VOICE OF THE POOR PRAYER
Lord of all people,
During your time on earth you identified with the poor and instructed us to care for one another, for our neighbor and especially for the least of our brothers and sisters.
Be with us as we advocate for the poor.
Help us to persevere in joy and love on their behalf.
Add your voice to ours as we speak out for those who are not heard in our communities.
Guide us as we work, comfortable in the knowledge that we are doing your will for this day and time and place, and that you will take care of tomorrow.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, his Blessed Mother, our patron St. Vincent and our founder Blessed Frederic.
Ruth Zemek

REFLECTION: As we visit one more family in poverty and we hear one more story of hardship, as we assess their needs and wonder about what to do, it is common to feel unsure on how we can provide concrete help, beyond some initial assistance. So many families, so many needs..., so few resources available.

And, when we think further on how to address the problems that caused their poverty, where do we go for solutions? Whom do we talk to? Are there programs available that can help? Is the problem specific to this family or is it so pervasive that it affects many families? Is advocacy what we need to do? How do we go about it? How can we be their voice?

Seeking answers to these questions might lead us back to our prayer, when we said, “Guide us as we work, comfortable in the knowledge that we are doing your will for this day and time and place, and that you will take care of tomorrow.”

Doing God’s will for this day, time and place is what can give us the needed reassurance. Have we learned to listen to God’s will for our life and for our ministry for people in need?
EVANGELII GAUDIUM
(The Joy of the Gospel)
By Warren Wright, Columbus, OH, Mideast Region Voice of the Poor Representative

Pope Francis issued this apostolic exhortation on November 24, 2013. It consists of 288 numbered paragraphs: an introduction (p 1 -18) and 5 chapters: The Church’s Missionary Transformation (p 19 – 49); Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment (50 – 109); The Proclamation of the Gospel (p 110 – 175); The Social Dimension of Evangelization (p 176 – 258); and Spirit-Filled Evangelizers (p 259 – 288). Francis makes clear that we are all called to be evangelizers. Evangelization has individual as well as communal components. Everyone, including and especially the poor, needs to be welcomed into the community. We must be open to encountering the poor and letting them transform our lives. Pope Francis speaks out against an economy of exclusion, the idolatry of money, a financial system that rules rather than serves, and inequality that spawns violence. The poor must see their place at the table and help shape the decisions of society. Several excerpts on these elements are presented below for your reflection:

Paragraph 188 – The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset, which thinks in terms of community, and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by the few.

Paragraph 198 – For the church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical one. God shows the poor “his first mercy.” … This is why I want a church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but also in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way.

Paragraph 205 – I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, and the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset, which would help breakdown the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society.

Paragraph 220 – People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be. Let us not forget that “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in a political life is a moral obligation.”

Paragraph 272 – Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then we must constantly be missionaries. The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs.
GETTING INVOLVED

By Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, AZ, Western Region Voice of the Poor Representative

Those of us who are members of Homeowners Associations periodically get together in an assembly to make decisions. Perhaps, we even serve as officers. We are willingly taking these responsibilities; because we care about the place we live and want it run in an orderly, fair and efficient manner.

Some of us go a step further and serve in the local School District, Township Council, or County Board. The motivation is the same: care for the place we live. While still a part time occupation, this is a bigger commitment, sometimes but not always, compensated. Some stay for one of two terms to see a project realized or a problem resolved. Some seek re-election repeatedly, enjoying challenges and interaction with people. It is a balance between continuity versus fresh ideas.

Being part of these processes is important, both as citizens and as Catholics. One of the basic principles of Catholic social teaching is “Family Community and Participation”. The US Bishops comment: “The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.”

