

JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

SPOTLIGHT: TERRI SUMMERLIN

By Nancy Hemesath

Terri Summerlin has a profound interest in foster children, a passion that was triggered twenty years ago when she learned of a pregnant teen who was homeless and in need of support. Terri provided temporary shelter, became an advocate and a mentor, and developed a relationship that continues to this day.

Her compassion for foster children also led Terri to become a CASA volunteer (Court Appointed Special Advocate). In this role, she has supported ten foster kids, building relationships that will last a lifetime.

When Terri and her husband Gene moved to Omaha six years ago, she sought ways to connect with others and opportunities to volunteer her time and talent. In addition to volunteering at CASA, she joined Sacred Heart Parish and then volunteered with the Heart Ministry on the same day. Sacred Heart, Heart Ministry, and CASA have provided outlets for her abundant energy.

At Sacred Heart, Terri joined the first Alpha group where she formed many new relationships. Terri was recruited onto the Parish Council within her first year, a role she held for five years. Terri participated in the parish's discernment process, a monthly commitment that lasted over a year. She and Gene participated in a Peace and Justice Retreat/Strategic Planning session. From that launch of the Peace and Justice teams, Terri volunteered for the Green Team, which she continues into the present.

Terri is committed to living a sustainable lifestyle as a vegan and a faithful recycler. As part of the Green Team, she has worked with others to develop protocols for the Sacred Heart parish kitchen and parish events so nothing is wasted. Though this may not sound difficult, it is not an easy task to implement procedures that are user-friendly and yet effective in curbing waste across many types of parish gatherings. When attending parish meetings, you will see signs and containers that have been carefully planned so we can together take small steps in creating a sustainable earth.

Terri has a heart for those who suffer discrimination, particularly our black and LGBTQ brothers and sisters. Not one to sit by quietly when she sees injustice, she raises her voice to object and be in solidarity with the oppressed. This came to the forefront following the murder of George Floyd. Terri joined many Black Lives Matter demonstrations. She was arrested while participating in a large peaceful demonstration. She was transported to the Douglas County Jail and held in an extremely overcrowded cell overnight before being released the next day. Charges were later dropped.

Terri feels called to lift her voice to be the conscience in our society and our church. She knows many are uncomfortable with her message. In this she follows in the tradition of the prophets who spoke truth to power. Terri challenges others to think.

Other volunteer jobs that Terri enjoys are subbing at the parish office when staff are out, gathering items for the



Terri Summerlin

busloads of refugees through Omaha Welcomes the Stranger, and babysitting her grandchildren. Among her many commitments, Terri's family takes priority. She seeks to protect quality time with her husband Gene, whom she always identifies as her best friend, her four adult children and five grandchildren.

When asked what sustains her through the many challenges she faces, she identifies her faith sharing group as a source of life for her. She also said she has a go-to prayer when she feels the need for divine help.

"Glory be to the Father, Glory be to the Son, Glory be to the Holy Spirit, Glory be to the Universal Christ."

NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE



Sacred Heart is a recognized presence at neighborhood events. The seeds of hope are being sewn in this neighborhood, and Sacred Heart is a growing part of that effort. Pictured here are Ella Willis, Steve Everitt, and Joan Lieben.



On April 14, several members of the Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team participated with some of our neighbors in the Candlelight Prayer Walk and Day of Remembrance to end youth violence. The event was sponsored by Mount Moriah Baptist Church and the Global Leadership Group.

NORTH OMAHA LEGACY TOURS

By Phil Rooney

Our parish sits in the middle of one of the Midwest’s most amazing neighborhoods, with a rich history and the possibility of a dynamic future we are now starting to see become a reality.

Sadly, many of us are unaware of everything that sits around us.

Preston Love Jr., the son of the local music legend of the same name, is working to change that with his North Omaha Legacy Tours. He has many stories to tell, and on his bus tours you will hear many of them.

Sacred Heart is located just north and east of the historic corner of 24th and Lake Streets. The tour takes an amazingly quick couple of hours. Love said the tours grew out of the many tour requests he received, his

frustration with the lack of familiarity of African-American students with the area’s history, and his success with the Face-to-Face with Black History tours of the American South he has led for students. He also grew tired of watching well-meaning people give similar tours without the depth of knowledge to explain things.

“I knew I had left a void by not doing tours of my own community,” Love said. And so a business venture was born in 2021. “It was time for people to hear the truth and facts, history and culture of North Omaha without some of the misconceptions.”

Last year, his first full year, saw Love host more than 120 tours. He expects that number to grow in 2023 and is pleased to see it has grown from small groups and family tours to corporate events.

That growth has also provided a significant economic impact for the community as people are exposed to businesses that they may not have known they could work with, new shopping at retail outlets they previously had not encountered, and more dining opportunities at some of the community’s restaurants.

Love has seen many myths put to rest as people gain new knowledge of the community and its history. “We’re having a whole lot of positive ripple effects,” Love stated.

Visitors often get to meet boxing champion Terence Crawford and visit his gym where he and others train. The tours run from North 24th Street to the 30th Street corridor with a short side trip to the Malcolm X Foundation. The Neighborhood Alliance Team is planning to organize a tour soon.

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

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE TEAM

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

By Gene Summerlin

The Sacred Heart Immigration and Refugee Team formally came into existence just over three and a half years ago. Since our inception, we've been engaged in issue advocacy related to the southern border and treatment of immigrants, assisted in providing a way-stop for refugees making their way to more permanent destinations, and adopted families from Afghanistan who have been relocated to Omaha. We have gained valuable experience but most of us will never know what it is like to make a new life in a new country far from home. We can be empathetic. We can be informed. But we will likely never feel the "life has been turned upside down" uncertainty and fear that arises when forced to leave home for the unknown.

