



# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

## SPOTLIGHT: TRISH FULLER

What does it take for the Social Justice Committee work groups to be successful? One thing is guides who have a love and knowledge of the teachings of the Church, who have practiced lifestyle changes showing a commitment to social justice, and who live out steady authentic leadership. With this issue, we will begin to highlight guides who are helping us to live a life committed to social justice.

Patricia Fuller (Trish) is one of the influencers guiding Sacred Heart's actions around commitment to caring for the environment. In 2015, Kate Hughes, another Sacred Heart parishioner who works to protect the environment, invited Trish to Mass and soon Trish enrolled in RCIA. Trish participated in RCIA in 2015 and joined the church at that time.

What led Trish to this point? Growing up in the '60s, Trish gained an awareness of the importance of social consciousness that never left her. She earned a nursing degree and then studied Aviation Safety. She, along with her husband, were pilots. She flew for a commuter airline for more than 20 years.

In the 1990s Trish became acutely aware of environmental issues. After her retirement and the passing of her husband, Trish dedicated her time to working with the Sierra Club and other organizations to address the needs of the earth. Trish spent her time promoting Earth Day and lobbying agencies and government to make changes in public policy to benefit the environment. Through Sierra Club and Citizens Climate Lobby, she learned about *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' encyclical on Caring for Our Common Home.

Pope Francis states, " we must hear both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth." This message so resonates in this time of the wild fires raging in our western states, the droughts, and rising temperatures. The earth and the poor are certainly crying out for action now.

TRISH FULLER

The Pope's document resonated with her values and brought to life the underlying reason for her commitment. Together she and her friend Kate Hughes formed Sacred Heart's Green Team. With others, they started to institute small but significant changes at our parish. She was not passive but worked to make changes to help sustain the earth.

They changed out the light bulbs in the parish office building substituting compact fluorescent bulbs. They made sure there were recycling bins in the offices and parish hall. They provided reusable shopping bags to parish members. They lobbied to get rid of all Styrofoam and provided reusable dishes in the parish hall. Trish credits Fr. Dave with supporting their efforts from the beginning. In fact, he nearly electrocuted himself installing a dishwasher in the parish hall!

While the Green Team was going about quietly instituting changes, the Social Justice Committee was getting organized.



Trish Fuller

In September of 2018 at a strategic planning session the Committee organized its outreach into three teams – the Green Team, the Immigration and Refugee Team and the Neighborhood Alliance. This meant more members and greater visibility for all the work being done.

The first major project taken on by the Green Team in 2020 was the zero-waste parish party in February 2020. Trish commented on her satisfaction of having the whole parish cooperate in this venture. Another effort has been composting at our school and parish center, with the opportunity for all parishioners to use the composting bin. Trish is the behind-the-scenes inspiration for these efforts.

Trish turned over her Green Team leadership role to Dakota Polivka but she continues to facilitate future steps. It's her commitment to clean energy that has inspired Fr. Dave and other team members to implement a plan for our parish center to use solar panels. (See explanation on Green Team page.)

Trish is a model of one who has heard Pope Francis' message to Care for Our Common Home and puts the message into action. Her example encourages each one of us from the whole parish to do the same.

# NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

## BEING BETTER NEIGHBORS

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

To develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha.

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### BY MATT HOLLAND

In 1955, Dan Goodwin opened the Spencer Street Barbershop on the corner of 24th and Spencer, two blocks from Sacred Heart Church. Goodwin's new barbershop, one of the first Black-owned businesses on 24th Street north of Lake Street, was part of a demographic change that took place during the 1950s — a change that would have a lasting impact on Sacred Heart and the surrounding Kountze Place neighborhood.