Seeking the Common Good is key for the quality of life in our local communities. However, these do not exist in isolation – decisions taken elsewhere impacts them. Most of us feel less comfortable with State and Federal governments. They appear distant, political and unable to compromise. The issues are complex and hard to grasp. Power and ideology seem to drive decisions, rather than the Common Good. Because of spin, it is not easy to get the real picture. Sometimes, we feel so disenfranchised and disgusted that we rather not get involved. But, not so fast…

"Politics is one of the highest forms of charity because it seeks the common good“-- is the answer that Pope Francis gave to a teacher, who asked a question about what kind of role Catholics should play in politics (June 7, 2013). The pope said that Catholics have "an obligation to get involved in politics. “ "We can't play the role of Pontius Pilate and wash our hands of it". He continued that those who complain that politics is "too dirty" should ask themselves why. Perhaps, it's "because Christians haven't gotten involved with an evangelical spirit. “ It is easy to blame others, but instead people need to ask themselves: "Me? What am I doing about it?"

So, do we leave the decisions that affect everyone up to the politicians?

Being involved with public life and serving the Common Good is considered a “virtue” by the Church. As Catholics, we have the advantage of a well-developed body of social teaching that clearly outline the positions that are consistent with our Faith and Scriptures. We stand for life and justice, far beyond any liberal or conservative positions and our involvement in public life has nothing to do with current partisan debates.

Voice of the Poor is the ministry of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul that deals with public life. Voice of the Poor Vincentians analyze the issues, build expertise in advocacy and on influencing outcomes. Under their guidance, every Vincentian can be the Voice of the Poor.

For more information about Voice of the Poor, click on: http://www.svdpusa.org/Resources/VoiceofthePoor.aspx
To get involved write to voiceofthepoorwr@cox.net
On January 5, 1914, Henry Ford made the dramatic move of doubling the wages of his automobile factory workers to $5 per day. At that time in the US, there was not a federally mandated minimum wage for employees and Ford was experiencing big problems with absenteeism and turnover. In addition, his company was making huge profits and he could afford the pay increases. A natural outcome of his largess was that he created a new pool of buyers for his automobiles.

Did this move make Henry Ford an enlightened employer or a shrewd businessman? Can a business leader or an organization be both?

In their book, *Conscious Capitalism, Inc.* Whole Foods Market cofounder John Mackey and professor Raj Sisodia offer examples of companies where these seemingly opposite viewpoints are found to be mutually compatible. An organization can be profitable and a benevolent employer. Companies such as Whole Foods Market, Southwest Airlines, Costco, Google, Patagonia, The Container Store, UPS, and dozens of others, according to the authors, are examples of companies that benefit customers, employees, suppliers, investors, and society.

Catholic teaching, from early writings of Frederick Ozanam, to modern encyclicals, has supported the view of these authors, particularly in light of the spiritual value that work brings to the worker.

"Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, 'anoints' us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts..."
- Pope Francis, Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, 5/1/13

There are two national position papers on the Voice of the Poor web site dealing with wages (http://www.svdpusa.org/Resources/VoiceofthePoor.aspx).

One of those papers deals with society in general. When you read the paper, it is clear that SVdP supports a wage that recognizes the dignity of the individual. The national Voice of the Poor committee is studying various proposals to increase the minimum wage and will likely take the issue to our national Board later this year.

However, discussions about minimum wage, the least amount of money that an employer can pay to comply with the law, seems to miss an important point in Catholic teaching -- does it bring dignity to the worker and those that he or she supports?

And, when the dust settles after the debate, none of the proposals being discussed will truly lift someone out of need and dependency.

The chart below shows that, even if there are two wage earners employed in minimum wage jobs in Georgia, their annual income, before taxes, barely puts the family above the poverty level.

This family would still qualify for several public assistance programs in Georgia. Keep in mind that we are talking about gross income. The family still needs to find affordable housing, pay for transportation, medical expenses, childcare, clothing and other normal living expenses. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute just released a study on poverty in our state. They estimate that it takes more than $50,000 in annual salary for a family of three to live without public assistance.
Obviously, simply earning $7.25 an hour, or even $10 or $11, will not get a family on the path to self-sufficiency. We certainly need to study and increase wages for the lowest paid individuals in the US. However, we must do that in the short term, by finding a fair wage for wage, and in the longer term by finding more enlightened employers who understand that “The economy should serve people, not the other way around.” Economic Justice for All, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, USCCB 1986)

That is why the national Voice of the Poor Committee has updated its very first position paper, which deals with just wages for Society employees, using the term self-sufficient wage.

