

JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
OF SACRED HEART PARISH

SERVING THROUGH CONNECTEDNESS

By Nancy Hemesath

Mike (Woz) and Meaghen Wostoupal moved to Omaha after their five children were raised. They searched for a church community, and they joined Sacred Heart in 2013 because they loved the spirit and friendliness they encountered here. They have been active members ever since, co-chairing the Sacred Heart Festival in 2014, 2022, and 2023. Mike joined the Finance Committee in 2022.

Mike's day job is hard to explain – even for him! Suffice it to say that his personal mission is to support people after one of the worst times in their lives. When victims of a tragedy receive large insurance settlements, Mike's companies help them stabilize their financial future so their lives can get back on track.

Woz describes himself as politically “middle of the road.” He was particularly upset by the death of George Floyd and yet his close friend in Sioux City is in law enforcement so he was not ready to condemn all cops. He spoke with Fr. Dave about his struggle to find an appropriate response.

Fr. Dave introduced him to Matt Holland who invited him to join Sacred Heart's Neighborhood Alliance. As an active member of the Neighborhood Alliance, Woz has volunteered for various activities which put him in touch with LaVonya Goodwin, President of the North 24th Business Improvement District. Woz discovered that, from high school days, LaVonya knew his friend and neighbor, Dana Murray.

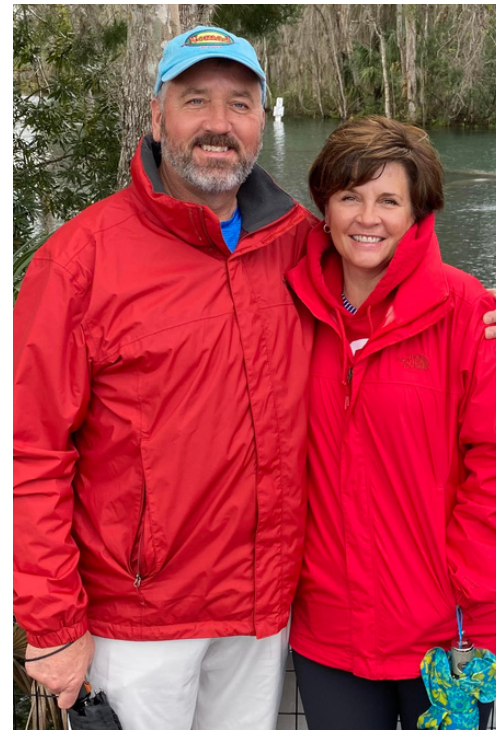
Be strong and courageous;
do not be frightened or
dismayed, for the Lord your
God is with you wherever
you go.

JOSHUA 1:9

Dana had left Omaha and developed a successful career in the music industry before returning to the area. LaVonya got in touch and, with some persistence, persuaded him to accept a position to lead the former Love Jazz Center.

Dana Murray's vision helped transform the organization into the North Omaha Music and Arts Center (NOMA) in 2021. Murray's goal is to provide young people with an introduction to and education in the arts, programs he wished he could have experienced while growing up in Omaha. NOMA's vision is to enrich and empower the community through art and music. Woz now serves as the board chair for NOMA. “Start-ups are never easy,” Woz says. He has done for-profit start-ups and is now using his skills to get this new non-profit on track. Fundraising is a challenge for a new organization without a track record.

Committed to the mission and loving a challenge, Woz is doing the hard work involved, building relationships and linking Neighborhood Alliance and Sacred Heart to North Omaha, frequently using volunteers to assist in NOMA events.



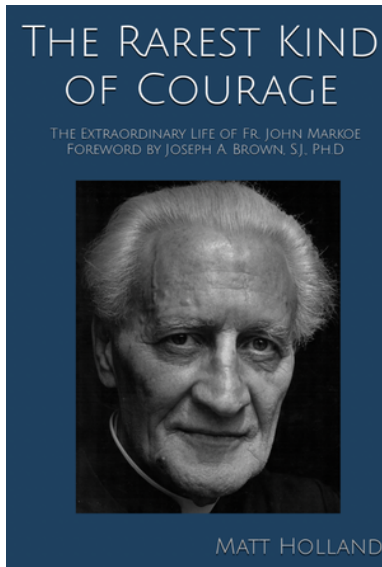
**Mike Woz and Meaghen
Wostoupal**

“Connectedness” is one of Mike's strengths. He often finds ways of connecting people through networking (Goodwin and Murray) and creating common ground (fighting racism through building relationships.) An influential book in his life is “Love Your Enemies” by Arthur Brooks. He often finds himself building bridges.

