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WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis



Special Interest Articles:

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Donna Wilhelm, Dorothy Pagosa, Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Michele Richardson, Rose Grabowski, Rose Marie Bommer, Shannon Fox — Social Justice Committee

We Strive for a more Just World *by Sr. Donna Wilhelm*

Our Mission Statement reminds us that

"Together with all our sisters and brothers who strive for a more just world, we undertake those activities which will promote the material and spiritual development of the human family."

One of the many ways we "promote the development of the human family" is through the SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Contributions Fund. This fund allows our congregation to partner with individuals and organizations doing good work and promoting justice.

The current criteria of the fund include the following:

1. The request promotes the conditions of social justice and incorporates the means of attaining it through systemic change and/or direct service.
2. The request supports our Mission Statement, Statement of Commitments, and/or Social Justice Focus Issues.

3. The organization requesting funding has limited access to, or availability of, other funding.

Historically, the fund has been used to allow the congregation to pay memberships for a number of organizations such as NETWORK, Pax Christi, The Southern Poverty Law Center, and the like. We have also given awards to a wide-ranging number of organizations and not-for-profit groups for direct service, advocacy, and efforts to impact systemic change in our local areas, our country, and our world.

Currently, the members of the award committee include Sisters Donna Wilhelm, Dorothy Pagosa, Lisa Alexander, Lois Bromark, Marjorie White, and Sandy LoPorto.

Any sister or associate is welcome to apply to the fund using the forms found on our website or to direct worthy projects and organ-

izations to do so. It is not necessary for a sister or associate to be directly involved in the requesting group, though often we are.

In the past, the awardees and memberships have been posted in the Social Justice section of the Communiqué. While seeing the list is helpful, hearing more about how the awards have been used is a way for all of us to be a part of the many efforts to which we contribute.

In this issue we will hear from four awardees.

(Please see below).

Enjoy reading about our corporate contribution to the efforts of so many to create a more just society, and if you know of a group, cause, or organization that would benefit from a small award, please refer them to the Social Justice section of our website for application information. ■

Awardees: SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Contributions Fund

- ❖ **Peace in the Hood**, Cleveland area organization that teaches and promotes non-violence in Cleveland's urban neighborhoods (*see p. 2*)
- ❖ **The Arts of Thanksgiving**, a yearly inter-religious, intercultural celebration that includes activities and a wide program of performances in a common effort to Give Thanks (*see p. 2*)
- ❖ **An award for a housing supplement** given to a former resident of Joseph's Home. Joseph's Home provides care for men who are homeless and who need on-going medical care (*see p. 3*)
- ❖ **SOA Watch**, a group that has been advocating for the closure of the School of the Americas for the past 25 years (*see p. 4*)

Project Ujamaa By Ruth Standiford, *Peace in the Hood* Program Coordinator



Project Ujamaa (*Ujamaa is a Swahili word meaning “family hood”*) is continuing its successful programming thanks in part to funding from the **Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis Social Justice Contributions Fund**. In addition, we were able to purchase much-needed supplies for our program and continue working for peace, justice, and empowerment.

Thanks to you and others:

- We were able to pay for contract services to 99 Treasures staff to teach entrepreneurship, financial literacy, Acrylic Painting 101, and host the monthly meet and greets.
- During the school year we provided a safe space for more than 60 at-risk youth and their

families to come together and learn about their history and culture and what they have in common. They learned to be peace makers and not peace breakers.

- During the summer, we provided a safe space for more than 92 at-risk youth through Peace Camp. Our program was featured on *Romona’s Kids* and in an interview in the Plain Dealer (*Grieveland*). The title is from an original poem by one of our students, Naudia Loftis.
- On Saturdays, we held family day where the entire family is welcomed to come in and paint and enjoy the program. This increases family bonding and provides instruction in positive family activities.
- We have established a **Go Fund Me** page to

invite contributions, and our web site is progressing nicely. We are working on learning the encryption process so that the work of our youth can be protected.

- We have held 4 *Meet and Greets* to showcase the work of the youth.
- One of our youth, Naudia Loftis from St. Martin De Porres, put together a march called “*Value Our Lives*” to call attention to the senseless loss of life, particularly young people. She was also honored with a MyComYouth Award and has established a peer mentoring program for young students.