As noted on the Washington University web site, “The Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the amount of income necessary to meet basic needs (including taxes) without public subsidies (e.g., public housing, food stamps, Medicaid or child care) and without private/informal assistance (e.g., free babysitting by a relative or friend, food provided by churches or local food banks, or shared housing).”

Our goal, once the position paper is approved by our leadership, is to make sure that The Society is one of those enlightened, conscious employers. We certainly must put our house in order before we go pointing too many fingers at other employer’s wage scales.

Everything we do as a faith-based organization should be developing our personal spirituality. Whether it is home visits, volunteering to sort clothes or cans of food, or driving a fork lift—we should conduct our business in a way that reflects our values. The same should be true about the way we employ people.

WALK IN A CLIENT'S SHOES

Do you know what it is like to live on Minimum Wage? Could you do it? Why not try and see? Go to the website below, select your state, and see how you make out:
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/09/opinion/minimum-wage.html?_r=1

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY STATISTICS

By Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, AZ, Western Region Voice of the Poor Representative

Fifty years ago, in the State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared “war on poverty”. A few months later, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which had the aim of attacking the roots and consequences of poverty by creating job opportunities, increasing productivity, and enhancing the quality of life - not just ending poverty, but eradicating the main causes of it.

In the decade following, poverty rates in the U.S. indeed dropped to their lowest level since records began in 1958: from 17.3% in 1964 to 11.1% in 1973, when the Office of Economic Opportunities was dismantled by President Nixon (although a number of programs were saved and became part of other government agencies).

Unfortunately, negativism and mistrust prevailed over a constructive criticism that could have made a successful program more effective and efficient.

Constructive criticism is something that we should expect from the minority party and acceptance of this criticism something that we should expect from the majority party, no matter which of the
two is in charge. The Common Good depends on it. Instead, cooperation between the two parties on matters that are truly important for the American people and the economy seems to have been quite elusive over the last 50 years. The trend has been “either my way” or “no way”.

The consequences of these choices are still being felt. According to the Census Bureau, 46.5 million Americans are now living in poverty, years after the 2008 recession ended. The average national poverty rate is stuck at 15%. For the first time since 1965, it has remained at or above 15% three years running. Within this rate, depending on the local economy, there are vast disparities. Poverty rates are the lowest in the intensely populated North East corridor, where much of the national wealth is concentrated and a lot higher elsewhere. In Tucson, AZ, the sixth poorest large city in the US, the poverty rate is at 20.4%.

These are the official published poverty rates. How do we arrive at these rates? We calculate them from the official poverty level of income, still defined today as three times a low-cost food budget for a 1960 household, updated annually for inflation and adjusted for the number of people in the household. Anyone living in a household with less income is officially in poverty.

What income is considered? The Census Bureau explains: "The official poverty definition uses cash income before taxes and tax credits (Earned Income Tax Credit) and excludes capital gains and noncash benefits (such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, Medicaid, Section 8 housing assistance and other benefits). These benefits are what makes life more bearable for people in poverty and their survival possible. Thankfully, when adding all the non-cash benefits, the resulting income of most recipients arrives at or just exceeds the official poverty level.

When one considers that the official poverty level is set at such an unrealistically low level that would never allow self-sufficiency, this seems a meager consolation.

As explained by Jack Murphy in his article above, self-sufficiency allows a family to meet basic needs (including taxes) without public subsidies (public housing, SNAP, Medicaid or child care) and without private/informal assistance (free babysitting by a relative or friend, food from churches or local food banks, or shared housing).” As an example, he cites a study that estimates that it takes more than $50,000 in annual salary for a family of three to live without public assistance, versus the official poverty line for a family of three of $19,790.

Yet certain economists and politicians, looking at how non-cash benefit can raise people at or above the poverty line claim that there is no poverty in the US and continuously push for drastic cuts in those very benefits who barely provide some relief.

