

Voice of the Poor Success

Frank Barrios, diocesan board member and VOP participant, continues to work with Phoenix Councilman Greg Stanton and the Arizona congressional delegation requesting the return of a fair share of federal dollars for low income programs to Arizona. Two of these programs are Section 8 housing vouchers and LIHEAP (low income heating and energy assistance program). Following last summer's record heat and a doubling and even tripling of requests to Conferences for help with electric bills, Frank and Society president, Steve Jenkins, sent letters to Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt and every member of the Arizona congressional delegation describing the need for additional emergency assistance in Arizona. As a result of this request, an additional \$440,000 was sent to Arizona for emergency utility assistance. Voice of the Poor was heard!

Help Low Income Families Get the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

Julie Douglas, St. Thomas Apostle Conference member and VOP participant had the following experience at a VITA site last year:

Last year members from our Conference accompanied a client to a VITA tax preparation site. What we saw amazed us! Our client had expected to receive around \$700 in income tax refunds. Through the able efforts of the VITA volunteer tax preparer, they received over \$3,400. (In other words, our client would have LOST \$2,700 if they had filed their own return!) The VITA volunteer who assisted us was extremely

qualified. He was the retired former CFO of a local Fortune 500 company. He was able to electronically file the return which meant the family would receive their refund in an expedited fashion – 3 to 5 working days!

Many low income families go to fast cash establishments for loans against tax refunds! They PAY for tax preparation that is FREE at VITA sites and forfeit additional funds in fees subtracted from their tax refunds.

You can help in two ways:

- (1) **Make sure your Conference knows about the VITA sites** for free tax preparation. Call Information and Referral at 602-246-3500 or go to www.cir.org for locations.
- (2) **Volunteer to become a VITA site tax preparer**, coordinator, screener or interpreter. No experience is necessary. New volunteers will be trained by the IRS. Contact Margie Coggins with Information and Referral at 602-263-8845 or contact her at mcoggins@cir.org.

It's Not Too Late

Thank you to the 20 Conferences who have submitted their responses to the VOP Conference Issue Survey. If you found your Conference survey at the bottom of the pile, please submit it ASAP to Lucy Howell at Howishome@aol.com. There will be a summary next month.

The next VOP meeting will be on Monday, December 17 at 3:30 in Vincentian Support Services.

Meetings are open to all. Agenda items should be submitted to Howishome@aol.com.