

MISSION STATEMENT

The Christ the King Social Justice Committee Exists to promote, nourish and sustain the ministry of Social Justice through the parish community by serving as a catalyst for and being an active participant in addressing social injustices within and outside the parish community.

Just Us Parishioners

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Social Justice Committee

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WHERE'S THE HOPE FOR HAITI?

By Gwen Watson

We went to Haiti in mid-January of this year to rescue a falsely imprisoned priest who was gravely ill with leukemia, and ended up finding a country needing to be rescued.

I was part of a human rights trip led by Catholic Bishop Tom Gumbleton and Human Rights Attorney Bill Quigley. Our delegation had two major goals: (1) To free Father Gerry Jean-Juste and arrange for medical treatment for him outside Haiti, and (2) To help the parishioners establish health care at St. Clair's Parish in Port-au-Prince.

We visited with Archbishop Miot, Papal Nuncio Mario Giordina, and the human rights officers at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince appealing for the release of Father Gerry, an advocate for the poor, a voice for justice, and a friend of former Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide.

During our stay in Port-au-Prince, we had a chance to observe much of what the Haitian citizens are suffering. Hunger is the greatest problem. With the rate of unemployment at 70 per cent, many people are starving. We visited St. Claire's Parish on Wednesday, one of the days of the feeding program for 400 children for which Christ the King Parish collected funds in January. It was touching to see the number of children who brought along a cup so they could fill it with rice that came from the rice bowl they were given. They wanted to share their meal with their mothers who were hungry.

A lack of health care for the poor is another problem. We visited a clinic with equipment so old it would be only found in medical museums in the states, and there was neither a CT Scan machine nor equipment for cancer radiation at the hospital we toured. We heard story after story of poor people being refused hospital care because they couldn't afford the charges.

We stayed at the Matthew 25 Guest House behind a locked gate. There was no hot water and occasionally no water at all and often no electricity. Few of the streets in Port-au-Prince were paved. Kidnappings were common, so we only left the house when we had an appointment and a set destination.



Pictured from left to right are: Tom and Jan Honore, Bishop Tom Gumbleton, Archbishop Miot, Gwen Watson, and Bill Quigley.

We learned about the abject poverty of the people from Haitians who met with us. I met with one group on the subject of women's nutrition. A Haitian doctor said the agronomists are developing a new bean and rice powder that is like oatmeal and would provide pregnant women and those of child-bearing age the needed iron, calcium, vitamins, etc. It would cost 5 cents (American money) a meal, and when I asked if most women could afford it, the answer was "no, very few can."

A week after we left Port-au-Prince Father Jean-Juste was hospitalized in Miami for treatment of leukemia and pneumonia. Throughout our visit I continued to wonder, *where's the hope for the long-suffering people of Haiti?* As the February 7, 2006, election approached, instability, insecurity, and violence increased. I concluded that in the short term, the hope for Haiti is a fair election. Long term hope will come when social programs are organized to obliterate hunger, reach full employment, and provide health care and education. That's when Haiti will lose its record as the hungriest nation in the world.

As a Roman Catholic in a country that is 80 percent Catholic, I'm praying that my church will become more involved with its hungry members.

A quote of Dr. Paul Farmer, the Harvard physician who spends part of each year in Haiti treating the poor, sums up my impression of how we've responded to the needs of the people of Haiti: **"The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that's wrong with the world."**

GENEROUS SOCIAL JUSTICE

COLLECTION !!

Thanks to the generosity of Christ the King parishioners, a total of \$22,629 was collected in January for the special Social Justice Collection. Funds were distributed to What If? Foundation, Monument Crisis Center, Mary Mahoney Foundation, and SHARE Foundation.

The following thank you letters were received:

From Sandra Scherer, Executive Director of Monument Crisis Center:

“On behalf of the Monument Crisis Center, our clients, volunteers, staff, and Board of Directors we wish to thank you for the very generous donation from your special January collection. We enjoyed meeting everyone and having the opportunity to share information about our work at the center.

“We were honored to be considered among your other very worthwhile charities and genuinely blessed by your hospitality and warmth. Much of our success here at the Monument Crisis Center is directly the result of the support and involvement of the parishioners and parish staff of Christ the King.

“As we continue on this journey to help our nearest neighbors, please know how much we appreciate your kindness.”

From Margaret Trost, President, What If? Foundation:

“I loved being with you in Mass over the weekend of January 7. Thank you, thank you for your gift of \$7,543 for the What If? Foundation! Because of your generosity, we’ll be able to provide 12,000 more meals to hungry children who come to our food program in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. We’ll also be able to pay the tuition for several more students. Your offering is going to make a tremendous difference! Life is so difficult in Haiti, but through your love and sharing, the children know that their suffering has not been forgotten and hope is kept alive.

“Thank you again!”

From Leslie Bilchick, SHARE Foundation:

“This is such wonderful news. Thanks to everyone involved. We are working on the new women’s project now with criptdes san-vincente, so it’s good to know we can count on funds to carry it out!

“Mil gracias, on behalf of SHARE, and the women of the rural communities in criptdes san vincente, who will have new opportunities to grow personally and to contribute to their communities and others because of the effort you have made.”



SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS

Parishioner Gwen Watson was one of the 19,000 people who walked in a solemn procession in Columbus, Georgia, November 18, 2005, to call for the closing of the School of the Americas (commonly known as “School of Assassins”), now called WHINSEC. The SOA trains Latin American security personnel in combat and counter-insurgency.

Thirty-seven people entered the military base at Fort Benning, were arrested and brought to trial in January of this year. Among those arrested was Franciscan Priest, Father Louie Vitale, 73, retired Pastor of St. Boniface Parish in San Francisco. At his trial he was sentenced to six months in jail. He is being released May 4, and we will be welcoming him to our parish on Monday, May 8, at 7:30 p.m. He will make a presentation on his experience and on WHINSEC. A reception will follow.

Funding for WHINSEC is up in Congress again this spring. To close WHINSEC, we are asked to support **Bill HR 1217**. Congress Member George Miller is among 122 co-sponsors. Congress Member Ellen Tauscher has not co-sponsored. Please call her office at (925) 932-8899 and ask her to co-sponsor this bill.

Contra Costa Interfaith Housing

What is Permanent Supportive Housing? Permanent supportive housing is decent, safe, and affordable housing linked to voluntary support services designed to meet tenants’ individualized needs. Meeting the goal of providing permanent supportive housing is the mission of Contra Costa Interfaith Housing. CCIH is a nonprofit, charitable human services agency that began in 1991 as a grass-roots effort by local faith communities (including Christ the King parish) to address the issue of homelessness in Contra Costa County.

The first project of CCIH, Garden Park Apartments, opened its doors in Pleasant Hill in December 2004. This apartment building is home to 27 formerly homeless families. In addition to a resident property manager and around-the-clock staff, CCIH provides an array of on-site support services that empower families to stabilize, develop greater self-sufficiency, and thrive.

Christ the King parishioners were actively involved in the GPAC opening with our Adopt-A-Unit program that provided furnishings and provisions to our assigned family. At the March 30 meeting of the Social Justice Committee, Louise Bourassa, the Executive Director of CCIH, gave an update on the status of the Garden Park apartments. The results tell a compelling story about the value of permanent housing in these people’s lives and even more important, the role of supportive services that help families to stabilize their health, increase self-sufficiency, and remain permanently housed.