This is clearly a self-serving ideological position that completely disregards any evidence of what it takes to bring people to self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, this position has strong financial backers and the mistrust that it creates is pernicious for public assistance programs.

As Vincentians, we need to use the stories of hardship that we hear during home visits to counter this position as much as we can.
A CHALLENGING FUTURE

Concrete, practical education that provide the skills necessary for holding a good paying job, especially in manufacturing, is a necessity that not only will help to end poverty, but it will ensure a future for the US economy.

The current unemployment crisis, income disparity, outsourcing of skilled jobs overseas have common causes, the deterioration of education standards in the US, a shift in demographics and ultimately a shift in the global competitive environment.

Lee D. Lambert, the new Chancellor of Pima Community College (PCC), addressed these issues during a workshop for the community to collaborate with PCC in establishing its future direction, this past February.

“In the 21st century, as globalization and technology accelerate change in higher education, we need to build a strategic plan that can yield measurable benefits for the community and our students”, Chancellor Lambert said. “We know that such a plan cannot be formulated without incorporating the insights of the community we serve”.

“Certainly, PCC is overdue for change. To take a phrase from Intel Corp. founder Andy Grove, the College and the nation are at a “strategic inflection point,” a time when major shifts are taking place in the competitive environment. Though the United States remains the greatest nation on Earth, there are cracks in the foundation. The American Dream – the inter-generational covenant that children, with hard work, can be more successful than their parents – is in peril.

Demographic shifts are compelling new directions in higher education, especially at community colleges such as PCC. In the U.S., 78 million Baby Boomers are heading toward retirement. Their replacements in the current and future workforce are some 48 million Americans ages 14-24. Compare that with 450 million young people in India and 420 million in China, two nations whose young people are overtaking young Americans educationally. The U.S. cannot remain competitive if our children cannot succeed in school and the workplace. Jobs will go where the best employees are.

The education gap has been well documented. U.S. 15-year-olds are falling behind the rest of the world: We are 26th in mathematics, 21st in science and 17th in reading. For adults, the numbers are equally bleak: 21st in numeracy and 15th in literacy, including digital literacy, the ability to use online resources information gathering and problem solving. This is especially important because 77 percent of U.S. corporations use online resources to train workers, and one-third of U.S. college students are taking at least one online course.

Globalization is also forcing major change. Ninety-five percent of U.S. companies’ potential consumers live outside the U.S. One in six U.S. jobs is tied to trade; in some states, 40 percent of jobs are trade-connected. Americans need to be aware of other societies, for the simple reason it’s smart to know what your competitors are up to. Yet, as has been documented by the Abraham Lincoln Commission for Study Abroad, only 20 percent of Americans hold passports.

These factors are behind the inability to fill some 4 million jobs in the U.S., with the problem particularly acute in manufacturing: Sixty-seven percent of the National Association of Manufacturers report shortages of qualified workers. The American Society for Training and Development reports that 84 percent of its members say they have difficulty finding
work-ready employees, who often lack the so-called “soft” skills: communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving. The mismatch also is evident in that only 27 percent of college graduates are hired for a job related to their major.

**Community colleges are uniquely positioned to train the workforce for middle-skill, living-wage manufacturing jobs that can form the core of stable, prosperous communities.** But they need to do better. Pima Community College needs to do better. Tucsonans are acutely aware of the consequences of living in the sixth-most impoverished city of its size in the U.S. I repeat: We need to do better.”

These comments Chancellor Lambert are echoed by the Voice of the Poor position paper on “Education”:

> “We must rethink the objectives of America’s educational system. Practical training programs that put people back to work and educational fundamentals leading youth on the path to gainful employment after graduation are critical.

America must invest in the education of its least. It is a matter of investing now or paying much more later”

(http://www.svdpusa.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=TDoKaMqLW-o%3d&tabid=236)

David W. Barringer, National CEO of the Society, adds, “As Vincentians we understand that much of poverty is multigenerational. Thus to break the cycle of poverty, sometimes we need to focus on the children and their education, their choices and their decisions.”

