



# Voice of the Poor

## National Activity Report

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2012

### National Voice of the Poor Mission Statement

IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIAN LOVE AND JUSTICE, THE VOICE OF THE POOR COMMITTEE UPHOLDS CATHOLIC VALUES BY RESEARCHING, VALIDATING, DOCUMENTING, ADVOCATING, AND PROMULGATING ISSUES RELATED TO THE CONDITION OF THE POOR AND DISENFRANCHISED FOR THE PURPOSE OF HELPING VINCENTIANS TO LIVE THEIR FAITH BY ACTING KNOWLEDGEABLY AND CREDIBLY AS A UNIFIED BODY SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE FOR THE PURPOSE OF BUILDING UP THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

**Key National Indicators** (Note, this section is a placeholder for future key indicators-to be completed by 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, 2012)

#### Coverage & Growth

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coverage</b>
Regional Reps	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
Archdiocese Coverage		
Conferences Covered		

Highlights: Midwestern & Southcentral Regional Reps named

#### Education

	<b>Total</b>
Workshops Given	
Number of Participants	
VOP Articles	

Highlights:

- Completed VOP Video & Posted to Facebook Page
- Redesigned web site for completion in August
- One of three face-to-face VOP meetings held in St. Louis with 15 people in attendance

#### Advocacy & Effectiveness

<b>National</b>	<b>Total</b>
Alerts Issued	<b>3</b>

E-Mails Sent	
Action Taken	
Issues Won	
<b>State &amp; Local</b>	<b>Total</b>
Alerts Issued	
E-Mails Sent	
Action Taken	
Issues Won	

Highlights: Issued national alerts on

- Farm bill
- Social service block grants
- Payday lending

**Spirituality**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coverage</b>
Committees with Spiritual Advisors		
VOP/CST Reflections Issued		

Highlights: Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M. is National VOP Committee Spiritual Advisor

**Northeastern Region:**

**Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont**

Albany, NY (restructuring); Boston, MA; Brooklyn, NY; Buffalo, NY; Fall River, MA; Hartford, CT; Manchester, NH (inactive); New York, NY; Providence, RI; Rockville Centre, NY; Worcester, MA.

Submitted by **Joan Delaney**

- A modified organizational regional meeting was held in Providence, RI on June, 23 where I gave a brief presentation on VOP and distributed a packet of information to each diocesan council representative that included basic VOP ideas on advocacy, process, as well as excerpts from the Western Newsletter on civility in advocacy and bottom-up advocacy.
- We have liaisons in all diocesan councils. Additionally, a representative from Exeter, NH who was present at the regional meeting eagerly accepted the VOP packet.
- Activities from councils include:
  - **Providence** – “I am in the process of forming a VOP committee made up of myself, and two other individuals and with the Providence Council Executive Director as a resource person. We will use CAPWIZ as well as local resources to contact State senators and representatives. Our first meeting will be in July at which I will orient the members on the National mission statement and cover the guidelines you gave me last August” – Frank St. Pierre
  - **Fall River-** Cape and Islands is doing a “Housing with Love Walk” Our goal is for SVDP, Cape and Islands District to raise about \$90,000 to help prevent homelessness on the Cape and Islands” (Al Alfano) “For the past 19 years several organizations have banded together for a walk from Provincetown to Woods Hole to bring attention to the severe housing situation for those in need on Cape Cod. These

funds help Parish Conferences to provide assistance to those facing foreclosure or eviction. The Walk spans seven days. It starts in Provincetown on July 9 and ends in Falmouth on July 15" - Beth Rossi

- **New York City** – Pattie Hughes has told me that they have been involved in advocacy with other groups regarding budget cutbacks
- **Hartford** – Mary Acunto has told me that they have hired a social worker to deal with core problems of clients
- **Albany** – A new liaison for one conference has eagerly accepted the VOP role. She is in the process of publishing CAPWIZ information in her parish bulletin and coordinating with her conference president on future activities. When the diocesan council's restructuring is worked out, she would seem an ideal person to be the council liaison.
- **Worcester**- Both the council president and executive director attended the regional meeting and were positive about VOP. Hopefully they will be able to initiate some specific activity in the future as they have appointed a VOP representative.
- **Rockville Centre**- The diocesan council has conducted a letter/e-mail campaign against budget cuts for subsidized child care in Suffolk County. We have also expanded our own e-mail list and recently used it to pass on information regarding needed advocacy for the Farm Bill since potential food stamp cuts would affect our area.
  - We are preparing a VOP workshop on advocacy/systemic change for our September Rosalie Rendu training day. We continue to have VOP articles in our diocesan newsletter.
  - We now have liaisons or actual VOP committee members in 10 of our 53 conferences and continue to advertise for more conference representation.

### **How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?**

>Since one of the first activities that our diocesan councils pursue is having people sign up for CAPWIZ, we must continue to improve its efficiency and timeliness so that people receive it at least as quickly as they receive similar requests from other groups. It is pointless to expend energy urging registration if it is not going to be processed in a timely manner from National.

