

Listening to the voices of Appalachia

Committee works to create awareness, address concerns

by JOANITA M. NELLENBACH

correspondent

CANDLER — “O Lord, we come together today to listen to the voices of Appalachia, including those of the natural world; to become informed about issues relevant to the church’s presence in Appalachia; to address the causes of poverty in Appalachia; and to promote justice and dignity in accordance with Catholic social teaching. Bless and guide our work here today. Amen.”

Thus did members of the North Carolina Chapter of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA) pray at their third meeting at St. Joan of Arc Church in Candler May 4.

They came from throughout the Diocese of Charlotte: Asheville, Bryson City, Charlotte, Hayesville, Hickory, Maggie Valley and Murphy.

“I have a strong interest in social justice issues,” said David Tilly, a parishioner of St. Joseph Church in Bryson City. “We have a responsibility for all people.”

“It’s wonderful to be with like-minded people,” said his wife, Cathy.

Bernie Offerman and his wife, Jan, are parishioners at St. Peter Church in Charlotte. They’re in the chapter because membership “brings home to us in North Carolina concerns about global warming and mountaintop removal.”

“These are 200 million-year-old mountains,” he said. “We have to make it a point to stay in touch and be aware.”

CCA’s North Carolina Chapter formed last September.

“One of the purposes of the chapters in the different states is to create awareness about Appalachia and the problems of Appalachia,” said Mary Herr, chair of the North Carolina Chapter, CCA’s vice chair and a parishioner at St. Joseph Church.

At its first meeting, the chapter identified issues of concern in North Carolina: the economy — including poverty; kinship care and lack of transportation; recycling and environmental concerns; and comprehensive immigration reform.

Members agreed to address one or more of these issues by promoting recycling, talking with Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults classes about the concerns, being more present to immigrants, volunteering to teach people about climate change, collecting food for a local food pantry, delving into issues of homelessness and working on a DVD about climate change and immigration reform.

At the May meeting, members talked about what progress they had made. For example, Claudie Burchfield, director of the diocese's Office of Economic Opportunity in Murphy, reported the kinship care program is under way in her area.

Attendees from Asheville are delving into the consequences of Interstate 3, which would go through Asheville and allow for truck transport of hazardous waste.

Augustinian Father John Denny, pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland in Maggie Valley, said he had given "green" grocery bags to the parish's faith formation classes and had the church's lighting changed to more energy-efficient bulbs.

Father Denny has been St. Margaret of Scotland's pastor for 18 months.

"I became aware at one of the (Smoky Mountain) vicariate meetings that Mary Herr was starting a chapter of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia," he said.

"I thought it would be a good way for me, a relative newcomer, to learn about the struggles and the issues of the Catholic Church in Appalachia," he said.

The CCA-sponsored fourth annual Bishop Begley Conference will be held at St. William Church in Murphy Oct. 23-25. The theme is "Building Ecumenical Relationships in Appalachia."

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WANT MORE INFO?

For more information on the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, visit www.ccappal.org.

For more information on the Appalachian Regional Commission, visit www.arc.gov/index.do.

DID YOU KNOW?

Appalachia covers 205,000 square miles, comprising all of West Virginia and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The Appalachian Regional Commission, a federal-state partnership, noted on its Web site that about 23.6 million people live in the 420 counties of the Appalachian region.

Most of the counties in the Diocese of Charlotte are part of Appalachia.

ABOUT THE CCA

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia, founded in 1970, is headquartered in Spencer, W.Va. Its director, Glenmary Father John Rausch, lives in Stanton, Ky.

CCA:

— promotes Catholic social teaching in the region;

— collaborates with dioceses, local parishes and other organizations to advance social and environmental justice;

— offers spiritual and educational opportunities such as Pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Appalachia, the Cherokee Spirituality Retreat/Seminar, religious education materials on climate change and the Religious Leaders Forum on Mountaintop Removal;

— publishes and distributes both of the Appalachian bishops' pastoral messages: "This Land is Home to Me: A Pastoral Message on Poverty and Powerlessness in Appalachia" and "At Home in the Web of Life: A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Community in Appalachia."