It all makes logical sense, yet, here in Arizona and in other states as well, for the sake of reducing taxes, we have cut funding of education, which resulted in crowded classes, underpaid teachers, limited educational equipment and closing of schools. State funding of education in Arizona went from 6,165 million in 2007-2008 to 4,407 million in 2012-2013, a decrease of almost 30%. What outcomes do we expect from this type of policy decisions?

Furthermore, all of this is happening in a period when demographics are not in our favor.

Children now are a smaller proportion than ever of America’s population (24% now, 26% in 1990 and 40% in 1900), even with a boost from immigrant families. This trend will continue, and the share of population over age 65 will increase from 13% today to about 20% by 2050. The increasing cost of caring for an aging population will reduce even further the resources available to care and educate children.

Add to that our archaic immigration system, which discourage needed legal immigration, exacerbating the situation further. These are the demographic facts:

**The U.S. birth rate is declining:** Western nations have not been replacing themselves through births. Among the US born population the fertility rate is 1.93 babies per woman of childbearing age. When immigrants and naturalized citizens are factored in, the rate goes up to 2.1. But, 2.2 babies per woman of childbearing age is the rate considered necessary for a sustaining population.

**Mexico’s demographics are also changing:** As Mexican population shifted from rural to urban areas in the last 3 decades, the fertility rate dropped from six to 2.5 children per childbearing woman. We are already feeling a large drop in the supply of low-skill labor from Mexico (T-bird, 2008), not because border enforcement, but because of demographics.

*Railroad on the migrant journey*
According to the Pew Foundation: when the US economy grows at 3% per year, it creates around 500,000 new jobs. The U.S. population will not meet this need. Over the past periods of growth: legal and illegal immigration helped providing both workers and consumers to drive the service economy and helped supporting the Social Security system. Now, US and Mexico demographics, border enforcement and lack of reform facilitating immigration, will prevent the worker supply to be there, if new growth occurs.

In conclusion, the future of the US will be bleak, unless dramatic changes take place, including generous funding of education and a sensible immigration reform.

**WHAT HAPPENED TO SNAP?**

After the conference agreement that House and Senate negotiators reached towards the end of January, the Farm Bill was finally able to make it through Congress, and it was signed into law by President Obama on February 7.

The bill cuts SNAP benefits by $8.6 billion over 10 years, by increasing the threshold at which persons receiving the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) may receive SNAP benefits. There are about 850,000 SNAP households, who also participate in LIHEAP. For these households, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bill will reduce benefit levels by about $90 per month. The SNAP benefit reduction from the Farm Bill follows an approximately $11 billion cut in benefits that took place on November 1 of last year.

On the other hand, the bill increases the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and it includes funding for new pilot programs to help people secure employment through services, such as job training and new incentives to help veterans start agriculture businesses.

Assistance for food banks has also been increased to help with emergency food needs and rural development initiatives have been strengthened to upgrade infrastructure and create a better environment for small businesses.

Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, commented: “While we are disappointed that the final compromise continues to call disproportionately for sacrifices from hungry and poor people in this country and around the world, especially when large industrial agricultural operations continue to receive unnecessary subsidies, we are glad to see support will continue for domestic and international nutrition and development aid, rural development and conservation,”
FROM THE WESTERN REGION

WASHINGTON

TWO CLIENTS - Generally, help with car repair, or anything else that has to do with cars, is not the kind of thing that we at SVdP do. That said, I disagree with the concept of helping folks remain poor. I would prefer to help them do whatever they need to do to get out of poverty, rather than give them fish, help them to become fishermen, so that they can fend for themselves. Dan and I are working with a young woman at this time and we are helping her with gas for her car, so that she can go to her new job every day and receive her first paycheck. There is another woman, who is also likely to need her car to get to work and to need clothes for work. It seems to me these kinds of things fall into the “helping them to become fishermen” category and are along the line of positive action to help them get themselves out of poverty. I would expect the Holy Father would wonder why we are even considering not helping these folks become fishermen.

