



JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ISSUE!

BY NANCY HEMESATH
Social Justice Committee Chair

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Justice from the Heart, a quarterly newsletter published by the Sacred Heart Social Justice Committee. Our goal is to share information about the activities of our three justice teams and to invite interested parishioners to join us in our efforts.

HOW DID WE GET STARTED?

In 2017 I approached Fr. Dave with a concern. I was worried about the direction of our country, and I wanted to contribute to creating solutions within my faith community here at Sacred Heart. I knew many members of our parish worked for justice in their own individual ways but my desire was to work for justice together, to become more familiar with Catholic Social Teaching as a community, and to see where the Spirit might lead us.

Fr. Dave was immediately on board, and we gathered a few people to start thinking about what we might do.

The Spirit has been working!

In this issue you will read Matt Holland's description of the Reconciliation and Healing Service we held as a response to St. Benedict the Moor's one-hundred-year anniversary. Their anniversary presented an opportunity for us as a parish to confront our own racist history. It was clear to us at the conclusion of this powerful prayer service that the Spirit was calling us to do more.

The immediate response was the formation of the Neighborhood

Alliance Team.

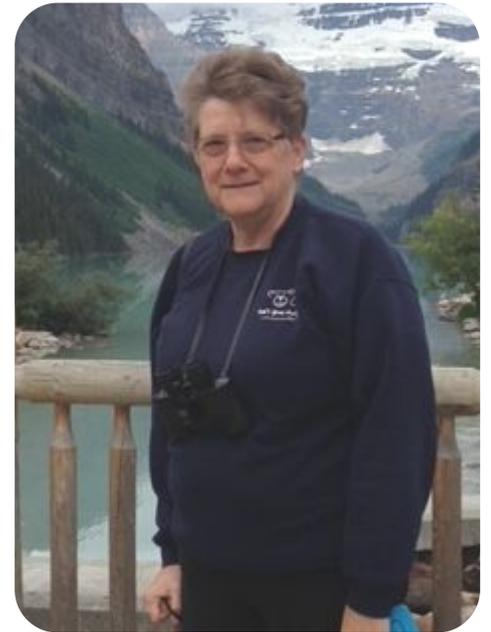
As more and more parishioners expressed an interest in becoming involved with the works of justice at Sacred Heart, in September 2019, we set aside a Saturday morning for reflection and planning for those interested in advancing the works of justice. Realizing we could not address every injustice, three issues emerged as the focal points for ongoing work.

The Neighborhood Alliance Team would continue to address racism by seeking to be good neighbors to those living in north Omaha. The Green Team, already doing good work, would expand to educating the parish on environmental issues, take the lead on climate-saving actions by the parish and encourage personal commitments from parishioners.

The Immigration and Refugee Team chose to educate themselves and others about needs and resources in the community, communicate and raise awareness, and manage an action list. In addition to the on-going work of these three teams, parish wide efforts have included a listening session regarding the priest abuse scandal.

For Lent 2019 faith sharing groups studied the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document on racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. Lent 2020 was to study *Laudato Si*, the papal encyclical on the environment but the pandemic interrupted this effort.

This year, Lent 2021, parish faith sharing groups are studying Pope Francis' document, *Fratelli Tutti*, On Fraternity and Social Friendship, the newest development of Catholic Social teaching.



As you read about the work on the Social Justice teams, listen to the Spirit. If you want to join one of the teams, you are welcome.

There will be many suggestions on how we might live more justly in this issue and upcoming issues.
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mothers and Others: Justice and Mercy for Immigrants witness each Thursday, 8-9 a.m. at 72nd and Hickory.

Green Team Meeting: March 9, 9:30-10:30 a.m. (ZOOM)

24th St. Business Improvement District Clean-up, fourth Saturdays starting March 27 at 10 a.m.

For other events and details, see the parish bulletin.

NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

BY MATT HOLLAND

The Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team was created as a continuation of the efforts begun by Fr. Korth and the Sacred Heart Social Justice Committee to focus on addressing our parish history.

