

OPINION

Making 2019 the dawn of better lives for dogs and cats

by Terry Dorsey

Mahatma Gandhi, who inspired MLK JR., myself and many other people, said that "A society's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." With the midterms over, and no matter who won, we would all agree that it is time to get back to work.



TERRY DORSEY

People in poverty, children, the elderly and animals should continue to be our focus. As a new Animal Adoption Center in Chatham County becomes a reality in 2019 (construction and completion is scheduled for this upcoming year), here are some ways that Chatham County could maximize its investment, save lives and improve the quality of life in Chatham County:

CONDUCT A BEST PRACTICES STUDY

Chatham County is long overdue for an independent best practices study. Even more critical with construction of the new adoption center, where a higher level of customer service will be expected, this study should include a look at the overall mission and values of Animal Services and set some measurable goals for the new adoption center and staff. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and The Society for the Protection of Animals (SPCA) offers assistance and expertise for studies, improvements and partnerships.

IMPROVE THE ADOPTION RATE

For years, many rescue groups have come to the aid of homeless and abandoned cats and dogs for the Chatham County Animal Shelter. Limited shelter hours and very few adoption events leads to many adoptable animals being euthanized. Animal Services could drastically improve the adoption

rate by hosting monthly adoption events, where seniors, students and other volunteers could assist. Shelter consultants recommend partnering with a nationally recognized leader in animal advocacy with experience and expertise in sheltering and adoptions like the SPCA.

BE PROACTIVE IN INVESTIGATING DOG FIGHTING, PUPPY MILLS ABUSE AND NEGLECT



In August, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that a Moore County resident was sentenced to a year in prison for dog fighting. His dogs were found chained to fences with broken teeth, sores and scars. Dog fighting often exposes children to violence and is accompanied by drugs, guns and is related to pet theft, where pets are attacked and killed by dogs in training. Dog fighting is often a rural crime. The current "humane tethering" ordinance has a limited effect and does not effectively address the neglect and abuse often related

to it. Abuse and neglect is more obvious when animal service officers, deputies and other law enforcement officers are looking for it. It is also critical that it be reported, even anonymously.

CONSIDER DIFFERENTIAL LICENSING

Many of the stray and homeless animals, especially cats, come from un-neutered or un-spayed animals. According to the Humane Society of the United States, approximately 3 million cats are euthanized each year and an estimated 50 million feral cats live in U.S. communities. Communities with higher licensing compliance rates report better numbers for returning animals to their homes, saving shelter space, time, money and keeping pets out of the shelter system.

Differential licensing requires that owners pay a very low license fee for a fixed animal and a very high fee for an unfixed animal. Coupled with low cost spay and neuter resources and intentional education by Animal Services, people see the value for themselves, the animals and the county. Chatham County continues to be overrun by stray cats. Many good-hearted volunteers have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars feeding, fixing, and, when possible, placing them. This problem results from unregulated breeding and lack of initiative by Animal Services to address the issue. Many counties, towns and cities have curbed this problem by enacting differential licensing: Licensing can also provide funding for low cost spay/neuter and other programs. While it takes years to take effect, licensing can be gradually implemented, leading to saving lives and resources.

The Rev. Terry Dorsey is a Ministry Consultant and led a campaign to build the new adoption center for cats and dogs in Chatham County. Terry meets irregularly with irreligious people at SoulJourn Cafe at the Pittsboro Roadhouse to talk about life.

Our Lady of Guadalupe crosses the border without papers

by Audrey Bernier Schwankl

I am not Mexican or Latina, but my daughter and I have a special devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Jesenia is adopted and half Mexican. Her birth father, Rigoberto, once sent my husband and me a hand-drawn image of 3-year-old Jesenia dressed as Guadalupe. He had someone draw it of her from a photo while he was in a detention center just before he was deported. Jesenia (now 17) and I have almost always pulled ourselves out of bed at 4 a.m. on December 12th and stolen away through the dark to our parish church, St. Julia, for the "Las Mañanitas" the Our Lady of Guadalupe sunrise mass. Beautiful. And jam packed full of half awake people singing "La Guadalupana".

Let's jump ahead to this year. On a recent Sunday morning in November, Daniela, a dark haired, young woman hopped out of a car. She took her place on the shoulder of a country road in rural Chatham County and waited expectantly. Pretty soon she saw another youth approaching and knew that the Antorcha Guadalupana was on its way. The long awaited burning torch had made its way, hand to hand, runner by runner, to Siler City from some 2140 miles away in Mexico City, and it was now her turn to feel its power. In a moment she grasped the monumental torch, and feeling a rush of emotion, began running it swiftly toward her friend down the road.