> Don't confuse advocacy with systemic change projects. The large-scale systemic change projects which are used as examples in National's presentation could be off-putting for diocesan councils who are having their own problems just surviving, raising funds, maintaining active memberships and pursuing existing programs and projects. Advocacy for systemic change is not the same as undertaking new projects and we shouldn't be unrealistic in systemic change suggestions. Since most councils are resistant to simple advocacy, we should rethink the extent of how their role in systemic change is presented to them.

### **What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?**

- On a regional level, I will continue to send e-mails, materials, and urge advocacy. The lack of response to electronic communication, however, is discouraging.
- On my own diocesan level, we will continue to expand our conference liaisons and e-mail communication and look for specific advocacy projects that directly affect the people we serve.
- **Summary** - The economy and budget cuts at all levels of government make advocacy for funding problematic. I plan on reminding liaisons that bottom-up

advocacy which better addresses their client's core problems can still be undertaken by councils/conferences by updating themselves on existing programs ( ESL, literacy, job training, etc.) and actively guiding clients to pursuing what already exists. There are also existing budgets for libraries and school districts (continuing education) which could be tweaked to better reflect the needs of the poor (job fairs, resume and interviewing workshops, ESL, GED, etc.) Vincentians must be educated to look at the core problems which cause need, whether it be for individual clients, an area or a nation. They must then decide what specific actions/advocacy are required to alleviate that need and be motivated to expand their concept of traditional Vincentian ministry toward VOP activity.

### **Eastern Region**

**Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia**  
Reported by **Lynne Betts**

We discovered something called a "Good Financial Standing Ordinance" in our town, which is supposed to mirror a County ordinance. It can create a problem for residents who are renters and have their utilities cut-off. If their landlord/landlady has outstanding debts to the town OR if they have other tenants who are delinquent on utilities, services will not be re-connected until ALL outstanding debts are paid.

Due to this ordinance, we have a chain of sad events re a particular resident.....& I suspect the cases due to this will be rising in the near future. I understand the intention behind this (trying to weed out slumlords), but am curious to know if it has actually been a beneficial ordinance. As a Vincentian, working with the poor, I am going to go downtown & request a couple of minutes on the Agenda of an upcoming Council meeting; with the mission of putting a face on the issue.

First, I will be doing some homework on what may be working in other areas to deter slumlords while protecting adequate/safe housing for low income renters.

\*Pay Day Lending & Title Loans have been at the forefront for a few months (particularly in DE & PA). HB289 was signed into law in DE, which mandates pay day lenders start using a database to track borrowers and puts a cap of 5 loans per year to be issued. In PA, where the interest rates were already capped, there was a push to allow rates to soar nearly as much as in DE. Follow-up from PA VOP is pending. The Center for Responsible Lending is an invaluable resource, and building relationships with allies is paramount (ie DE Community Reinvestment Action Council, Inc.).

\*Meaningful, good-paying jobs and affordable housing are items where we could begin sharing success stories in the region. For instance, were Vincentians active on local committees that were able to provide support for new businesses/employment or available housing?

\*The constant flow of Vincentian resources to energy/utility companies begs the question "what can we do, together, to help families reduce utility (especially electric) costs?"

\*Many VOP members have tracked Farm Bill activities and advocated for no cuts in SNAP (food stamps), among other things.

\*VOP groups have also been sharing stories related to immigration issues.

\*We enjoyed about 80 participants at the VOP session in Greensboro!

### **Midwestern Region**

**Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan (except Marquette), Ohio**  
Submitted by **Warren Wright**

1. Utilized regional email list to respond to action alerts from SVDP Capwiz, USCCB/CRS, and Bread for the World.
2. Columbus VOP Committee met every other month, with members of the Committee making local visits to Senators Portman and Brown, and Congressman Tiberi
3. Participated in Retreat Experience in Wadsworth, OH focusing on Ozanam as a Pioneer for Social Justice, the Two Feet, and the ART of Social Justice.
4. Local activities on transportation issues in Newark, OH.
5. Columbus members attended BREAD Nehemiah Action in May in Columbus, OH. BREAD action focused on projects to address jobs, health care costs, distributive justice, abandoned properties, and truancy.
6. District Council, St. Joseph County, IN (South Bend, Mishawaka, and surrounding area) did legislative advocacy using an e-mail network.
7. SB Executive Director, Charlie Thompson, expressed concern to the mayor's assistant that many houses were being demolished instead of being rehabbed so that low-income people might have a place to live. The mayor now has a committee careful to distinguish between properties that are beyond repair and which could and should be preserved. (Many of the houses we used to deliver food to have been demolished.) We also have a member who is interested in working on getting utilities to reduce their fees for reinstating service after it has been turned off. St. Vincent's often ends up paying these fees for the clients, because they can't afford them. So it costs us more. SB members continue to speak out on other smaller issues as they come up.

**How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?**

Legislative activities focused on creating a circle of protection around the poor by continuing to fund those programs that benefit those we serve. The Wadsworth retreat generated more VOP

interest among 20 people in the Cleveland diocese. BREAD activities continue to develop projects on the various issues that benefit those we serve. The South Bend activities speak for themselves.

**How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?**

Not sure at this time.

