



# JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

## CARING, CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBER

By Nancy Hemesath

Ella Willis was tired when I interviewed her for this article. The Good Samaritan gospel resonated with her because she had been up until 3 a.m. posting bond for an acquaintance in need. This was not the first time in Ella's life she lived the role of Good Samaritan. It is her lifestyle.

Ella was born in Mississippi to a family with fourteen children. Though not Catholic at the time, she attended a Catholic school and in the 9th grade started attending Mass. Seeds were being sown.

When Ella moved to Omaha, she became Catholic and joined Sacred Heart Church, the Catholic church nearest her home. She had four children whom she raised on her own. Her children were all baptized at Sacred Heart. They graduated from Sacred Heart Grade School and went to Catholic high schools, even though money was tight. Ella worked multiple jobs, at least two at a time to make ends meet.

She worked as a cashier at UNO, Metro and Phil's Foodway, waitressed and did telemarketing. She worked for an electrician, learning wiring and building. She provided day care, a home for a special needs child, did home health care and cared for her elderly mother until her death.

Through her hard work, she provided for her children and purchased the house she still lives in. With her construction skills she added on to the house with the help of her sons and a neighbor.



**Ella Willis**

She has always felt welcome at Sacred Heart. She has especially fond memories of Sr. Machias and Sr. Mary Ann Murphy who came to her home to sit with her mother prior to her mother's death.

Ella said she did not know about Sacred Heart's exclusion of African Americans in years before she joined. She was aware of other forms of prejudice that were as evident in Omaha as she had known in the South. Omaha is as segregated as other communities where she has lived.

Though Ella is in her 70s, her work ethic remains strong. She has served as an officer of her neighborhood association for years. She is proud of the work she has done to beautify North 24th Street, planting and weeding numerous flower beds.

With others she developed the Neighborhood NAAF Memorial Garden at 24th and Manderson. She facilitated a lovely wall mural of flowers on 24th and Sahler. She has helped organize neighborhood watches with block captains. She hosted a tour of North Omaha for Congressman Don Bacon and others.

She also dreams of opening a North Omaha history center in a building she owns at 4016 N. 24th St. She welcomes donations and volunteer assistance on this project. She is an active member of the NAACP, Urban League and the VFW Auxiliary.

Of the Sacred Heart community, she said, "Sacred Heart is a caring, loving, concerned community. I have always found this to be true, but it is even getting better."

# NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

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## RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE

By Matt Holland

*32 homicides were recorded in Omaha in 2021. Eight of those murders occurred within one mile of Sacred Heart Parish.*

24-year-old Duop Tang Deng was shot on March 27. Jumeez Sherman, 22, was shot on January 2.

19 year-old Jasmine T. Washington was shot on July Fourth. KorVanta Hill, shot on October 18, was 18.

17 year-olds Jia'Quan Williams and Ja'Vondre McIntosh were both shot on June 3. And 14 year-old Desmond Harrison was shot on June 8.

The only victim older than 25 was 59 year-old Larry D. Thompson, killed on March 12.

In response to this devastating violence in our parish neighborhood, Sacred Heart parishioners, joined by neighbors from North Omaha and two Omaha police officers, took part in a prayer march along North 24th Street on April 26. The march — sponsored by Hope of Glory Church, Sacred Heart, and the Global Leadership Group — was part of National Youth Violence Prevention Week.

Among the marchers were the families of 2022 murder victims Eltio Plater Jr., 22, killed on Easter, and 20-year-old Vincent Burns, who was killed in January. Global Leadership Group director LaVonya Goodwin, when asked the goal of the prayer march,



**A prayer march was held on April 26 in response to violence in the neighborhood around Sacred Heart Church.**

answered, “We want to save lives. We want to decrease the homicide rate in this community.”

Marchers, many carrying signs, walked south along 24th from Spencer Street to Lake Street and back. As they walked neighbors came out and waved, offering encouragement. Cars passing by on 24th Street honked their support.

Sacred Heart parishioner Nancy Hemesath, chair of the Sacred Heart Social Justice Committee, was deeply affected by the march; “I was moved by the grief of family members whose loved ones had died from gunfire. This was more than a statistic; it was suffering families in deep grief.”

Sacred Heart parishioners who took part in the prayer walk were echoing the story of the Good Samaritan and the unwavering message of what it means to be a neighbor. When our

parish neighborhood experiences violence, we are faced with a choice.

Do we look away, crossing to the other side of the road to avoid the inconvenience of stopping to administer aid, like the priest and Levite did on the road to Jericho?

Or can we imagine what it would be like to follow the example of the Samaritan and come to a full stop to do everything we can to help?

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### **Upcoming events:**

Please join us on **August 27 at 9 a.m. at the Global Leadership Group Omaha Community Garden, 3118 N 24th St. (northeast corner of 24th and Spencer)** for the monthly neighborhood cleanup. It is a great way to meet our neighbors and get to know our neighborhood while doing our part to help it look its best.