On a larger scale, think about how most of the social and human services systems are set up – they are set up in a way that tends to keep the poor, poor. Originally set up to provide real help, most of them have settled into providing assistance upon which the poor have come to depend. And, when the government’s ability to provide that assistance falters due to budget cuts, the poor are in even direr straits than they were previously. These systems need changing. For Vincentians, who want to do something about these things, the way to do it is to become involved with the Society’s Voice of the Poor efforts. Given the Holy Father’s personal preference for the poor, I would expect that our own Vincentians would fully understand that VOP is more than just politics. Advocacy for the poor and the elimination of poverty should be a personal imperative for us all.

Reported by Jim Bloss, Snohomish, WA

OREGON

I was asked by a teacher at Queen of Peace Catholic grade (1-5) school to speak at an assembly of the student body about St. Vincent de Paul Society on Thursday, February 27.

The children will be receiving their “Rice Bowl” boxes before Ash Wednesday. They will put their own money into the small boxes. Part of the money collected will go to the Queen of Peace St. Vincent De Paul Conference.

We have two great grandchildren who are students at the school in kindergarten and 5th grade. Our shy great grandchildren did not want me to mention their names in my talk.

I was to talk to the student body about the history of St. Vincent, the history of Frederic Ozanam and his formalization of the SVDP Society, its introduction into America in St. Louis Missouri and spread to Oregon.

Since my 11-year-old great granddaughter had accompanied my husband and me on two visits with our clients, I was able to describe how important her being with us was to our clients. She helped us pack a bag, including her favorite stuffed toy for a woman whose husband had been deported to Mexico, while she was in a Salem Hospital. When she got home, she had been evicted. Her husband owned a home in Mexico and called to have her join him there, so we bought her a bus ticket and accompanied her to the bus depot and waited with her until she departed.
On another visit, we were asked to meet a woman and her husband at the Department of Motor Vehicles to purchase an ID card for the woman who was developmentally disabled and needed the card for benefits. We were told in advance that her behavior might be unpredictable, so we gave our great granddaughter a “heads up”. The woman was wearing high heel shoes on the wrong feet and immediately showed them to our great granddaughter asking her, “How do you like my shoes”? Granddaughter said, “They look nice”. The lady said,” I have them on the wrong feet”. Granddaughter said,” Are they comfortable?” The woman said, ”Yes, that’s why I wear them that way”.

While I obtained the lady’s birth certificate from the DMV clerk, my husband and our granddaughter chatted amicably with the woman and her husband until it was time for her to have the photo taken. The husband thanked us for assisting them.

We told the student body that 100% of the money we receive goes directly to assist people in need. Also described how sometimes children go home to find the electricity shut off with, no lights, and no TV until the parents can find assistance.

Our great grandchildren thought the talk was well received and that the kids were more inspired to donate. Many of our Vincentians have incidental teaching moments where we can influence others to have a better understanding of the needs of the Poor. This opportunity that we were given was a blessing to us.

Reported by Mary Beal, Salem, OR

CALIFORNIA

On February 15, we were invited to speak to the Sacramento Deacons (about 120 attendees), and the presentation went well, including some information on systemic change and VOP. I developed a handout from the Vincentian Family Gathering training I attended and from other resources.

Speaking to Diocesan deacons about Voice of the Poor and systemic change

Also, on February 6, I had a chance to go on Catholic radio to talk about Voice of the Poor. My comments are about 35 minutes from the start of the program. I talk about a charity walk and then Voice of the Poor.

http://ihrarchive.org/archive/sbh-20140206.mp3

Reported by Paul Starkey, Sacramento, CA

IDAHO

Voice of the Poor in Boise, Id has worked closely with Catholic Charities of Idaho, which we consider our mentor when we advocate at the legislature.

In February, we attended a hearing by the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee of the Idaho legislature, where VOP member Frank Monasterio, Vincentian from Mountain Home, ID testified on Medicaid Expansion.

He shared facts and figures on how detrimental not expanding Medicaid in Idaho will be both in terms of lost economic opportunities and of lost lives.

The legislative liaison from Catholic Charities, Christine Tippetts, told us that, being this an election year, we probably will only see action next year, in spite of the minority leader John Ruishe wanting Medicaid expansion to happen this year.