**What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?**

1. Continue regional outreach and use of email list for advocacy.
2. Participate in Midwest Regional Meeting in Louisville.
3. Continue to populate diocese/district contact list.
4. Get input from more dioceses/districts for this report.
5. Develop Regional Newsletter on a quarterly basis.
6. More local meetings with representatives.

**Midwestern Region**

**Colorado, Iowa, Illinois (Diocese of East St. Louis/Belleville only), Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Wyoming**

Submitted 6/24/12

Submitted by **Joseph J. Komadina**

Reported on activity at Regional Meeting in Belleville IL. Some confusion about national committee makeup. Regional pres. Said we were not necessarily regional reps any more since there was a change in the philosophy of selecting national committee members. Question: Is this something we work out with our district president, or do we have duties specified? Greatest reported activity was in St. Louis Council with the petition campaign to get limitations on Pay Day Loans on the Mo ballot in November. This fit in with national president's presentation on systemic change. St. Louis Council has one district which is actively involved with other regional entities in influencing local and state issues. Also has a program to get those helped in GED and job training programs along with ongoing voter registration.

**How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?**

Helpful to new attendees at regional meeting. Spurred interest in more action opportunities.

**How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?**

Practical ideas for implementation and identification of action areas.

**What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?**

**Work with regional vp for more input and correlation**

**South Central Region**

**Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas**

Submitted by **Frank Kiolbassa**

Archdiocesan Council in San Antonio voted to advocate for local city ordinance regulating payday and car title lenders. Ordinance is proceeding through City Council process. Archdiocesan Council is seeking Archbishop's support.

**Southeastern Region**

**Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee**

Area Covered by this Report: **Archdiocese of Atlanta Council.**

Submitted: July 6, 2012

Submitted by **Jack Murphy**

Our Spiritual Advisor, Deacon Bill Payne, has decided to step aside to begin a social justice effort at his parish. He has done a great job over the years of service to our VOP committee and he will be missed. We are looking for another Spiritual Advisor.

We continue to meet monthly and have several active projects:

Prepaid electricity-The committee discovered several Electric Membership Corporations (EMC's) the use smart meters to allow customers to pre load their electricity account, monitor their usage via phone or online, replenish it when needed, and have it remotely disconnected when the money runs out. The account can be reloaded when they get the funds. This approach eliminates late and reconnect fees, which is a big asset to conferences extending funds to reach more people in need. We documented the benefits to the utility and wrote and distributed a method for other conferences to "sell" the concept to their EMC. We asked for feedback and success stories.

BankOn-That effort seems to have fizzled out in Atlanta. There were a number of meetings but it seemed to have stalled when the bank representatives went back to their institutions to raise marketing and operating funds. During the discussion phases, we didn't really see much of a commitment to develop products and services to help low income people get back into the financial world and rebuild credit.

Microloans-Work goes all too slowly on this effort as we search to find a financial institution that has enough reach to be a resource to our 70 conferences. We met with Wells Fargo but they have very little regulatory flexibility to charge the low interest levels that we are looking for. However,

we did find an alliance of credit unions that may help us develop a template to take local credit unions that would meet our criteria. More to come on that.

The VOP Committee in Forsyth County, GA has created a template for collaborating with local groups in a suburban setting to advocate for affordable housing. They shared that with us at a VOP Advocacy workshop at our Spring to Life (STL), our annual Council meeting.

VOP also did a Navigating the Benefit Maze workshop at STL for 90 Vincentians.

Navigating the Benefit Maze was also conducted during Vincentian University.

Just about every time I speak to a group of Vincentians I ask about the root causes of the cases they see in home visits and the answer is almost always single parenthood. So we have begun a project to identify and catalog all of the resources available to single parents (child care, legal help, support groups, etc.). Our end product is expected to be a resource document to share with all conferences. However, we may also find organizations that need help with their advocacy issues. If the organization is in line with Catholic Teaching, we could partner.

We continue to meet regularly with the lobbyists for The Catholic Conference, The Archdiocese, and The United Way. Our discussions are around the prefilling of bills and looking for an issue we that would address issues close to Vincentians hearts that could be moved forward in the General Assembly. We also found a new potential collaborator in the co-founder of Community for Social Action at a Temple in Roswell, GA. This group is focused on issues that affect the poor.

**How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?**

Prepaid electricity and microloans could help current clients out of short term need and give them the skills/ability to better control their situations. At the same time, both projects give Vincentians more tools and resources to serve more people and move us further upstream in the cycle of need from direct aid to empowerment.

**How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?**

Nothing. The National Committee is perfect! (Ok, that's a joke, since I am on the National Committee. If you read this, please like our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Voice-of-the-Poor/147163592040872>.)

**What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?**

- Begin to formulate our legislative agenda
- Create details for microloans
- Push prepaid electricity
- Find a Spiritual Advisor
- Continue to teach NBM workshops to grow membership
- Find resources for single parents

Area Covered by this Report: **St. Luke Conference**, Dahlonega, GA Date Submitted: June 23, 2012  
Submitted by **Suzy Gruenhagen**

We have begun to focus on developing a better understanding of Systemic Change. After re-watching the video on the topic by the SVDP National President, Sheila Gilbert, we equated a systemic change in the manner pre-paid electricity accounts enabled clients to learn to manage their electricity usage.