Mike is guided in his professional life and in his community volunteerism by the verse in Joshua 1:9: “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

Matt Holland speaks with authority about Fr. Markoe because he has written and released this biography. The book is available at The Bookworm and on Amazon.



Fr. Markoe meets with Dennis Holland, his student leader of the DePorres Club. Denny was a Sacred Heart parishioner in later years and is the father of Matt.

PROFILE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

By Matt Holland

When the Sacred Heart Neighborhood Alliance Team was formed nearly four years ago, members created the following purpose statement: “To develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha.” It was a statement that would have resonated with Fr. John P. Markoe, S.J., a pioneering battler for racial equality.

A Jesuit for five decades, Markoe spent twenty-two of those years in Omaha, working to improve conditions for African-Americans while striving to convince white Omahans that racism was a sin. Markoe taught math and philosophy at Creighton from 1946 to 1967, but he was more at home in the Near North Side, an area known by Omahans as the ghetto, where he felt the same comfort “that suburbanites enjoy on their patios.”

Whitney Young – head of the Omaha Urban League before he became executive director of the National Urban League – recalled how his friend John Markoe “moved with freedom and comfort in the ghetto, by day and by night, warmly welcomed and cheerfully greeted by all who lived there.”

Markoe’s impact on the current Historical North 24th Street Family of Parishes is notable. Located behind St. John’s Church on the Creighton campus is a building that bears his name. At St. Benedict the Moor – where Markoe was instrumental in the effort to change the parish from a mission to a standard parish – the Markoe Room sits just off the parish hall named after Deacon Ernie Spicer. At Sacred Heart the efforts to integrate Sacred Heart High School by members of the Omaha DePorres Club, co-founded by Markoe in 1947, echo today.

And the Sacred Heart Denny Holland Award is named after Markoe’s close friend, ally, and fellow founder of the DePorres Club.

Late in his life Fr. Markoe began to receive honors and recognition for his five decades of work. His reaction to the attention given his efforts was simple and straightforward; “There really shouldn’t be anything to learn. Christ gave it to us 2000 years ago: ‘Love your neighbor.’”

In 1967, just months after Fr. Markoe died, Jesuit Father General Pedro Arrupe was looking for an example for U.S. Jesuits to follow as he urged them to address racism in their schools, seminaries and the cities they served. He found John Markoe, calling him a great pioneer who, despite opposition at every turn for fifty years, accomplished heroic things.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: *To develop a presence in and connections to the Sacred Heart neighborhood and North Omaha.*

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE TEAM

BORDER CROSSINGS ARE DOWN. IS THAT A GOOD THING?

By Gene Summerlin

A few months ago, we talked about the efforts of Omaha Welcomes the Stranger. This group provided temporary lodging, supplies, and care to asylum seekers traveling from our southern border to the homes of their U.S. sponsors. At first, travelers were expected monthly, but with the recent reduction in the number of migrants allowed to cross onto U.S. soil, the stream of asylum seekers is now at a trickle.

Federal immigration policy is complicated as are the reasons for the decline in migrant admissions. A surge in migrants occurred this Spring just before the end of the pandemic-era expulsion policy known as Title 42. For those seeking asylum status now, most migrants must prove that they were first denied asylum in a country they passed through en route to the United States and use the CBP One smartphone app to schedule an appointment with a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol official at a port of entry to apply for asylum or other relief – a process that currently involves a wait time of four to six weeks before the applicant can cross into the United States. Previously, asylum applicants were admitted to the U.S. and processed on this side of the border.

While scheduling asylum appointments through CBP One does make for a more orderly asylum process, it doesn't eliminate the humanitarian problems created from amassed large groups on either side of the border.