On March 4, Voice of the Poor Vincentians attended another senate committee hearing where Frank again testified, this time against Senate bill 1314. This bill, sponsored by Sen. Heider, allows lenders of Payday Loans to charge interest rates
and fees, with no limitations and the loans to be rolled-over three time. We provided data in opposition to this bill because it is virtually "toothless" on protecting the families that we try to assist.

The bill was defeated by a vote of 4-3. Then, after the hearing, a committee member told the chair that she felt she had voted incorrectly. So, a reconsideration hearing was scheduled (very unusual procedure). When they reconvened, they only discussed among themselves, with no testimony taken, and they voted in favor of the bill. Now it will go to the full senate for consideration. To counter this decision, on March 7 we went to the Capitol and distributed to each senator in their mailbox a copy of our fact sheet with the reason for our opposition of the bill, in the hope that they will read it and understand our reasons, so that we might be able to testify again before the full Senate.

Voice of the Poor also supports raising the minimum wage here in Idaho. Again, there will not be any action in the legislature this year, being an election year. We can only hope for this to happen in 2015 and it will probably be a staggered step bill.

Next year we will probably work again hand in hand with Catholic Charities and other involved citizens groups here in Idaho and hopefully make an impact in a positive way for those we assist.

I feel that we have made ourselves known for standing for the poor at the Capitol and each time is a new learning experience. Our Voice of the Poor Committee has four members from four different parishes and each one brings an open mind and the desire to work for the poor in an area where the poor are seldom if ever seen, except when brought by a group such as ours to share their stories. We pray that we can make a difference. Each time we speak on behalf of the poor, we step out in faith. Please keep us in your prayers as we go forward.

Reported by Kelly Anderson, Boise, ID

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ARIZONA

SOUTHERN ARIZONA -- Issues related to Immigration continue to take front stage for Voice of the Poor Vincentians, whether they advocate for Immigration Reform, or protect families at risk of separation, or facilitate their visa applications.

Arizona Speaks - On Nov. 21, 2013, thirty Vincentians, including the entire Tucson Council Board and many Conference Presidents, joined Bishop Kicanas, religious leaders of many denominations, plus business, civic, education, healthcare and law enforcement leaders in an assembly in support of Immigration Reform. This was just one of four simultaneous assemblies across Arizona. Overall, four hundred leaders in Phoenix, Yuma, Sedona and Tucson signed a declaration in favor of Comprehensive Immigration Reform, which was sent to the Arizona Congressional Delegation and published in local newspapers.

San Pedro Pilgrimage - On January 26, Tucson VOP Vincentians helped in organizing a pilgrimage in solidarity with migrants at the San Pedro Chapel. Participating were people of various faiths communities including parishioners from Catholic churches in Tucson and students from San Miguel High School and members of St. Francis in the Foothills Methodist Church, St. Philip’s in the Hills Episcopal Church and of a Mennonite community. They gathered to trace the journey of migrants through the Arizona desert. Father Ron Oakham, O. Carm., pastor of St. Cyril Parish, led the 50 people who attended through the five stations, remembering the suffering of migrants: the hard decisions to leave the native countries, the hardships of their travel, the need to stay in the shadows, once arrived at their destination, and farce trial called Operation Streamline.

Reported by Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, AZ

PHOENIX -- Three members of the Phoenix VOP traveled to Washington, D.C. February 2-5th to attend the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. Issues discussed with our Senators and Representatives were encouraging immigration reform and minimizing cuts to nutrition and other safety net programs to those in need. The VOP members were received positively in the offices that they visited, which was very reassuring.

In Arizona, we have contacted our state representatives regarding the car title loan industry. We are monitoring any bills that would strengthen these businesses in Arizona, as this could adversely affect many families we serve.

Another area that we are focusing our attention on is recruitment of conference representatives. We have 12 districts in our council and plan to assign two districts to each VOP member for recruitment purposes. We will contact each conference president to encourage him/her to nominate reps and promote VOP in their conference. We are currently retooling our VOP brochure. This will help in many areas... including VOP being included and emphasized in the Ozanam Formation Training classes.