Future activities will include using the "10-Minute Advocacy Exercise (distributed by VOP several years ago). Here Vincentians will attempt to discover underlying causes for assistance needs of selected client cases. As a follow-up we would discuss what we might do, as a conference, to alleviate any root causes.

**How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?**

We have just begun our activity.

**How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?**

Communicate to all conferences, councils, etc. what other entities are doing. Let's share all our good ideas.

**What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?**

Continue what we began for this quarter. (We had a late start.)

**Orlando Diocesan Council**

Reported by **Norm Stachura**, Annunciation Catholic Church Conference

VOP activity for the quarter: Our Orlando Diocesan Council has been focused on added new VOP coordinators in parish conferences. Currently, 13 of 25 conferences have VOP coordinators. Next, we have focused on getting VOP coordinators to get Vincentians in their conferences signed up for SVDP National CapWiz and our Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops ([www.flaccb.org](http://www.flaccb.org)) email action alert systems. All SVDP CapWiz alerts and Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops updates were circulated to all VOP coordinators and reminded to alert their conference Vincentians to the issues. We are also encouraging VOP coordinators to have VOP-related topics at each conference meeting to increase awareness, education, information, and to encourage prayer, discernment, and action on VOP issues. This past weekend we had our quarterly diocesan Council meeting with 75 attendees. We invited the director of the Orlando Diocese Office of Advocacy & Justice to speak to our Council about the USCCB "Faithful Catholic Citizenship", which is so important this election year, as well as the mission and activities of the A&J Department. The presentation was very well received. We also reiterated the two primary email alert systems that we are focused on in our diocese. All Vincentians at the meeting were reminded and given the sign-up addresses for the action alert systems.

**How did this activity help VOP?** The strategy and action described above is part of a continual process that should yield positive results over time. We are trying to communicate often, wide and deep with our Vincentians. Candidly, many of us are in a learning mode and trying to help each other. It will take some time, but we are making progress.

**How can National VOP help?** Keep up the good work, communication and encouragement. The National Office VOP website needs to be updated with more recent and current posting - -not older, outdated material. Finally, we need more specifics how VOP can support at the council and conference level the SVDP strategic goal to end systemic poverty.

**VOP plans for the next quarter?** Continue process of adding more VOP conference coordinators, increase sign-up up for the two key email action alert systems, and increase awareness of VOP issues at conference meetings, and encourage "Faithful Catholic Citizenship". Start exploring opportunities for concerted Orlando diocesan VOP action on one or more issues.

### **North Central Region**

**Illinois (except Belleville), Michigan (Diocese of Marquette only), Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin**

Reported by **Michael Stratton**

Waukesha County VOP is reading sections of Ruby Payne's "Bridges out of Poverty" and discussing at their monthly meetings. Waukesha continues to send a liaison to the monthly Milwaukee Archdiocese VOP committee meeting.

Milwaukee Archdiocese VOP continues to track the healthcare bill and how it will affect Badgercare participants here in Milwaukee. The committee took up the challenge to plan and implement a Vincentian awareness month, to take place in September. This was presented at each area meeting and the Milwaukee Archdiocese SVDP meeting in the Spring by Michael Stratton. There was an overwhelming support for the effort and was fully backed by the Archdiocese SVDP leadership. The newly appointed Auxiliary Bishop, Don Hying wrote a letter to all priests in the Archdiocese asking on behalf of the conferences to support their efforts to bring awareness to this great ministry.

North Central Region held it's first phone conference with Robert Kraig from Citizens Action to discuss the healthcare bill. There were 12 participants and the feedback was positive. It is hoped that this type of communication and information sharing will be a regular part of the NCR VOP.

### **Western Region**

**Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington.**

Reported by **Giulio Grecchi**

In February 2012, Brian O'Donnell, Western Region Vice President, nominated Giulio Grecchi, to be the Western Region's Voice of the Poor Representative on the National Voice of the Poor Committee, a position held for several years by Lucy Howell.

Giulio Grecchi is keeping his current role of Voice of the Poor coordinator for the Tucson Diocesan Council.

### **Voice of the Poor Western Regional Brick**

Similarly to other regional functions, Brian O'Donnell requested that a Brick (plan of action) be develop for Voice of the Poor in the Western Region. The Brick is articulated around three key priorities:

- **VOP Development**, including promoting the active presence of a VOP Representative and/or Committee within each Archdiocesan and Diocesan Council with the purpose of re-energizing existing VOP ministry, or establishing it where it does not yet exist.
- **Catholic Social Teaching Education** of Vincentians available to each Archdiocesan and Diocesan Council and to the respective conferences.

- **Advocacy:** encouraging each Archdiocesan and Diocesan Councils to be the Voice of the Voiceless, with the respective Local and State authorities. Through their respective VOP representative or committee, each Council will assess proposed legislation on whether it will have a positive or negative impact on the people we serve. Then, based on that assessment the Council will decide whether to support or oppose relevant bills, accordingly.

