

Minutes St. Mary Magdalene Social Justice and Peace Committee Meeting
Thurs., March 4, 7 p.m. via Zoom

Welcome, Introductions, Opening Prayer and Agenda Review

Present: Lois Campbell, Emily Lippert, Joyce Rothermel, Mimi Darragh, Evelyn Christie, Michael Drohan, Linda Burns, Rae O'Hair, Vicki Sheridan. Holly Mohr is interested in joining this group but cannot until after RCIA is finished. Excused: Virginia Cook and Jim Ruck.

1. 2021 Contemporary Way of the Cross: Mimi Darragh, Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi
Mimi talked about the history of this event for those who were not familiar with it. There was a discussion about the best way to manage the event this year on Good Friday (indoors, outdoors, virtually). A vote was taken and it was decided to do the event outside in Wilkinsburg with social distancing. Evelyn approached Pastor Janet Hellner-Burris (Christian Church of Wilkinsburg) and Pastor Caitlyn Werth (Waverly Presbyterian) about joining with us. Michael suggested using Fratelli Tutti as a source of content for the stations. Mimi was concerned about using a papal encyclical in an ecumenical group. It was pointed out that the encyclical was addressed to all people, not just Catholics.
2. Accomplishments since Jan. 14: Letter writing, weekly bulletin input, support of our Social Ministry Center, participation in APP Speakers' Series with Bill Huebsch, participation in Stop Banking the Bomb picket, participation in Wilkinsburg Affordable Housing Advocates group, participation in CAT meetings, beginning of Lenten small discussion groups on race, participation in beginnings of an LGBTQ ministry in our parish.
3. Monthly Collections: March – toilet paper, April – ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise, May – paper towels.

4. Letter Writing:

Jan. 30-31: Fr. Tom received a letter from a parishioner critical of this letter (to Pres. Biden about Catholic social teaching) and the practice of letter-writing at church in general. Fr. Tom told him that the letter-writing was just an opportunity, not an expectation. Mary Jean has offered to contact this parishioner in person as it is someone she knows.

Feb. 27-28: Fr. Tom received a complaints that someone approached parishioners in the pews and offered a letter to sign. Fr. Tom requested that letters should only be available in the back of the church or downstairs. Evelyn said that she had approached people at St. James but would not do that again. It was suggested that we might make a sign to put by the letters in the back of the church so that more people would notice them. Another suggestion was to have the priests announce at mass that it is voluntary and that letters are related to Catholic social teaching. At our next meeting we will discuss setting up a sub-Committee to develop a plan for greater dissemination of Catholic Social Teaching at our parish.

March 27-28: Topic – letter about the minimum wage to our US senators; Writer – Linda Burns; 4 PM - Evelyn
9 AM – will ask Mary Jean Havern and Virginia Cook and 11 AM – will ask Sylvia.

April 24-25: Topic –letter about fair redistricting in PA to representatives Frankel, Lee, and Gainey; Writer: Joyce will ask Virginia; 4 PM - _____; 9 AM - _____; and 11 AM - _____

5. Anti-Racism Education at St. Mary Magdalene Parish and Its Relationship to the Cultural Action Team

- A. Website – Thanks to Holly and Cathy for entries on SMM website from Pax Christi on racism.
- B. Lenten book study continues on Fr. Bryan Massingale's book, Racial Justice and the Catholic Church on Tuesday evenings at 7 PM and Wed. mornings at 7 AM (have been discontinued) through March 30-31. Vicki reported that the Tuesday evening group is running with about 10 people. She thinks the book is a little dense but would lead a group again in the future. Lois' Wednesday am group is smaller with only 4 people but it is going well. Both leaders said that new people could join. Vicki may reach out to people from Mary Queen of Peace and St. Jude parishes about future discussion groups. Vicki suggested the book Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church by Olga Segura might be a good topic. Holly is offering this book discussion in April (3 sessions) at Mary, Queen of Peace (former St. Mary of the Mount) where she works.
- C. LGBTQ Ministry Update: Vicki reported that she and Fr. Tom have been invited to be on an interdenominational panel at Carlow to discuss ministry to LGBTQ Catholics. It is on Sunday, March 21 at 4:00 pm and will target students, but all are welcome to attend. Discussions about making SMM a gay-friendly parish are ongoing. Vicki noted that New Ways Ministry has St. James listed on its website as a gay-friendly church.