The Kountze Place neighborhood, like Sacred Heart parish, was historically all white. But the same changes that made it possible for Dan Goodwin to open his barbershop began to alter those demographics. In the late 1940s, some Black Catholics who lived within the edges of Sacred Heart's parish boundaries attempted to register as parishioners, even though St. Benedict the Moor was the designated parish for the city's Black Catholics. Sacred Heart pastor Fr. Joseph Osdick offered this explanation as to why he would not admit these new parishioners: "They have a parish, but not here." <sup>1</sup>

While Sacred Heart addressed the issue of admitting Black parishioners, the Kountze Place neighborhood faced a similar challenge.

As Omaha's African-American population grew, so did the Near North Side — the racially segregated neighborhood where Black Omahans were allowed to live.

Since Cuming Street formed an immovable boundary to the south, so the Near North Side expanded to the north going from Lake Street to Ohio, to Miami, to Locust, then to Binney. Kountze Place homeowners, many of them Sacred Heart parishioners, sought to stop Blacks from moving in by implementing protective covenants that clearly stated homes in the neighborhood "...shall not be sold to any person or persons of any race other than Caucasians." <sup>2</sup> These covenants did not stop homeowners from selling as realtors capitalized on the combination of racial prejudice and the fear of decreasing property values. Fr. Osdick's recollection that "One moved in and the next day nine for sale signs went up" <sup>3</sup> painted a clear picture of what happened when a home did sell to "a person of a race other than Caucasians." By 1960 nearly 11,000 people, including the families who founded and built Sacred Heart, had abandoned their homes in Kountze Place and moved to new neighborhoods and new parishes elsewhere. <sup>4</sup>

As the surrounding neighborhood changed, Dan Goodwin's business prospered. He moved to a new building one space to the south, updating the shop's name to Goodwin's Spencer Street Barbershop.

The barbershop became a center of activity and discussion along North 24th Street, and a young Ernie Chambers often led those discussions as he cut and trimmed the hair of Kountze Place's new residents. Today the Goodwin Spencer Street Barbershop still stands on the west side of 24th Street, between Wirt and Spencer. Dan Goodwin doesn't cut hair anymore, but his son, Dan Jr., and daughter-in-law LaVonya have moved in a new direction, using the building as a home base for several organizations that are focused on creating positive change along North 24th Street. Over the past three years the Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team has had the opportunity to work with these groups, including the Global Leadership Group and the 24th Street Business Improvement District, as we strive to be better neighbors.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Fr. Joseph Osdick, 1948

<sup>2</sup> "Dismissal of Restrictive Covenant Suits Asked," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 23, 1956 p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Fr. Joseph Osdick, 1948

<sup>4</sup> *United States Census Reports*; 1950, 1960



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us on Saturday, Sept. 25 for 1, 2 or all 3 of these neighborly events!

**\*9 a.m.** Global Leadership Group 24th Street Cleanup – 3116 N. 24th St.

**\*10:00 a.m.** Neighborhood walk to distribute flyers and invite neighbors to our October 3 Welcome Back event

**\*Noon** Guided tour of "March on Washington" display - Great Plains Black History Museum, 2221 N. 24th St.

Left, Denise O'Gara looks on as Great Plains Black History Museum director Eric Ewing shares insights about the museum's Negro League display.

# IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE TEAM

## REFLECTING ON AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

Though immigration and refugee topics are often politicized, immigrants and refugees are more than classifications, they are real people – brothers and sisters whom we are called to care for and love like our families and ourselves. The Immigration and Refugee Team was born of our desire to welcome, with respect and solidarity, the “foreigners” residing among us.

### BY GENE SUMMERLIN

This installment of our newsletter was supposed to be a 10,000 foot view of current immigration issues – a “why you should care about what’s happening” explanation. That should be an easy topic since several bills have been introduced in Congress during the new administration and a broad revision to U.S. immigration law is being discussed as part of the upcoming budget reconciliation package. But every time I sat down to write, I couldn’t stop thinking about the news coming out of Afghanistan.

Videos of people so desperate to escape a country that they would hang on to taxiing cargo planes is not only heart wrenching, it’s almost inconceivable. The hopelessness that must envelop so many Afghans as their homeland transitions to a violent and ultra-repressive new government is beyond anything most of us will ever experience. While the circumstances that created this situation may be complex and difficult to understand, what is clear is that thousands of humans will suffer – people with families, lives, and dreams wanting to escape to a better life.