We invite you to come to our program and meet our youth. ■

The Arts of Thanksgiving

by Shani Kadis, Coordinator of Interreligious Thanksgiving Celebration



Things in our world are tense, and it is imperative there are programs like the “arts of thanksgiving” to help bring people together in peaceful, respectful, and nurturing ways. Chip Freed, Lead Pastor of Garfield Memorial Church in Pepper Pike said, “What a contrast to leave the arts of thanksgiving Interfaith celebra-

tion last year, only to come home to view the tragic events unfolding in Ferguson, MO. I keep hearing today from local and national leaders that we need to get ALL to ‘come to the table.’ My mind immediately thought, ‘I wish they could see **our** table.’”

And what a table it was, as 14 acts from vary-

ing ethnicities and religions took the stage Nov. 23rd at B’nai Jeshurun Congregation as part of the “The Arts of Thanksgiving,” a self-described interreligious and multicultural celebration.

The event started with a bang, as bhangra music blasted out of the speakers and dancers created loud

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Arts of Thanksgiving

clapping sounds via the “sapp.” Festive performances mixed with religious readings from numerous faiths and even words of encouragement from the performers themselves.

Opera singer Jonathan Cilla Faro told the crowd that “we’re born to shine” and “the past is past” before launching into a riveting version of “Because We Believe” that was met with thunderous applause.

Seemingly every kind of song and dance was

incorporated, from a solo Chinese dancer who contorted her body in near-impossible ways to the fleet-footed Murphy’s Irish Dance Troupe, from an ethereal Indian classical vocalist to the perfectly timed “hallelujah’s” that kicked off the Olivet Mass Choir’s second song.

This event promotes the material and spiritual development of the human family. Art and music have a special way of creating conversation and building bridges between people who might not otherwise

connect. This program has bred a deeper understanding of our larger Cleveland community and encourages participants to expand and grow through understanding and mutual respect.

The “arts of thanksgiving” is very fortunate to have sponsors from different faiths and organizations across Cleveland.

Without all the sponsorship (including yours), this unique program would not be possible.

Thank you! ■



Spartan Bhangra Dance Group CWRU



Djapo Cultural Arts Institute

Award for a Housing Supplement

A former resident at Joseph’s Home, there since 2013, was undocumented and nearing the end of his two-year time limit to stay, as per guidelines of HUD.

He has Mantle Cell Lymphoma, an aggressive kind, and is getting medical care for the cancer because he is participating in a clinical trial.

He is from Spain, and through Immigration lawyers and computer searches, has been able to get a copy of his birth certificate from Madrid, Spain, his passport from Spain, and find his two adult sons and ex-wife in New Jersey, whom he left 15 years ago to come to Cleveland for a job in a restaurant.

The birth certificate and passport from Spain prevented him from obtaining an Ohio ID, and without an ID, he could not rent an apartment. The Immigration lawyer has been trying to get the gentleman a legal status through some of the executive orders issued by President Obama, but all those are currently in court battles.

So, an application was made to the SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Contributions Fund to give the gentleman money for rent for six months to move into a friend’s apartment building. It is hoped that in re-establishing a relationship with his sons they will be able to help him with rent money in the future.

He is also very resilient and determined, and will do any odd job for anyone to earn money.

In a thank you letter the gentleman wrote:

“I am very grateful for all the help that you have given to my situation. I have received many blessings, thanks to all of you for your hard and loving work and I would not have been able to get here without your help. I pray that the good Lord continues to give the health and love to continue your ministry. I know that your organization helps a lot of persons like me, with many problems, to get them to the right place in life.” ■

“So, an application was made to the SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Contributions Fund...”

SOA Watch is Going to the Border

By Sr. Dorothy Pagosa

Sister Barbara Gluck and I attended the 25th anniversary of the march to Ft. Benning to demand closure of the **School of the Americas**.

Things have changed since I first attended the demonstration in 1997.