Those efforts culminated in a Healing and Reconciliation ceremony held in September of 2018 to acknowledge and ask forgiveness for Sacred Heart's role in historical racially discriminatory practices that impacted Omaha's Black Catholics, many of whom are members of our neighbor parish, St. Benedict the Moor.

Three months later, in January of 2019, the Neighborhood Alliance Team was formed. The team's first function was to create the following purpose statement: "To develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha." One key aspect of efforts by the Neighborhood Alliance Team has been community outreach. Team members have gotten to know our parish neighbors by visiting them door-to-door and extending invitations to parish events.

The team has also developed relationships with neighborhood businesses and groups, attending and supporting numerous meetings and events held by these groups, as well as working to secure financial support

for them through the parish.

These businesses and organizations include *The Omaha Star*, The Great Plains Black History Museum, The Union for Contemporary Art, Neighborhood Action and Fact Neighborhood Association, Binney Wirt Spencer and Lothrop Neighborhood Association, Global Leadership Group Neighborhood Association, The Empowerment Network, and the 24th Street Business Improvement District.

Another area of focus by the Neighborhood Alliance Team has been helping Sacred Heart parishioners develop a deeper understanding of the history of systemic racism in Omaha and its impact on North Omaha today.

A number of events — including a May 2019 tour of the Great Plains Black History Museum, an October 2019 Undesign the Redline workshop at the Union for Contemporary Art, and a June 2020 "Stand Together for Racial Justice" gathering — have been organized to give parishioners an opportunity to increase their understanding of Omaha's systemic racism and to show their support of overcoming the social injustices and economic disparities that exist because of it.

Those economic disparities are clearly depicted in U.S. Census data, and Neighborhood Alliance Team members have reviewed that data,

provided by team member Dennis Walsh, to develop a better understanding of the Sacred Heart neighborhood.

Expanding the partnership with parents and students of Sacred Heart School is another focus of the team.

Recent "Listening Circle" events have featured conversations between Sacred Heart parishioners and Sacred Heart School parents and have given insights into some of the challenges they face, including instances of blatant racism encountered by some of the school sports teams during games at other parishes in Omaha.

The team has also worked to form a deeper connection with St. Benedict the Moor parish. Those efforts have included formal and informal meetings with parishioners from St. Benedict's to discuss events and to explore areas of collaboration between our parishes.

The team has also extended invitations for St. Benedict's parishioners to Sacred Heart events and has encouraged increased Sacred Heart participation in events at St. Benedict's, including their Lenten Fish Fry.

You are invited to join the Neighborhood Alliance Team at our April 10 meeting as we continue our focus on developing "a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha."



OUR LEADER

Matt Holland

Matt Holland was an early member of the Sacred Heart Social Justice Committee. He has a depth of knowledge about the history of Sacred Heart parish and the surrounding neighborhood as a result of research for his book, *Ahead of Their Time*, about the Omaha DePorres Club, which was co-founded by his father — long-time Sacred Heart parishioner Denny Holland

Want to join us?

Anyone interested in joining the Neighborhood Alliance is invited to contact Matt Holland, matthollan@gmail.com.

IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE TEAM

BY GENE SUMMERLIN

“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34

”

“Where is your brother?”

His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death.

How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity? And their cry rises up to God! Once again I thank you, the people of Lampedusa, for your solidarity. I recently listened to one of these brothers of ours.

Before arriving here, he and the others were at the mercy of traffickers, people

who exploit the poverty of others, people who live off the misery of others. How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here.”

Pope Francis Homily at Lampedusa, July 8, 2013

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.

The Immigration and Refugee Team is a founding member of the “Immigrant Allies Network,” a collaboration among Sacred Heart, the Immigrant Legal Center, Mothers & Others, OTOC, Sisters of Mercy, First United Methodist Church, Omaha Grace United Methodist Church, ACLU of Nebraska, and many others.

The group was created to allow organizations with a broad array of interests in immigrant and refugee topics to meet regularly to coordinate efforts and goals in support of immigrants and refugees in our community and the world.

At Sacred Heart, we have hosted and participated in educational forums addressing immigrant rights, DACA, the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, and workers’ rights in the meatpacking industry.