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

# GREEN TEAM

## CONSIDER A MORE PLANT-BASED DIET

By Terri Summerlin

### Here's the why:

**A plant-based diet is good for the environment.** The United Nations' 2021 report on climate change issued a "code red" for all of humanity: climate crisis is playing out in real time. The U.N. identifies plant-based diets "as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change." Researchers in a 2018 Oxford University study said, "A vegan diet is probably the biggest single way to reduce your impact on planet Earth."

**Agriculture consumes more water than any other major global industry.** Forty-one percent of water used for agriculture goes toward growing livestock feed for the meat industry. It takes 460 gallons of water to make one quarter-pound beef patty. We can save water by switching to plant-based foods.

**A plant-based diet is good for your health.** According to the American Heart Association, eating fewer animal

products decreases the risk of disease, stroke, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, and many cancers.

### Here's the how:

**Commit to Meatless Mondays.** Go to [mondaycampaigns.org/meatless-monday](http://mondaycampaigns.org/meatless-monday) for recipes and helpful hints.

**Buy a plant-based cookbook or better yet, hit the library!** Green Team member Terri Summerlin is also happy to share recipes and vegan cookbooks. Hit her up!

**Use the buddy system.** Find a friend who is also interested in consuming less animal products and support one another by swapping recipes and eating meatless meals together.

**Spend some time researching the difference a plant-based diet can make for you, the environment and animals.** Websites, documentaries and Facebook pages are great resources.

You can make a difference. Happy meatless eating!



**In May, volunteers worked together to construct five garden beds. In July, the harvest came in, allowing us to share vegetables with our neighbors. One neighbor said her children had never eaten vegetables, and now they love them!**

## ORANGE BAGS, HEFTY ENERGY BAGS

By Patricia Fuller

As Americans, we create an enormous amount of trash.

Overall, the U.S. produces 268 million tons of trash annually. More than half ends up in landfills.

The Hefty Energy Bag program is an innovative and sustainable way to recover plastics that are normally not recyclable and convert them to a useable product. Orange bags may be purchased at some local grocery stores.

### Use your Orange bag for:

- Potato chip bags, other snack bags, stand-up pouches
- Candy wrappers
- Squeezable baby food pouches
- Granola, energy bar wrappers
- Foam to-go-boxes
- Plastic and foam cups, plates, and bowls, plastic utensils
- Packing peanuts
- Shredded cheese packages
- Salad bags
- Frozen fruit and vegetable bags
- Cake mix liners and other dry powder mix liners
- Pudding cups
- Plastic toothpaste tubes
- Condiment packages
- Plastic straws and stirrers
- Other non-recycled plastic bags

Place your Orange Bag in your curbside recycle bin to be picked up on your scheduled pick-up day. Items should be relatively clean and not contain residual food.

First Star Fiber Recycling is collecting the items to support a new Omaha company that will turn them into plastic lumber.

**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

## THE COMPLEXITY OF U.S. IMMIGRATION

### By Gene Summerlin

Why do people enter the United States before obtaining proper documentation? The answers to this simple question are so complex. For many, there isn't a realistic and foreseeable pathway for authorized entry.

Outside of travel visas, immigration into the U.S. is limited to three categories: employment, family reunification, and humanitarian protection. Each route has different requirements and eligibility restrictions.

Currently, employment-based immigration is limited to people with specific skills not otherwise available in our workforce. To qualify for employment-related entry, a foreign worker must have a job lined up with an eligible "sponsor" employer. For an employer to obtain permission to sponsor and bring in a foreign worker, the employer must show that the foreign employee possesses the appropriate job skills and education for the proposed position **and** that the employer cannot find qualified U.S. workers to fill the job.

Mostly employment-related immigration is limited to professions with high levels of education or to very specific occupations. Although there is a path to obtain seasonal visas for agricultural workers, employers must still petition for entry of these foreign workers and the number of people competing for these limited visas far exceeds the available positions.

Family-based immigration, though more common, also presents

Outside of travel visas, immigration into the U.S. is limited to three categories: employment, family reunification and humanitarian protection.

challenges. U.S. citizens can petition to bring in their parents (if petitioner is 21 or older), children, and siblings. Non-citizens who are Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs or green card holders) can petition for entry of spouses and unmarried children.

The petitioning family member in the U.S. must demonstrate an income level above the poverty line and must commit to support the family member if they are allowed to enter. The entering family member must also meet eligibility requirements. Current processing times for a spouse or minor child of a person with Lawful Permanent Resident status are almost four years and subject to an annual cap on the total number of LPR family member visas issued.

Refugees are admitted to the U.S. based upon an inability to return to their home-country due to a "well-founded fear of persecution" arising from race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin.

Asylum is available to a person already in the U.S. if the person meets the



definition of a refugee and the person applies for asylum within one year of entering the country. A person cannot apply for asylum or refugee status based on poverty or economic conditions in their home country.

Even for people who qualify for entry based on employment, family, or refugee status, our immigration policy imposes additional caps and limits on the number of entrants by classification and country/region of origin, so even someone who otherwise would qualify for a visa might be denied based on the number of visas already issued with the same classification or from the same country or region.

Immigration is a complex problem with no easy solutions. But we can find better answers by recognizing the unfairness and arbitrary results that stem from our current system.

### PURPOSE STATEMENT:

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