

Interfaith group seeks to solve community problems

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Neighborhoods are in decline. Human trafficking goes on in the least expected places. Homeless youngsters struggle to attend school. Too many vulnerable seniors spend their days in substandard or unsafe units.

These issues and others prompted a group of pastors to gather nearly four years ago to figure out “How do we do faithful living in the midst of all these difficult issues?” according to the Rev. Bob Stoeckig, pastor of St. Andrew Catholic Church.

To that end, the Las Vegas Valley Interfaith Sponsoring Committee was formed. The group held its first meeting in Las Vegas in May and became Nevadans for the Common Good.

On Dec. 11, the Boulder City Cluster of Nevadans for the Common Good, approximately 30 strong, held its second gathering at St. Andrew.

“To get anything to change you have to also create some relationships that give you a bigger voice or power in the process” Stoeckig said.

Stoeckig began discussing a “conscious, contagious neighborliness” developing among the faith community in Boulder City.

Boulder City congregations were represented by members of St. Andrew, Boulder City United Methodist with Pastor Sandy Johnson and Grace Community Church with its pastor, David Graham.

Also at the meeting was Robert Hoo, lead organizer for Nevadans for the Common Good. He is the nonprofit group’s first full-time organizer and its only paid employee.

Hoo, son of Chinese immigrants and a Yale Law School graduate, sees his role as a facilitator whose job is “to help people create a strategy to help make sure that people are learning certain skills, how to engage in public life.”

Before the gathering, Hoo said, “When people see how they can make a difference, when there’s a clear plan that they can be part of, and then also when they realize that they can potentially have a voice and some power in decision making. When people begin to

realize that the solution is among ourselves, and we can have a role in that, then people get involved.”

The group divided into three units to discuss the issues of human trafficking, the vulnerable elderly and youth with an emphasis on drugs and alcohol in the high school, after Stoeckig recapped the November meeting of the Boulder City Cluster.

“Each group discussed what they knew already, what they needed to find out and who they needed to talk to, to get more information about their issue,” Francyl Gawryn of Grace Community Church said.

“There is real progress to be made in all of these areas, and I am hopeful that we can actually be helpful in these matters.” Gawryn said.

Johnson said that when she arrived at United Methodist in July for her first clergy appointment, she was eager to begin working with the organization and bring it to Boulder City.

“Grace Church, St. Andrew and United Methodist are making the first important steps to begin our work here and will be expanding to include the rest of the faith community as we go,” Johnson said. “It is vital that we work together to make everyone’s lives better, regardless of our religious or doctrinal beliefs.”

“I was inspired by the presence and spirit of the group,” Hoo said after the meeting. “It is a very busy time of year, and these problems are daunting. It is very easy to decide that ‘it’s someone else’s problem.’ But, members of the three churches are rising to meet these challenges.” He added that the local church leaders “are beginning the process of finding common ground and building a stronger community.”

Before the next meeting at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 31 at St. Andrew’s, members will research specific issues to have a strong understanding of the particular problem discussed within the group to help the organization create fact sheets for strong presentations.

Gawryn summed up the group’s future actions, saying members will also start or continue to build relationships with legislators and others who are in positions of determining change.

“This is a grass-roots organization composed of local faith communities and other organizations that are looking at local issues to find ways to contribute to positive change,” Gawryn said.