I spent quite a bit of time in a developing country a decade or so ago working on water projects. On one of my first visits to the country, I underwent a striking change in perspective. As we pulled into a village, there were two men digging a well.



*This is a group of bright, happy Syrian cousins. Four years ago members of our Sacred Heart parish sponsored their families and continued mentoring them.*

Many of us won the cosmic lottery by being born in a country with a stable (albeit not perfect) government. Many others did not.

Their tools were a foot and a half long piece of rebar (an iron bar about as thick as your little finger) and a pie pan. It was hot. It was dusty. Their task was grueling, and the water table was eight to ten feet below ground. We came back a day later, the hole was probably six feet deep and they were still working. I can still see them both in my mind. What hit me was the randomness and inestimable advantages I received due solely to where I was born.

Many of us won a cosmic lottery by being born in a country with vast resources and a stable (albeit not perfect) government. Many others did not.

There are 82.4 million forcibly displaced people world-wide and 35 million are children.

In the past decade, the global refugee population has more than doubled. Whether due to armed conflict, gang violence, or food insecurity, these brothers and sisters want the same things we want: food and shelter, physical safety, loving communities and relationships.

Each of us are called to reach out to our brothers and sisters and share what we have been given. This is the foundation for why we should all care and why our immigration and refugee policies matter. If you would like to get involved in assisting refugee families in the Omaha area, let us know. If you are interested in more information on immigration and refugee issues, please join us at the “Immigrant Allies Network – Nebraska” on Facebook.

# GREEN TEAM

## SACRED HEART SHINES WITH SOLAR POWER

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

*To educate our parish on the care of our common home which leads to action on behalf of Mother Earth.*

### BY PHIL ALCOCER

As we witness the earth warming, the droughts and wildfires devastating our western states and the melting of the polar ice sheets, we can no longer ignore the Pope's plea to "care for our common home." This means we must decrease our use of fossil fuels that are warming our planet. Sacred Heart's Green Team has prayerfully considered the messages from Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, On Care of Our Common Home. We have considered the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 2021 Climate Report which points out that unless we really step up our game, we will not avoid the most devastating effects of climate change. One of the best ways to do this is to harness the sun's energy with solar panels.

And... this is where we, Sacred Heart parishioners, come in. The Sacred Heart Green Team proposes that we install photovoltaic solar panels on the roof of the parish office. Up to 36 panels will fit on the roof, which will satisfy about 60% of the office's electrical needs and save the parish over \$1,500 per year. The Green Team also proposes we install two electric vehicle (EV) charging stations for free use by parishioners and staff. The share of EVs on the road needs to increase 28 times to meet the IPCC's 2050 goal.

Sacred Heart's solar panels will be connected to OPPD's grid using net-metering. That means whenever our solar panels produce more electricity than the office can use, it will be fed back into OPPD's grid, and Sacred Heart will be credited on our electric bill. It's like running the meter backwards. This means saving money for Sacred Heart that we can use for ministry, and answering Pope Francis' call by pouring a little less carbon dioxide into the air.

This is just phase I. After the successful completion of the solar project for the parish office, the Green Team will turn its attention to phase II: roof-mounted solar panels for all three CUES schools. Phase II will be a much larger project, requiring funding from a variety of sources including contributions, grants, and financing. The estimated cost of phase I is modest by comparison, about \$40,000 for an 11-kilowatt solar array and about \$5,000 for two EV charging stations. Stay tuned to the bulletin or FlockNotes for information on how to contribute.



*At top, this is the rooftop of the Sacred Heart parish office, where the Green Team proposes to add solar panels. Above, this is an example of a rooftop with solar panels installed.*

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The IPCC analyzed a whole list of indicators that contribute to climate change and have set targets of change for each indicator. A good explanation of the details can be found at [wri.org](http://wri.org).