

The Menu



“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:13-14

Newsletter of the UCC Social Justice Team

Issue 2, February 25, 2007

Social Justice Workshop: April 15

The UCC Social Justice Team will be hosting a workshop Sun., April 15 1-5 pm and invites anyone interested in learning more about Catholic Social Teachings or how to apply justice issues to daily life to participate. Breakout sessions of the workshop will include topics such as faithful citizenship, using Catholic Social Teachings as a leader, social justice and charity, and information about pro-life issues. Registration will begin March 1, and materials will be available at the front desk at the UCC or by email at sjteam@utcatholic.org.

Support the UCC Missionaries to Arteaga, Mexico

Every year a group of 35 missionaries from the UCC travel to Arteaga, Mexico during Spring Break. This year they will be facilitating religious education for children, visiting the sick and elderly and giving away donated school supplies. The trip would not be possible without support from the UCC community. Please consider “adopting” a Missionary after the masses on Sunday Feb 25, in the Atrium. Suggested “adoption” amount is \$35.

Chef’s Special:

The Death Penalty: A life issue

Catholic Social Teaching:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred. In fact, this dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of Catholic social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia, cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Source: <http://www.usccb.org/sdnp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.htm>

What does scripture say?

“The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.”

Psalm 103:6

“Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case.” *Proverbs 22:22-23*

Jessica’s Law Status

The Texas Legislature is considering Senate Bill 68 and House Bill 8, known as “Jessica’s Law,” which calls for increased punishment for sex offenders: 25 years in prison for first time offenders and the possibility of the death penalty for

second time offenders. This means that someone could receive the death penalty without having committed murder, and the bill also has other moral problems. Currently, only 1 in 5 sex offender cases ever make it to the Texas justice system, and 90% of sex offenses are committed by a relative or

family friend. This law would further discourage reporting, as people might be afraid their relatives would receive the death penalty. Please call your legislators and share your thoughts about “Jessica’s Law” as soon as possible (Capitol switchboard number is 512.463.5495).

Source: TCADP

Linda White and Helen Prejean speak on dignity of the human person

On Valentine’s Day 2007 at the UCC, a message of love abounded—not that of candies and carnations, but a profound message about forgiveness, hope, and respecting the dignity of all.

Linda White, a Tomball resident, spoke about the way her daughter was brutally murdered by two 15-year-old boys attempting to rob her. She told how she went to therapy sessions with other

murder victim’s family members and how these sessions became emotionally draining because of the anger victims expressed at these meetings. Before her daughter was murdered, Linda did not know how she felt about the death penalty, but after her daughter’s murder, she began to investigate the inequities in the Texas criminal justice



system and decided that she was firmly against the death penalty. She joined Murder *Continued on back side.*

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Jesus was a victim of the death penalty.

Peaceful Vigil on the Days of Executions

On each day of an execution by the State of Texas, the Austin chapter of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty hosts a vigil at the Governor’s mansion on Lavaca between 10th and 11th Streets from 5:30-6:30 pm. Bring a sign and a marker, a candle, or a friend and be in solidarity with those being killed. The Austin chapter of the TCADP has meetings on the first Thurs. of the month at 2700 Anderson Lane. For more information, contact group leader Bob Van Steenburg, an active Catholic, at austin@tcadp.org.

Soup Supper Speakers

March 2: Casa Marianella
March 9: Mobile Loaves and Fishes (Alan Graham)

Suppers begin at 6:30 pm after Stations of the Cross at 6 pm. Bring a bowl, a spoon and bread to share!

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Victims’ Families for Reconciliation and found their message of forgiveness to be more constructive than the angry therapy group she had previously attended. Of the death penalty being a comfort for victim’s families, she says, “The death penalty holds out a false promise of healing and closure. Can there be closure? No there cannot; you’re forever changed. But you can talk about love...”

Sister Helen also spoke about her ministry with prisoners on death row. She said, “If we’re not working to change it, we’re complicit in it.” Texas has killed 383 people since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. Sr. Helen mentioned some inequities in the justice system. The State Legislature has a list of people who, if killed, their murderers

should be considered for the death penalty. The list includes policemen and children under the age of 13, but fails to mention firefighters or 14-year-olds. “How can we put a higher ‘price’ on some lives?” she said. Furthermore, it is clear that race is a factor in who is sentenced to capital punishment. 80% of people who are on death row have killed a white person, and 50% are people of color. Historical slave states perform 80% of all executions, and Sr. Helen cited the example of an African American girl from Shreveport, LA, who was raped and had her throat slashed, yet her murderers did not receive a life sentence.

Sr. Helen urged those present to speak against the use of violence as a paradigm for a solution to social

A Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty

by Helen Prejean, CSJ

God of Compassion,
You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.
Expand and deepen our hearts so that we may love as You love even those among us who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.
For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance as we fill up death rows and kill the killers in the name of justice, in the name of peace.

Jesus, our brother,
you suffered execution at the hands of the state but you did not let hatred overcome you.
Help us to reach out to victims of violence so that our enduring love may help them heal.
Holy Spirit of God,
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice. Help us to work for the abolition of state-sanctioned death and renew our society in its very heart so that violence will be no more. Amen.

Catholic Charities of Central Texas

Catholic Charities promotes both justice and charity. In Austin, they work to promote faithful citizenship, provide services to immigrants and have a food pantry, among other services. If you would like to volunteer on a regular basis or organize a food drive to benefit the pantry, please contact martha-jasse@austindiocese.org or go to www.ccctx.org.

SJ Team Mission statement:

The UCC Social Justice Team seeks to connect what we experience at Mass on Sunday to how we live the rest of the week by focusing on the tenets of charity and justice. We serve the common good through works of mercy for the poor and vulnerable and advocating for just social policies.

Like what you see? Want to become a part of it?

A small group of students and adults committed to promoting justice around the UCC and the community produces this bi-weekly newsletter, looks for opportunities to do charity and justice, leads workshops and hosts other events. If you would like to help with planning, have ideas to add, or would like to put a submission in the newsletter, email sjteam@utcatholic.org.

problems. She connected the issue to the number of Iraqi civilians that have been murdered during the Iraq war (current estimation is 60,000). Sr. Helen connected our call to speak out against the death penalty with our larger call of loving all people, especially the most vulnerable. She said, “We can love people who love us, but can our love extend to the unseen poor in this city? ...Is it possible that hurricanes aren’t the only way to drown? People are drowning in our inner cities. Is it possible to love them?” She spoke especially to the students present, saying how powerful the student voice can be, and that “when you are committed to a cause that is just and right, providence moves with you.” She connected all justice issues together in a “fabric” which is “held together by the dignity of the human person.”