We have been engaged in letter writing campaigns and rallies to bring attention to the need for policy changes addressing the treatment of immigrants and refugees within our region.

As we move forward and as we hope and pray for pandemic related contact restrictions to be lifted, we look forward to adding new goals directed towards working with our brothers and sisters within the Omaha community to address their needs and aspirations for the future.

OUR LEADER

Gene Summerlin

Gene’s commitment to walking along side those who have been marginalized began in law school when he was accepted into a year-long clinical defending involuntary civil commitments. His interest in immigration and refugee issues developed over several years of administering water and health projects in the Central Plateau region of Haiti for a partnership between a Haitian and US nonprofit. Gene is the head of Food and Agribusiness litigation for Husch Blackwell LLP, a national law firm with offices in Omaha. Gene also serves on the Sacred Heart Parish Council and Strategic Planning Committee.

Want to join us?

Anyone interested in joining the Gene Summerlin is invited to contact gene.summerlin@huschblackwell.com.



GREEN TEAM

OUR HISTORY

BY TRISH FULLER

Following the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015, Pope Francis's encyclical On Care for Our Common Home, we started the Green Team at Sacred Heart.

WHAT WE DID

Parish: In the parish office building, we replaced all the incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs and began using recycling bins for the office and parsonage. In the kitchen, we replaced disposable plates, cups and silverware with reusable dishware from Goodwill. We advocated against Styrofoam at any parish event, and Father Dave got the dishwasher working! In Lent 2019 we encouraged giving up single use plastic bags in favor of reusable cloth bags, and we gave away 500 reusable cloth bags. For church fundraisers and events we set up recycling stations for all aluminum cans, pans, bottles and plastic silverware. We replaced plastic plates with compostable plates. Our February 2020 all-parish celebration was "zero waste." Each attendee brought their dinnerware. We had 90% compliance! We composted all food waste and recycled bottles and cans.

School: The Green Team worked with our school

principal and Hillside Solutions, a local composting company. With Fr. Dave's help to secure donor support, the school now has a composting program, has replaced Styrofoam trays with compostable clamshell trays, and has an industrial size dishwasher. **Next steps:** A solar installer evaluated electrical use in the parish office. Installing enough roof solar panels to meet the energy needs would cost \$30,000. In the future we would like to see both the office building and the school powered by solar. We also are launching parish composting.

How does the Green Team do its work? In our monthly meetings, we support the steps each of us takes individually, and then we explore what we can collectively do to ensure climate healing. We have studied *Laudato Si'* to learn what our church says about the bigger picture of caring for our earth. We are currently reading *Drawdown*, edited by Paul Hawken, which gives an overview of successful interventions to reverse global warming. *Drawdown* ranks the effectiveness of these interventions so we can take informed individual and collective action. As an example, "What we choose to eat and the methods employed to grow it, rank with energy as the top causes and cures of global warming." We plan to identify do-able practices that benefit the earth and invite parishioners to join in implementing them.

OUR LEADER



Dakota Stock

Dakota Stock's deep passion for the environment began as a little girl catching butterflies and delighting in the sunshine. Two years ago, with an almost completed Studio Arts degree at UNO, she decided to switch her studies to become a constant advocate for the environment. In one year she will graduate with a degree in Environmental Science with minors in Studio Arts and Sustainability. She is an AmeriCorps member with Conservation Nebraska and an Engagement Coordinator at UNO with the Office of Sustainability. She grows her work for the environment with every wonderful person she meets. Sacred Heart's Green Team was the cherry on top, and she looks forward to building on the Green Teams' prior work.

Want to join us?

Anyone interested in joining the Green Team is invited to contact Dakota Stock, dakotajstock@gmail.com.

We are launching parish composting!

Parishioners can bring compostable food waste with them to the bin outside the parish office each week, until it is full. But please make sure that the food waste goes into the correct container and put the recyclables into the appropriate bins so Fr. Dave doesn't have to "dumpster dive" to get recyclables out of the food waste bin! See the parish bulletin for more details.