At the St. Louis Midyear meeting, the Voice of the Poor Brick was presented, discussed and approved by the Western Region Council members.

### **Voice of the Poor Training**

At the St. Louis Midyear meeting, the Western Region Council Presidents requested that specific Voice of the Poor Training be developed to educate existing and new Voice of the Poor Vincentians within each Council and/or conference.

A PowerPoint presentation was developed and will be introduced to the Western Region Council at the National meeting in Seattle at the end of August. The approach of the presentation is to explain Advocacy as a tool to address the needs encountered during Home Visits, thus tying work of charity and work of justice in one seamless continuum.

### **Voice of the Poor Regional Budget**

A budget of \$2,500, for the remainder of the fiscal year, was approved by the Western Region Council members during the June Regional Conference call, to cover expenses for attending National meetings and of possible visits to Councils in the Region.

### **San Francisco District Council Visit**

In May 2012, Giulio Grecchi, while in San Francisco, was invited by the President, Amy Love, to attend the local District Council meeting, where he had the opportunity to talk about Voice of the Poor. This Council will nominate a VOP representative in the near future.

### **Regional Voice of the Poor newsletter**

The existing Tucson Council Voice of the Poor monthly newsletter, which had been issued since June 2011, is now being released to the Western Region VOP circulation list. The approach of the newsletter had been broadened, beyond what is relevant for Arizona.

The newsletter is a teaching tool. The positions expressed in the newsletter on current issues are 100% in harmony with the positions supported by the US Bishops and by Papal Social Encyclicals. On these teaching clear documentation is available and is often quoted. In some cases, VOP has also developed position papers, based on the same Church's teaching.

Vincentians are invited to contribute to the newsletter by sending articles to Giulio Grecchi

***How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?***

The activities above are aligned with three priorities described in the Voice of the Poor Brick for the Western region.

***How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?***

Good communication and sharing of material and best practices is always very helpful.

***What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?***

Continue to work on the three Western Region VOP key priorities.

## LOS ANGELES ARCHDIOCESE

Submitted by: **Jim Weiss**

### ***Describe the Voice of the Poor activity:***

The Los Angeles Archdiocesan Council continues to support the actions needed to promote the needs of the poor both on a local and National level. These actions consist mainly of contacting our representatives both within the State and in the House of Representatives to urge their involvement in the support of issues that lessen the financial burden on the poor and promote the dignity of the most vulnerable. This is done in response to the alerts sent by National and other reporting organizations dedicated to the advocacy of the poor. In many cases our members are in direct e-mail contact with our National level representatives in an interactive correspondence.

### ***How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?***

There is no way of knowing that I am aware of.

### ***How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?***

For each issue requesting our support, the Committee could send along an easy way of filing our concern with those we wish to contact, i.e. set up a file of representatives by zip code and a selection method to forward that concern to the appropriate representatives along with a pre-drafted message acceptable to all on what is needed.

### ***What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?***

Continue doing what we have been doing.

## PORTLAND ARCHDIOCESE

Submitted by: **Maureen Sloan**

### **Payday Lending**

Oregon was successful in passing legislation about 4 years ago to regulate payday loans, and I testified on behalf of St. Vincent de Paul at that time. This year, I assisted the Boise Council on this issue, by answering a request from Kelly Anderson in Idaho and providing information to facilitate their fight against payday lenders.

### **Advocacy**

Responded to e-mails requesting to contact our Senators and Representatives on legislation before Congress. These requests have come from the Society, from the US Bishops, from Catholic Charities and from Network.

### **Meetings**

We have not held any Voice of the Poor Committee meetings this year, but in August I will attend a meeting of the Portland Archdiocesan Council, at the request of our Trustee Denis Maricle, in occasion of the visit by Brian O'Donnell, Western Region V.P.

I am the Society's representative on the Advisory Board of the Oregon Catholic Conference (which keeps an eye on State legislation). Later this year we will meet to look at pending legislation, other than what the Archdiocese's lobbyist brings to the table. Hopefully I can represent the cause of social justice in this way.

## **SAN FRANCISCO ARCHDIOCESE - SAN MATEO DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Submitted by: **Deborah Payne**

### **Feeding San Mateo County's Children**

Nationally nearly 32 million children eat lunch daily at school and almost 11 million eat breakfast. New nutrition standards for school meals, announced by the US Department of Agriculture January 25, 2012, reflect the first major changes in what schools serve children in more than 15 years. These new standards are found at

[http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2012-01010\\_PI.pdf](http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2012-01010_PI.pdf)

This is welcome news for us in San Mateo County where more than one third of students rely on school lunch aid. This volume of need is an indicator of economic well-being among families with school children in San Mateo County. For children to qualify for a free meal the family's annual income must be less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$29,000 for a family of four. To qualify for a reduced price lunch, the family income is up to 180 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$41,300.