With the joining of Sacred Heart and St. Benedict the Moor parishes, we have found even more people and insights that will strengthen our understanding of the burdens faced by refugee families.

Meet Jacques Musavyimana. Jacques is a core member of the St. Benedict the Moor parish. Born in Rwanda, Jacques and his family fled their country to escape the Rwandan civil war and genocide of the mid-90s. Jacques spent his childhood in a refugee camp in Tanzania where "if you had two meals a day you were high-class people. You were rich."

After years in limbo, in 2009 Jacques, his parents, and six siblings were relocated to Omaha. Like many refugees, Jacques started at ground zero. He had to learn English and a completely new culture while



Jacques Musavyimana has been meeting with Julia Knezetic and Nancy Hemesath. Not pictured are two more committee members, Bob and Mary Wester.

attending and graduating from Omaha South High School. He went on to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Master's in Criminology and Criminal Justice from UNO, becoming the first member of his family to graduate from college.

Despite his graduate degree in Criminal Justice, Jacques never intended to go into law enforcement. Instead, his focus has been on intervention and prevention – changing the lives of at-risk populations before they enter the court system. Today, Jacques serves as a Navigator with CUES Schools, working with students from the refugee/migrant populations.

He assists youth, parents, and school administrators in overcoming the unique barriers that refugee/migrant families face with school involvement. He helps school administrators and teachers (both inside and outside of CUES) work with parents as they navigate language barriers,

miscommunications, and work/home balance. In this role, Jacques also acts as a bridge between parents and students as children become assimilated in a culture often unfamiliar to the parents.

At St. Benedict the Moor, Jacques has become the liaison for the refugee families in the parish. He leads by asking a simple question: What do you need? The answers to that question resulted in "First Sundays," joint educational sessions involving members of both parishes on the first Sunday of each month. The first meeting covered housing and home purchases and was led by representatives from Family Housing Advisory Services. Future meetings will involve a citizenship workshop, English language learning, and dealing with the court system.

If you would like to be involved with First Sundays or the Immigration and Refugee Team, please contact Nancy Hemesath, nanhemesath@gmail.com.

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

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

GREEN TEAM

THANKS, GARDENERS!

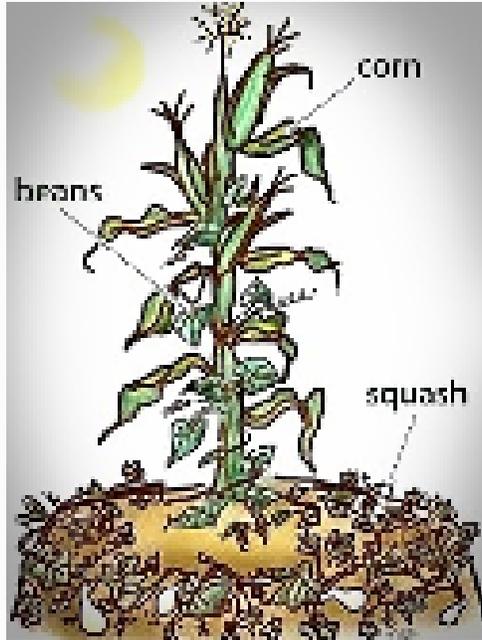
By Nancy Hemesath
and Jane O'Connor

As Jane O'Connor was digging into the soil at the Sacred Heart Garden, a little neighbor girl who befriended the gardeners last year came up and asked if she was digging for treasure. The answer was "yes." She explained to the confused three-year-old that good soil is a treasure that we all need to take care of. This was step #1 in Year Two of the development of the community garden.

Last year in early spring, the Green Team met for a day of planning and strategizing future goals. The idea of a community garden surfaced. Because the large lot west of the school playground was unsightly with piles of dirt, scraggly trees, weeds and trash, we had the perfect opportunity to make an improvement in our neighborhood. Within a week of speaking to Fr. Dave, the lot was being cleared and the land leveled.

George Vogel stepped up with some helpers to build five raised garden beds. The beds were filled with branches and quality dirt. Parishioners volunteered to adopt the beds and care for them through the summer. They planted the beds and developed a watering system. By the end of the season, the garden shared about 800 pounds of food with neighbors and others.

Energized by these successes of the first year, Year Two expansion is underway. The city remediated the lead-contaminated soil, brought in fresh, clean, rich soil and covered it with a foot of mulch, providing ideal conditions for expansion into new in-ground gardens.



In February, Fr. Dave took members of the Green Team to visit Winnebago to learn about the Three Sisters method of gardening, a practice widely used by Native Americans. One garden bed will employ this system of growing corn, climbing beans, and squash together. The corn provides the structure for the climbing beans while the squash suppresses the weeds. Another bed will have rows of vegetables.

The long-range goal is to involve the Sacred Heart School children and families in the garden project. This year two school classrooms, Pre-K and fifth grade have started seeds for transplanting outside when the time is right. At harvest time, Sacred Heart families will get first dibs on the produce.

Happily more and more parishioners are offering their help so volunteer staff can handle the increased work load.



Fifth-graders are learning about plants as they nurture seedlings for the community garden.

George Vogel has graciously agreed to scrape and till the soil as well as develop a watering system for the beds. We will build a small fence around the in-ground beds to keep out hungry little critters.

To support this growth, the Green Team secured two grants to pay for materials from Nebraska Power and Light and Omaha Men's Garden Club. In addition to donations from the parish, we have received over \$1,000 to pay for necessary hoses, fencing, plants, and tools.

All these efforts are in concert with the second Apostolic Priority of Sacred Heart. The garden "...embodies a culture of encounter and generosity that leads to solidarity with the community, care for God's creation, and service for the wellbeing of others." Thanks, Gardeners!

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.*