We also have been monitoring the growing wait times required at our local DES Department of Economic Security offices for those wishing to sign up for SNAP, AHCCCS health insurance and other benefits. Many families have reported that they have to arrive as early as 4AM in order to beat the long lines and ensure getting an appointment. We have been told that this problem will subside as the back log of submittals goes down. However, we will continue to spot check in the next month to determine if this is indeed the case.

Reported by Julie Douglas, Phoenix, AZ
Parish Social Ministry Regional Training in Oregon

*Opening a Horizon of Hope: Transformed by Christ to Love All*
*April 4-5, 2014*

**Sponsored by:**
- Catholic Charities USA
- Archdiocese of Portland
- Catholic Charities of Oregon
- Archdiocese of Seattle
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- Catholic Relief Services

**For more Information:**
Evelyn Brush  
**Archdiocese of Portland** - 503-233-8328  
ebrush@archdpdx.org

Tina Baldera  
**Catholic Charities USA** - 703-236-6233  
tbaldera@catholiccharitiesusa.org

Resurrection Catholic Church -- 21060 SW Stafford Rd., Tualatin, OR  97062

**Parish Social Ministry**
*Parish Social Ministry* is the parish’s living witness to the Gospel through a community working for service and justice to the born and unborn, to the poor, the vulnerable, and the voiceless.

**National Keynote Speakers**
- Joan Rosenhauer, Catholic Relief Services
- **Sheila Gilbert, St. Vincent de Paul**
- Candy Hill, Catholic Charities USA

**Workshops and Presenters:**
Moving from Multitude to Community, From Anonymity to Communion: Fr. John Kerns, Pia de Leon  
Pope Francis, Young Adults & the Social Mission of the Church: Panel  
The Holy Spirit Speaking to Us Today: Gifts of Unity and Diversity: Jesús Huerta, CRS  
Poverty and Economic Inequality: Sheila Gilbert, St. Vincent de Paul, Candy Hill, Catholic Charities USA  
Models of Collaboration: Christine Smith, CC of Idaho, Scott Cooper, CC of Spokane  
Why Fair Trade? Joan Rosenhauer, CRS, Heather Moline, CRS

**Registration** $60 registration fee includes speaker fees, materials, Friday evening Lenten soup supper and Saturday Fair Trade Coffee and lunch.  
**Registration Deadline: March 28, 2014**  
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-solutions/ events
Date: Friday/Saturday, May 30-31, 2014
Check in: Thursday May 29, 2014 3:00 PM
Location: Hilton San Diego Airport/Harbor Island
1960 Harbor Island Drive, San Diego 92101
619-291-6700

Meeting Registration: $75 per person.
Checks payable to: Society of St Vincent de Paul Western Region

Hotel Registration: $125 per night (Deadline April 27) at 800-445-8667 (SVdP Group) or online at:

Shuttle from San Diego Airport
Thursday May 29th 3:00 PM
6:00 - 8:00 PM – Meeting Registration:
Meeting Reception

Friday May 30th
7:00 AM - Rosary
7:30 AM - Mass
8:00 AM - Breakfast on your own
9:15 AM - Western Region Strategic Goal Workshop – Update
10:30 AM - “RULE” - Interactive Workshop
11:45 AM - Box Lunch Provided with Registration
1:00 PM - “RULE” – Interactive Workshop
4:30 PM - San Diego Night, hosted by San Diego Council
5:30 PM - Dinner on Your Own

Saturday May 31st
7:00 AM - Rosary
7:30 AM - Mass
8:00 AM - Breakfast on your own
9:30 AM - Western Region Business Meeting
11:00 AM - Dismissal

Questions: Steve Jenkins sjenklink@aol.com phone: 602-266-0526 Ext 22

Mail registration form & check to:
Society of St Vincent de Paul SVDP - Western Region Event
c/o Steve Jenkins - 1501 W. Amelia , Suite #102
Phoenix, AZ 85015-6164