"Enrollment in San Mateo County's public schools rose slightly in 2010-11, according to new figures released by the state Department of Education. The county had 92,097 students last year, compared with 91,371 the year before. Additionally, the percentage of the schools' minority youngsters continued to increase. The department reported that about 71 percent of the total public student body was nonwhite. The three largest nonwhite groups were: Hispanics, 36.8 percent; Asians, 11.9 percent; and Filipinos, 7.6 percent. Just more than 36 percent were enrolled in free or reduced-cost food programs. And nearly 20 percent were tabbed as being not fluent in English. For some perspective on the county's dramatically changing demographics, in 1970, the county's public schools had about 125,000 students, 95 percent of them white, according to county Office of Education data." —San Mateo County Times, 1/11/12 [http://www.mercurynews.com/john-horgan/ci\\_19721984](http://www.mercurynews.com/john-horgan/ci_19721984)

### **Payday Lending Grant**

Daly City Conferences continue surveying individuals and families to identify the payday lending situation. For the grant report, District Council's Jacqueline Carambat is investigating payday lending options. VOP's Deborah Payne is looking into the Society's Belleville Council work and how the Council provides an alternative to payday lending for those they serve.

### **Why We Need to be Concerned About California's Budget:**

(Information on the Governor's proposed budget is found at:

<http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/Revised/BudgetSummary/BSS/BSS.html>)

- **The Redevelopment Situation**

Last year California's 400 municipal redevelopment agencies were eliminated as a State cost-saving measure. Cities now are at odds with the State over how the redevelopment agencies are being dismantled. Los Angeles times story 5/30/12 <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-redevelopment-fight-20120530,0,7879329.story> According to the story, "if cities start defaulting... it will 'be disastrous not only for the [city] but for the entire bond market in the state of California."

- **Health Care Accessibility for Low-Income Children**

The governor's budget proposes to transfer nearly 900,000 children enrolled in Healthy Families, the State's Children's Health Insurance Program, to Medi-Cal – a program aimed at serving the state's poorest families, seniors and disabled residents. The impact of this transfer as it relates to simple access to the program for children living in California's rural areas is of concern.

- **Child Care Assistance Funds at Risk**

In Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed budget spending on child care and early education would be cut by \$517 million depriving 62,000 children of the opportunity to participate in these programs. Income eligibility limit for childcare assistance would be reduced from \$42,216 a year for a family of three to \$38,180 a year for a family of three. "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 2011 Report" by the National Association of Child Care Resource-Referral Agencies is found at

[http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default\\_site\\_pages/2011/cost\\_report\\_2011\\_full\\_report\\_0.pdf](http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default_site_pages/2011/cost_report_2011_full_report_0.pdf)

### **Restorative Justice**

San Francisco Archdiocesan Council board voted to ask National SVDP President Sheila Gilbert to support the SAFE California initiative, which seeks to abolish the death penalty. The California's Catholic Bishops support this initiative. Pope Benedict spoke in favor of eliminating the death penalty in December 2011. (<http://www.cacatholic.org>) SVDP National President Sheila Gilbert signed a letter in support of SAFE.

The SAFE California initiative submitted 800,000 signatures and now qualifies to be included in the November ballot. (<http://www.safecalifornia.org/>). We are now educating and encouraging Conference members to vote in support of SAFE. Go to the SAFE California website and the California Catholic Conference of Bishops website to download information to share. Community awareness, interest and education is needed.

**Signature Gathering Efforts for Parental Notification Initiative** (information contributed by John Murray - San Francisco Archdiocesan Council President)

The San Francisco Archdiocesan Council also supported, for inclusion in the November ballot, another life issue: the Parental Notification Initiative. However, this initiative did not collect the 807,615 valid signatures required to ensure that the proposed constitutional amendment could qualify for the November ballot.

### **ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE, KING COUNTY DISTRICT**

**Date Submitted:** July 16, 2012.

**Submitted by:** John G. Bergmann.

#### **Internal Activities**

Our Council has had a VOP committee in place for several years. At least one, and at times two, staff members have been on the committee, including Joseph Roberts and Stephanie Ragland. Vincentians are not generally inclined to serve on this committee. We have had occasional but not regularly scheduled meetings. The general topics of discussion have included pending legislation, working with other organizations such as Catholic Community Services, and participation in the Catholic Action Network. We have discussed pending legislation affecting those we serve, such as

the Housing Trust Fund, Disability Lifeline, and the Basic Health Plan. We discuss internally “Systemic Changes” and discussed how conferences on an individual level can identify such needs from the calls made to those we serve.

We have a column on our web site which provides general Information for Vincentians in the Council. It is entitled “Vincentian Advocacy – Voice of the Poor. It invites Vincentians to sign up to receive Action Alerts by email. Response to the sign up requests has been modest at best. We have made efforts to use this web site to provide legislative updates regarding pending legislation that may affect those we serve. Vincentians are encouraged to bring these reports to their Conferences. There remains little change in the number of Conferences with a designated VOP member. Our Council has meets quarterly. There is generally a VOP report to the Conference representatives present at the meeting. Occasionally handouts are available with items of current interest. Catholic Social Teaching is incorporated when relevant.