Back then we were looking at soldiers coming from Central and Latin America to be trained in counterinsurgency tactics. Some graduates (52) were associated with some of the worst atrocities in those areas including the deaths of Oscar Romero, the four churchwomen, and Celina, Elba and the six Jesuits in El Salvador.

It has been discovered that this past March 24th (the anniversary of the death of Bishop Oscar Romero) the first member of the U.S. border patrol graduated from the SOA.

The school teaches counterinsurgency tactics.

This is scary when you think that this will be associated with protection (?) of the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

In 2012, a border patrol guard fired his weapon through the fence into Mexico killing 16 year old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez. The agent was finally indicted this past September.

On Saturday, Nov. 21st we attended a march to Stewart Detention Center where immigrants are being held in the for-profit detention center run by Corrections Corporation of America. The Center has to fill a certain number of beds according to its agreement with the Federal Government. This encourages them to keep immigrants in detention. What was once a justice system is now a for-profit corporation.

We heard speeches from some family mem-

bers of those detained inside Stewart. Eleven people were arrested for crossing onto CCA's property. They were fined \$100 and released.

Sunday, November 22, we had the procession to the fences of Ft. Benning. Crosses bearing the names of the victims of the graduates of the SOA were placed on the fences.

At the end of the march, we were sent forth to meet again next year... **this time at the border.**

Details are still to be worked out. Just know that our allies in Central and Latin America feel that this is where the movement needs to go next. The movement has to change and grow to meet the increasing needs of our sisters and brothers south of the border.

Perhaps you would like to join us. ■

My SOA Experience *By Sr. Barbara Anne Gluck*

In September of this year 2015 arrangements were made for me to do a second SOA March experience.

On November 19th I flew from Appleton to Detroit, a layover, then on to Atlanta where I met up with Sister Dorothy Pagosa. We went

to pick up a car at the airport. We then proceeded to Columbus, Georgia where, over the next three days, protests would take place.

Friday began with workshop sessions at the Georgia Trade and Convention Center. Choices

could be made as to which workshops to attend, each one lasting a little over an hour, on different topics, with speakers/facilitators.

Saturday, November 21st I had a new experience with hundreds of others. We stood together with

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Sisters Dorothy and Barbara Anne at SOA Watch in Ft. Benning, GA



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My SOA Experience

the Georgia Detention Watch. There were speakers and musicians.

The procession was a 1.7 mile journey concluding with voices and musicians at the gate of the Corrections Corporation of America's Stewart Detention Center, named one of the ten worst immigration detention centers in the U.S.

Workshops were held at the Convention Center throughout the afternoon and evening and we attended the non-violence one with speakers and musicians, a musical celebration of creativity and life in the face of injustice. Father Roy Bourgeois spoke. He is the SOA Watch founder.

We ended by all reading the SOA Guidelines, stating that:

"... we gather in the diverse traditions of non-violence with respect for the right to self-determination of oppressed people and communities. Together we envision a day in which a culture of peace with justice and respect will prevail, where all people will live together free from oppression."

Sunday, my third day of the experience, was the actual March to the gates at Fort Benning Base.

At 8:00 am the veterans came forward in procession, as they are on the forefront of the struggle to close the School of the Americas, now WHINSEC.

They have fasted, organized, marched, hung uniforms and other military items on the fence, crossed the line to carry the protest onto the Fort

Benning military base, and served jail time.

The rest of us protesters marched in a quiet respectful manner, carrying small white crosses bearing the names of those murdered by the SOA. And, as the names were read by the musicians, we raised our cross chanting, "PRESENTE."

Upon reaching the fence we stuck the crosses in the fence, maintaining silence. The *Puppetistas* then put on a pageant commemorating the victims of the U.S. militarization at home and abroad.

I'm glad I participated, to say "No Mas" (No More), to honor the victims and the memory of the hundreds of thousands who have suffered and died. ■



Sister Barbara Anne with Father Roy Bourgeois, Founder of SOA Watch

"Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that **the world is a gift** which we have freely received and must share with others....

Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us."

~ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 159



REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.



Please send these to **Sister Dorothy Pagosa** by the end of December for inclusion in the January 2016 issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*.

~Your Social Justice Committee