6. Lenten Planning: (Feb. 17-April 3).

A. We had discussed showing the movie Just Mercy as a virtual event during Lent. We discussed going ahead with this and suggested Friday, March 19th at 7:00 pm as a possible time (have decided on Friday, March 26 at 7 PM so as not to compete with the Stations of the Cross on March 19. We don't have a copy of the movie. Will contact Cathy Raffaele about how to obtain it through streaming. (Cathy has purchased the film and will be our zoom facilitator for the evening.) Joyce will ask Jim Ruck to do an announcement for the bulletin and newsletter.

B. We will participate in Lenten almsgiving for SMM Global Solidarity Partners.

7. Walk for a Healthy Community – Sat., May 8: Evelyn and Joyce reported that this is a major fundraiser for the Ministry Center pantries. The area-wide event will be virtual but we did a small walk with our parish participants from

one of our pantries to the other last year. We would like to do this again this year. Evelyn and Joyce have set a goal of \$20,000.

8. Community Outreach:

- A. The Sanctuary Project: Evelyn reported that the focus currently is on the Arts and Talents for Peace event. This is for youth up to 20 years old. Anyone who joins will receive \$50. Art and talent must be related to peace. The participants will be filmed on 3/13 for a virtual event.
 - B. Wilkinsburg Affordable Housing Advocates Update: Lois reported that the group's focus now is on preventing evictions, helping people to get support for paying their utility bills and supporting Wilkinsburg residents who want to buy affordable houses in the community. Steve Burris, who has worked on affordable housing for many years, recently joined the staff of Hosanna House. There are about 1,000 abandoned houses in Wilkinsburg. Many have owners who have died and they had no heirs or their heirs weren't interested in the property. Steve has a proposal for how to get interested buyers connected with these houses. In May there will be a workshop for interested buyers. Next meeting, Thursday, March 11th at 4:00 pm online.
The Ministry Center has grant money to help people with utilities, rent, and mortgage. Can continue at present rate until June.
The Wilkinsburg Penn Joint Water Authority is lifting the moratorium on water shutoffs at the end of March.
 - C. Vaccine Distribution Possible: Anne is in conversation with Giant Eagle to have the Chapel be a vaccination site. No commitment has yet been made.
 - D. Stop Banking the Bomb Campaign Update: Joyce reported that there will be a picket on Saturday, March 6th at 11 AM at the Wilkinsburg PNC. Consider signing the petition at www.abetterpnc.org. There will be a resolution at the shareholders meeting which asks for a report on whether the bank should continue to fund companies involved in making nuclear weapons. This resolution has been proposed by Humility of Mary Sisters (Pgh.) and St. Joseph Sisters (Brentwood, NY).
 - E. Move the Money Campaign – This is a campaign to get Pgh. city council to ask Congress to shift money from military spending for human needs. We voted to endorse the campaign. Joyce will share the upcoming opportunities to meet with members of City Council and attend a City Council hearing on the topic.
 - F. Primary Elections: We can put out voter registration forms in the churches and encourage voting and voter education.
 - G. Unemployment: Lois reported that the situation in PA is dire. There are not enough people to answer the phones and arbitrate cases so only 1/2 the people who have applied for unemployment have gotten it. The governor is aware of the pressure to do something about it. He has directed heads of the Labor and Industry department to meet with the unemployment campaign. There will be a rally downtown on Wednesday, March 10th at 11:30 AM. (The rally was a success. The Governor has agreed to hire between 500 and 1000 additional customer service representative for unemployment benefit claims.)
 - H. Stone Soup Garden: Michael gave a little history of the garden. In the early 2000s Josie Bryant (from Ministry Center at St. James) got involved in an effort to slow the decline in Wilkinsburg. The church paid for the fence around the lot and making of garden plots. In 2020 some trees were planted, a water buffalo was obtained, and a shed was put up. Most people who have gotten involved in the garden are white and not necessarily from the immediate community. Several people brought up other groups that might help with the project or recruit new people, i.e. TreeVitalize and the Isaac Walton League. It was suggested that people from Mother of Good Counsel might be interested. Michael could contact Linda Atkins.
 - I. Ballot initiatives: Lois reported that enough signatures were obtained to get two initiatives on the ballot, Breona's Law outlawing the use of no-knock warrants, and another initiative that would limit the use of solitary confinement at the county jail.
9. APP Spring Speakers Series: Thurs., March 18, at 7 PM on Racism with Barbara Johnson; Thurs., April 22 at 7 PM on the Church after COVID-19 (panel – Holly Mohr from SMM will be on the panel); Wed., May 19 on How Can We Be Church? with Phyllis Zagano. Register at www.associationofpittsburghpriests.com. There will be a book discussion in April on one of Phyllis' books. Details coming soon. We should promote the talk by Barbara Johnson who is a member of SMM.

Next Meeting: Thursday, May 6th at 7:00 via Zoom

Minutes submitted by Emily Lippert