### **External Activities**

**Catholic Advocacy Day:** We encouraged Conferences to send representatives to the legislature on Catholic Advocacy Day on February 15, 2012 in our state capital in Olympia. The local IPJC organized the event, arranged for charter busses and guided us through the day. It began with Mass in Olympia celebrated by our Archbishop, J. Peter Sartain. We were briefed on issues regarding Economic Justice, Health Care and Housing. Because of the economic downturn and drop in tax revenue, basic programs for the needy, such as Housing and Essential Needs, the Basic Health Plan and the Housing Trust Fund faced total elimination or substantial reductions in funding. Several Vincentians travelled to Olympia to participate with a group of about 250 concerned Catholics. We met with our local legislators and addressed the importance of these programs to the poor we serve. All three programs were restored and put into the budget for the next fiscal year.

**Catholic Advocacy Network:** We attend quarterly meetings of this group which is currently chaired by a representative of the Washington State Catholic Conference. Participants discuss recent legislation affecting our clients, pending referendums such as Referendum 74 on Marriage, the Dialogue for Justice and its work.

### **How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?**

Please see the report above. We believe we were able to assist in keeping legislation providing critical help for the poor. We are trying to keep current on legislative issues affecting our clients. We are working through CAN to keep current on pending legislation, and other activities that will affect those we serve. We are working toward partnering as a Council with Catholic Community Services.

### ***How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?***

WE welcome your constructive criticism and suggestions to improve our help to the poor and disadvantaged in accordance with 7.2 and 7.5 of our Rule. We would appreciate directions from National as to what National expects of us with respect to VOP activity and Systemic Change.

### ***What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?***

Our committee will meet to review the Vision, Mission and Goals of the VOP committee that was adopted by our Council in August 2009. Our staff is extremely busy focusing on hosting the National Assembly this year. We will likely meet in September as a VOP committee.

## **BOISE DIOCESE**

Submitted by: **Kelly Anderson**

Our very young V.O.P. committee has been very busy. We have attended a Strategic planning retreat with C.C.I. (Catholic Charities of Idaho) and they are very happy to have us as a partner in working on legislative issues that affect the people we serve as Vincentians.

We will be attending a financial workshop with the Idaho Dept of Finance on credit and the use of credit for low income people, at the end of July. We are also continuing to follow up on the Payday Lending issue, with people who have been involved with changing the legislation elsewhere. We are working hard to make sure we will be ready when the legislature convenes in January. We will try again to present enough stories from loan recipients with negative experiences with these payday and title loan companies to have a chance at a 36% interest rate cap being put in place. This is the amount of interest they are legally bound to charge active military personnel (when identified as such). I.C.A.N. (Idaho Interfaith Roundtable Against Hunger) is another group working with the poor and very involved with getting this interest cap in place. We have come together with many like-minded groups, including the above, A.A.R.P. and Debt Reduction Services to share our strength, resources and names to attack this problem and bring fairness to an already uneven playing field for the poor.

We know there are many problems and issues that need to be addressed and we feel we can best help if we work on one issue at a time. We meet once a month and welcome prayers and partners. We have members from Holy Apostles, Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Good Counsel, and Sacred Heart. We welcome participation from all of our S.V.D.P. conferences.

## **PHOENIX DIOCESE**

Submitted by: **Ronald W. Meyer and Julie Douglass**

### ***Position Papers***

The VOP committee discovered that there are many issues which require explanation and education. In order to inform the Board of potential issues, it was decided to draft position papers for the benefit of the Board. The advantage is that the Board would have an opportunity to familiarize itself with the content of the issue and the factors affecting it. Furthermore, when the actual issue arises, the Board will already be educated and informed and can more quickly respond to the issue.

During the last year, two issues arose for which the VOP committee drafted position papers. The first involved the flat tax proposal. The statute was analyzed and materials were provided to show that, if not properly constructed, the flat tax would be very devastating to the poor and the working poor. The second area addressed the proposed TABOR legislation. This is an acronym to describe a spending formula to limit and curtail government spending. On the surface, it sounds plausible. However, upon research and examination, it was discovered that - while TABOR may look good on paper - the practical effect is the opposite because it removes any flexibility that the state would have toward budgetary challenges and the needs of the poor. Besides an explanation of the statute, information from Colorado was also provided. Colorado passed a TABOR bill in 1992 and found it to be very negative. The voters in the state passed a referendum in 2005 in order to modify the bill.

### ***Position on Bills Before the State Legislature***

The VOP committee tracks legislation that could affect the poor. There were four instances of legislation that were detrimental to the poor. With the approval from the Board, the VOP committee opposed the following legislation:

- SB1061 - This bill would have allowed Arizona schools to opt out of federally funded school lunch programs.
- SB1444 – This bill would have required schools to check the immigration status of all students.
- SB1445 – This bill required hospital employees to check immigration status of any patient who does not have health insurance
- SCR1030 – A spending control measure that would have been very restrictive and had the potential of hurting education and health care the most.

### ***Voter Registration***

It became apparent in talking with the lobbyists in Washington, D.C. that the key to influencing legislation is to show elected officials that voters are taking a position on particular legislation. One of the problems is that the poor do not vote and, as a result, there is no incentive for elected officials to listen to them. To respond to this problem, the VOP committee became active in fostering voter registration drives in parishes, thrift stores, and the dining room.

