
5. Clearly labeled recycling, compost, and orange bag bins.
6. Posted kitchen protocols so events are close to zero waste.

Land

1. Developed plan for an organic community garden.
2. Gave talks at Masses to introduce vision and secure donations.
3. Parish volunteers built five raised beds, and filled with enriched soil.
4. Parish volunteers planted, grew, and shared a variety of vegetables.
5. City remediated contaminated soil.
6. Developed a plan for next year's expansion.

Results

Hillside Solutions continues to collect food waste from six school bins and two parish office bins. This past school year about 800 pounds of food were collected each week. This means 28,000 pounds of food were composted that previously would have ended up in a landfill. This is a savings of 53.2 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. There has been a noticeable decrease in waste from our activities, especially from parish-wide activities. Progress is being made with the Parish Center kitchen because of labeled bins, posted guidelines, reorganized cupboards, and a new dishwasher. Maintaining change requires vigilance, and we are creating systems to do this.

Many comments have been made about improvements made to the empty lot and the beauty of the various plants. We now have soil that is lead free, which means next year we can extend our garden outside of the five raised beds. This year we were able to share about 200 pounds of food with our neighbors and the two Afghan families. Growing more food in the future means more food to share.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: *In partnership with our parish, the Green Team is continually learning, calling all to take action and working to care for our common home.*

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE TEAM

A WELCOME FOR NEW ARRIVALS

By Gene Summerlin

Until Congress decides to substantively engage in comprehensive immigration reform, the situation on our Southwest border will largely remain the same.

Over the last few months, we've seen families become characters in political theatre as border state governors send busloads of recently admitted asylum applicants to northern states with little notice or planning. To be fair, the initial social service costs of new refugees and migrants (whether documented or undocumented) fall far more heavily on border states than on those further away.

Because our immigration system is not currently capable of handling the number of migrants and asylum seekers that are presently entering the country, federal and state governments are increasingly turning to NGO's (non-governmental organizations) to fill the gap between those services that state and federal entities can't provide and the vital needs of new arrivals.

Just a quick reset here. Yes, immigration is a political issue. No, immigration is not only a political issue. For most of us, we probably don't have much of a role to play in solving the political problems surrounding our immigration system. But we can help with other problems that our inadequate system creates. Enter groups like Annunciation House. (www.annunciationhouse.org). Based out of a 100-year-old building in El Paso, Texas – just 10 blocks from the U.S./Mexico border – the Annunciation House serves as a rest and transition facility for new

"The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong in the world."

PAUL FARMER

arrivals to the U.S. before they begin their journey beyond the border. Due to the increase in migrants and refugees being admitted into the country, NGO's like Annunciation House are also beyond capacity.

A local team, Omaha Welcomes the Stranger, made up of many Sacred Heart parishioners, is working with Annunciation House to provide short-term assistance to migrants who have been granted "provisional" releases by the Customs and Border Protection agency. Provisional release is an alternative to detention for migrants seeking asylum who have been vetted, processed, and released by federal immigration officials as posing no safety risk.

The first busload of travelers arrived in Omaha in early December. Omaha Welcomes the Stranger provides a safe place to stay, food, clothing, basic health care, and assistance in arranging transportation to the location of each family's sponsor. The group anticipates hosting groups of asylum seekers on a regular basis.

Annunciation House has been able to collaborate with similar groups across the country so that families can move from the border to locations closer to their ultimate destination, while also spreading the financial and social services costs among a broader group of volunteers.

Because each new busload is made up of people with different family demographics, financial donations are the best way to support this effort. Donations can be made through Sacred Heart by designating a gift to Omaha Welcomes the Stranger supplies. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer, contact Terri Summerlin (terri.summerlin13@gmail.com or 402-202-5090).

In the words of Margaret Hoarty, one of Omaha Welcomes the Stranger's founders, "These are people. It's a humanitarian effort. It's not political. There's no right or left. These are people who need assistance and we are just trying to provide that."

Paul Farmer would agree.

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The Immigration and Refugee Team works to welcome, with respect and solidarity, the "foreigners" residing among us.