Despite the obstacles to creating a better system, it isn't hopeless.

If a potential asylum applicant elects to cross the border between ports of entry prior to being admitted by CBP, he or she faces a rebuttable presumption against “a credible fear of persecution” – the legal basis for granting asylum – and a potential five-year ban on reentry. (Those provisions are currently being challenged in court.) The percentage of asylum seekers that fail their “credible fear interviews” has more than doubled since early May.

On the other side of the border, Mexican authorities have cracked down on “irregular migration” and now bus migrants from other countries seeking to enter the U.S. to locations within the interior of Mexico. But again, moving large groups of people from one location to another does nothing to address the humanitarian needs they face. As in the U.S., Mexico's asylum system was not designed to address the sheer number of requests being made.

As stated by Blas Nuñez-Neto, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's assistant secretary for border and immigration policy, “There's no doubt that our asylum system is antiquated and has not kept up with the changing demographics and countries that we are encountering at the border.” The system is, in Nuñez-Neto's words, “hopelessly broken.”



The current administration has pledged to set up “secure mobility centers” in Latin America to screen migrants for eligibility to be resettled, but there is widespread acknowledgement that these and other executive-order level policies are inadequate to address long-term migration challenges.

Despite the significant obstacles to creating a better system, it isn't hopeless. Bipartisan efforts have led to significant improvements in the immigration system in the past. There are legislators from both parties willing to work on revisions to our current laws, but we all need to encourage our own representatives to support those efforts. Until more members of the House and Senate express support for immigration reform, little is likely to happen beyond the whack-a-mole solutions we are seeing today.

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The Immigration and Refugee Team works to welcome, with respect and solidarity, the “foreigners” residing among us.

GREEN TEAM

THE FRUITS OF GARDENERS' LABOR

By Jane O'Connor

The Sacred Heart Community Garden is an expression of the teaching of Jesus Christ. Food is a frequent theme throughout the Gospels. Jesus had compassion for his followers when they were hungry. He multiplied bread and fish until all were satisfied.

We are following the example of Jesus by providing healthy fresh vegetables to neighbors and families of CUES children. We channel good food to some in our community who experience food insecurity. Since the May "Justice from the Heart" newsletter, we have been successful in planting our garden and installing a fence to keep little creatures from eating the fruits of our labor.

The late planting and the early growing season's heat and lack of rain stunted some of our plants. The three remaining Three Sisters mounds are providing squash with beans to follow. July's abundance of rain and heat has provided for ideal growth. We have harvested just over 200 pounds of vegetables and herbs so far. We have had a bountiful crop of beets, radishes, cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, peppers and herbs. We are currently completing biweekly harvests of these vegetables and expect other vegetables to follow as the season progresses.

Volunteer garden hours have totaled approximately 200 hours as of mid-July. Members of the Omaha Men's Garden Club, who provided some grant funding, will visit our garden in July. We look forward to their feedback. We also invite parishioners to walk through the garden.



Left to right: Phyllis Jeanetta-Brill, Roger and Cathy Carroll and Jeanne Schuler

We are planning for the future through ongoing relationships with CUES staff and families as well as potential community partners. Our sustainability will require ongoing grant submissions, leadership and planning in addition to more volunteers. Gardening needs will include seedling growth, soil preparation, planting, weeding, mulching, pest management and harvesting.

We wish to thank these volunteers to date:

- **Volunteers:** Mia Bretey, Jeanne Cefja-Gregory and Joe Gregory, Roger and Cathy Carroll, Angelo DeSanto and Jane O'Connor, Linda Duckworth, Dee Ebel, Donna Heide, Nancy Hemesath, Phyllis Jeanetta-Brill, Joan Lieben, Mary Jo Manahan, Mary Clare McQuade, Mike Monaghan, Carol Peterson, George Vogel, and Mike Weber
- **Special Projects:** Phil Alcocer, Dan Kalkowski, and Mr. Dave
- **Special thanks:** Father Dave



Mia Bretey earns National Honor Society hours working in the garden.

Correction from May: We received a grant from Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light not Nebraska Power and Light.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: In partnership with our parish, the Green Team is continually learning, calling all to take action and working to care for our common home.