

St. John 23rd Social Concerns Committee
SEMI ANNUAL REPORT July 2019 – January 2020

1. **Serene Manor:** Our fingernail polishing group continues to serve women at Serene Manor. If you have an hour, on the 3rd Monday each month from 2:30 – 3:30 PM, we would love to have you join us to give residents a boost. At Christmas, 10 resident names appeared on the Advent Tree. These 10 received beautiful presents provided by parishioners. You made Christmas extra special.
2. **Refugee Welcoming Committee:** The Refugee Welcoming Committee has good news. “Our” refugee mother, Therese, helped by a diocesan grant and a parishioner’s gift, registered for a UT on-line course to become a dental assistant. She did similar work in Namibia. Even with her experience, the course was a challenge! With a parishioner helping and hard work, she successfully completed the course January 5th. Now, she faces a 40-hour internship at a dental office while working her current job. Then, she receives her certification. Congratulations to her, her two young children and our parish support team. In 2 years, she is just about self-supporting. We started a new team (smaller) which currently volunteers with Bridge while we recruit more members. Like to join? Call Andrea.
3. **Welcome the Stranger Walk:** On Thursday, December 19th, 200 people met at First Baptist Church downtown and processed in two directions stopping at 4 downtown churches, the YWCA and Yassin’s Falafel House for blessings. The march ended at Market Square for a program welcoming refugees and immigrants with songs and a word by a representative from the outgoing and incoming mayors. It ended with prayers from various faith traditions. Members of St. John 23rd participated.
4. **Social Concerns Grant Committee:** The Committee received one grant request from the St. Mary’s Legacy Clinic for \$1,000.00. Upon receipt of documentation and deliberation, the grant request was approved. The grant partially funded medications for underserved populations in rural Tennessee counties where the mobile clinic offers medical care. A matching grant added funds.
5. **Book Study:** Each meeting we begin by studying community issues as a way of deepening our faith. David Shipler’s *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* explores the mingling of public policy, physical and mental health, poverty, employment, personal response patterns and how they combine to form barriers to those in poverty. He presents selected personal cases in cities like Washington, DC explaining how challenges that seem easy to a middle-class person can be daunting to those in poverty. Examples are access to bank accounts, workplace expectations, and accessible transportation. The study of this book will continue through Spring.
6. **Weekly Witness:** Every Wednesday and Thursday, immigrants (and their families), authorized to be in the US, from East Tennessee, line up outside the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) Office. Observing every lineup, there are 3-5 people from 9 different churches and groups from Knox, Blount and Anderson Counties. Holding a sign reading “Love your Neighbor” in English and Spanish, the ‘witnesses’ offer hot coffee, chocolate, cookies and words of support. The immigrants are in line

for up to 90 minutes with no bathrooms, no protection from rain, cold or weather. Sometimes ICE cancels the lineup with no notice. St. John 23rd is one congregation. Currently, the WW people are trying to persuade ICE to offer better shelter, bathrooms and appointments to reduce waiting time.

7. **Catholic Response to Climate Change:** 2020 marks the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si*. Members from both St. John XXIII SCC and Immaculate Conception parish began planning a response to climate change. In December 2019, they formed a group, open to all local Catholic churches, to propose a collective response.
8. **Seminar on Parish Social Concerns with Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP:** January 3, 27 people from 6 of the 7 Knox County parishes met from 9:30 until 3:30 reflecting on the mission of the parish as defined in Luke 4:14-20. Jesus' message was bold eclipsing divisions of left and right in society and church. We listened, discussed our experiences in diverse parishes and found a deeper sense of what being church meant. Fr. DeSiano talked in the afternoon about working toward a kingdom of love. Love for the least means love for all. We had a positive experience and look forward to meeting again.
9. **The Social Concerns Committee participated in the St. John 23rd "Festival of Ministries,"** offering parishioners a chance to sign up for many different ministries.
10. **ACT East Tennessee Campaign for Faith IDs for Undocumented Immigrants:** The lack of legal driver's licenses creates havoc in the immigrant community. The new 287(g) law effectively deputizes Knox County Sheriff officers as federal immigration officers, authorized to begin deporting immigrants. Should a minor driving misdemeanor trigger deportation? Most people must work and have a way to get there. Families must go to doctors, hospitals, grocery stores, churches and schools. If immigrants cannot have a driver's license, how can they obtain a valid ID? We learned of other communities that have focused on "Faith ID cards" as a solution to arrests and subsequent deportation of immigrants. We plan to begin a city-wide conversation about this possibility.
11. **Justice Knox:** Over the past few months, the Justice Knox Team from St. John XXIII held meetings to hear personal stories of concerns affecting our local families and communities. Thirty parishioners and friends participated. Seventeen attended the Annual Assembly in November and voted to research transportation as our next issue. Several parishioners are involved in current research action: on-going meetings with the District Attorney to plan a more seamless approach to those with mental health in our jail; taking some School Board Members to the Louisville school system to check out the Restorative Practices Approach to Discipline implemented there; and meeting with the City Mayoral staff to create an ordinance and funding for affordable housing.