### ***Catholic Social Ministries Meeting***

The Diocese of Phoenix participated in the Catholic Social Ministries meeting in Washington, D.C. in February. All of the Senators and all of the representatives were contacted regarding the issues presented in Washington, as well as certain local issues selected by the Voice of the Poor committee.

### ***Action Alerts***

The Voice of the Poor committee was active in encouraging St. Vincent de Paul members to call their elected officials to oppose large cuts in the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as well as several local issues. While additional work has to be done on the network, the results were encouraging: the Action Alerts system is precipitating responses.

### ***Coordination with Tucson***

One of the highlights of the year was a joint meeting with the VOP committee in Tucson. Besides learning about each other's activities, there is going to be future coordination and collaboration on issues and programs.

## **TUCSON DIOCESE**

Submitted by: **Giulio Grecchi**

### **Internal Activities**

#### **VOP Committee**

Our Council has an active VOP Committee of four members, who generally meet on a monthly basis. The agenda of the meetings varies significantly depending to the priorities of the

moment. Discussion covers specific federal or state legislative issues of concern to the Council, for which Action Alerts are issued. Much time has been dedicated to figuring out how to move conferences from just providing assistance to people in need to look for long term solutions. Members of the Committee review the monthly newsletter, before it is issued providing comments and feedback, which often results in re-writing part of the text.

### **Executive Committee Meetings and Council's Board Meeting**

At every meeting of the Executive Committee (monthly) and of the Council's Board (every two/three months), member(s) of the Committee present a reflection on a current issue, tying the issue into Church' teaching, for information or for and eliciting support of Conferences, as needed.

### **Monthly Newsletter**

A newsletter has been issued every month, since June 2011. The newsletter is a teaching tool. The positions supported in the newsletter on various issues are consistent with the position of the US Bishops and those from Social Encyclicals, for which there is clear documentation available on the Internet. They are also consistent with the VOP position papers. These sources are often quoted. The newsletter normally includes a spiritual reflection. Contributions to the newsletter by members of other Council are very welcome, especially now that the newsletter is distributed across the Region.

### **External Activities**

#### **Co-Workers in the Vineyard**

Voice of the Poor participated in the Diocesan Conference, Co-Workers in the Vineyard, on March 15-17, 2012. The conference was organized for all who contribute the life the Church through their parish, school or affiliated organization of the Diocese of Tucson. The SVdP Tucson Council and Voice of the Poor had a table in the exhibit area of the Conference. Information about Voice of the Poor and material about social justice was distributed to participants. Names of interested people were collected .

#### **Local issues**

Members of the VOP Committee are in constant contact with other social justice organizations in the city of Tucson with respects to issues affecting the poor, children, elderly, immigrants (documented or not), and all of those served by SVdP. Recent local issues of concern included: bus routes and fares, funding of after school programs, funding of job training programs, immigration and deportation, etc.

#### **Action Alerts**

All National Action Alerts through Cap-Wiz have been forwarded to VOP membership and to all Conference Presidents for further distribution. Feedback as to the level of participation is unavailable or just anecdotal.

State Action Alerts were issued as well. These are relatively cumbersome for Vincentians to act upon as they can only be done by e-mail, after having identified the correct address for the respective State representatives. The help Vincentians, we usually suggest a text to be used and provide a link to the website that shows the representatives, based on the address of the constituents.

#### **Coordination with the Phoenix VOP Committee**

The Tucson and Phoenix VOP Committees have met in a joint meeting earlier this year to learn from each other and for ensuring future cooperation especially on common State issues. Tucson's VOP can benefit greatly from the knowledge and information shared by Phoenix on the State legislative agenda, as they have perfected an efficient way to gather and analyze relevant proposed legislation. The Phoenix VOP Committee has offered to represent the Tucson Council at the State Legislature. The offer was accepted.

***How did this activity help get people out of need, prevent others from getting into need, remove barriers to self-sufficiency, or generate more interest in VOP?***

Results and benefits to the poor by our activity are most often intangible or unquantifiable.

***How can the National VOP Committee better help your efforts?***

Best practices and new ideas are always welcome

***What are your VOP plans for the next quarter?***

The Tucson Council VOP Committee is planning to visit Conferences to provide training on VOP, with the goal of identifying a VOP representative in conferences of a certain size. These representatives will then be invited to join the Committee.

#### **OTHER DIOCESAN COUNCILS**

VOP of the **Orange, CA Diocesan Council** has been inactive during this period, due to unavailability of the VOP Chair, because of serious family health issues. When the new Diocesan Board will be installed as of October 1, a new VOP Chair will be nominated.

VOP of the **San Diego Diocesan Council** has been inactive during this period. The Diocesan President, Marlene Steffen, has been searching for a qualified replacement.

Nothing is known about VOP activities, if any, in the following Dioceses:

- Anchorage, AS
- Baker, OR
- Fresno, CA
- Great Fall – Billings, MT
- Honolulu, HA
- Juneau, AS
- Las Vegas, NV
- Monterey, CA
- Oakland, CA
- Reno, NV
- Sacramento, CA
- San Bernardino, CA
- San Jose, CA
- Santa Rosa, CA
- Spokane, WA
- Yakima, WA