These exuberant "messengers" as they prefer to be called, were doing their part to transport the Antorcha Guadalupana and its message of valiant hope, from the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. The torch, called the "Antorcha Guadalupana", along with large, framed and plastic-wrapped (for protection) images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego, were in the midst of an annual journey of love that includes visits to more than 70 Mexican and U.S. churches along its way to NYC. The group brings the joy and inspiration of Guadalupe to everyone who welcomes them, but especially to immigrants who depend on Guadalupe's motherly love for the strength to cope with the fearsome challenges they face.

Daniela, a student at UNC Pembroke, was one of over 70 St. Julia Catholic Church participants who carried the Antorcha from our church in Siler City to its next jubilant crowd at St. Anthony of Padua in Southern Pines. "I have been part of the Guadalupe Antorcha Run



The "Antorcha" (Torch) and traveling paintings of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego along with the St. Julia Catholic Church Antorcha "Messengers", organizers and the dance troupe "Fe Y Esperanza".

PHOTO BY ALFONSO SANTIAGO

for five years now and it is a very good experience. The moment that you hold the Antorcha, you feel all of the miracles that Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe helps bring about. You feel that she protects you in a very spiritual way," she said.

Daniela is a citizen of the United States and says she runs to speak out for those who are in this country without proper documents, but who have come here out of desperation, to feed their families, and to find a better life: "I want to get out there and show that we are here to do good, to accomplish our American dreams, and to help others accomplish theirs".

Daniela's mom Apolinar, the organizer of the St. Julia's part in this event, says this year's overall leader of the "International Guadalupe Antorcha Run" is Lucia Romero, 71, who lives in Mexico City. She has devoted herself to making sure that these gifts of Guadalupe make the annual journey north to lighten the hearts of her struggling people. Incredibly, Lucia trains for the journey by running marathons back home. While passing through our state, Mrs. Romero accompanied the Antorcha Run from Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Durham to St. Julia in Siler City. She then, guided the St. Julia messengers of the Antorcha on to St. Anthony of Padua Church in Southern Pines.

When they reached St. Julia, Lucia and the Durham group made their final quarter mile dash through hundreds of "papel picado" decorations and flags to the church doors where Pastor, Fr. Julio Martinez and hundreds of elated parishioners waited. As the St. Julia Youth Group waved national flags from all over the world in welcome, Fr. Julio accepted the burning Antorcha. A mesmerizing Aztec dance was performed by some practiced parishioners who called their dance group "Fe y Esperanza", "Faith and Hope". Exactly.

You may already know about Our Lady of Guadalupe. People everywhere know her as the Patroness of the Americas; North, South and Central; all of one piece under her care. Mexican Catholics have a particularly profound love for her and honor her as their affectionate and protective "Virgin Morenita". What underlies this devotion is the belief in Mother Mary's apparition in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill (in present day Mexico City), to a humble native peasant named Juan Diego. Mother Mary of Guadalupe herself appeared in the form of an indigenous woman, pregnant with the child Jesus, which made her even more intimately their collective "Madrecita".

The story goes that "La Señora de Guadalupe" asked Juan Diego to tell the Bishop to build her a temple on the hill where she

appeared, so that she could always know the humble people's needs and tend to them. Juan tried to convince the Bishop and failed. Days later, in the stark, flowerless month of December, La Señora de Guadalupe provided Juan "Dieguito" abundant roses to present to the Bishop as evidence that he had really seen and spoken with her. After a long, exasperating wait, all the while hiding the miraculous flowers within the folds of his cloak or "tilma", he was finally able to see the Bishop.

When Juan opened his cloak, the roses fell to ground. But the Bishop and his entourage barely noticed them, because before their eyes they saw a splendid image on the tilma where the roses had been hidden. It was the same image that you have probably seen on grocery store candles, T-shirts, pick-up truck windows and jackets: the Virgin Mary, indigenous, dressed in a blue/green mantle covered with stars. She wears a rose colored gown which is tied with a black ribbon, signifying her sacred pregnancy. She is not a god. Her hands are held together in prayer to a higher power.

And so, the Bishop believed Juan Diego, and the temple was built; then there was a basilica, and finally the modern Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe was constructed. The tilma was framed and hung above the altar where it remains to this day. Though made of finely woven cactus fibers, the cloak has remained intact for over 487 years. The image on it of La Virgen de Guadalupe is there for all to see and is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage destination in the world.

When, during the Antorcha Guadalupana Run, messengers from Mexico reach the U.S./Mexico border, they cannot cross with their beloved Guadalupe. Other messengers in the United States must reach across the line to bring the torch and the long awaited images of Saint Juan Diego and "La Virgencita" into the country. But, cross the border Our Lady does, and so far, no one has asked the Mother of the Americas and her humble peasant friend, Juan Diego, to see their papers.

On December 12th, you can find Jesenia and me on the road toward home at around six in the morning, buñuelos in hand, and still humming "La Guadalupana".

Audrey Bernier Schwankl and her family are parishioners at St. Julia Catholic Church in Siler City, a diverse community that works hard to live out the spirit of "Fe y Esperanza", "Faith and hope".