

Report from Voice of the Poor
Western Region
2/25/08
Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering
Washington, D.C.

The Western Region Voice of the Poor currently has representatives in Seattle, Spokane, Portland, Eugene, Central Oregon, Rogue Valley, OR, Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, AZ, Billings, MT and in CA: San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Mateo, Orange County, Bakersfield, Sacramento and Alameda.

We look forward to the Western Region Meeting in Boise, Idaho June 19-22, 2008.

Special welcome to Maureen Sloan of Portland, OR, Julie Douglas and Frank Barrios of Phoenix, Jim Gauntt of Seattle and Eileen Butera of Tehachapi, CA who are “first timers” to the CSG from the Western Region.

From the Archdiocese of Portland:

Maureen Sloan reports that the e-mail network is coming together. Concerns expressed in the Portland area are the inadequacy of food stamps and lack of food at local food banks. Homelessness and lack of affordable housing are also mentioned. Lack of funding for all day Kindergarten and affordable day care are issues impacting single working mothers. A reduction in logging in Oregon has had a ripple effect in the economy, particularly as a source of state revenue.

Oregon VOP was successful in passing payday lending legislation in that state. Don Lamb has worked with Billings' VOP on this issue.

In the effort to reduce poverty, Oregon VOP has done a lot of e-mailing to Congress to support low income housing funding through HUD, asked for increases in food stamps and more food for low income families (both part of the Farm Bill), Eugene SVdP has provided 32 units of low income housing for vets.

From the Diocese of Phoenix:

Our VOP network requires constant monitoring as people change providers and Conference presidents and VOP reps come and go. Inge Casey of our VOP Core (8 or so who meet monthly) has taken charge of the network. Julie Douglas has been calling new presidents as well as Conferences with no VOP and has had a great deal of success. Other core members have been to district meetings to make the direct appeal for participation. We have a “Welcome to VOP” e-mail that is sent out to new members along with “Conference VOP Job Description”. We have 250 on the VOPNET in central and northern AZ including community groups who have asked to receive our information. (This has taken 7 years!)

Arizona has serious budget problems and this legislative session will be primarily devoted to the battle over how to balance the State budget for 2008 and 2009. We have a few issues at the legislature (payday loans followed by Kathy Jorgensen, housing by Frank Barrios and Walt Gray and immigration by all of us) but will mostly be playing DEFENSE against proposed cuts to general assistance, the housing trust fund, rolling back eligibility for S-CHIP (known as KidsCare in AZ). Based on an issue survey of our Conferences last fall, Vincentians report areas of most need are (1) affordable housing (2) health care and (3) utility assistance. (While we are in D.C., three of us will be meeting with the lobbyist for the City of Phoenix regarding additional Section 8 vouchers and LIHEAP funding).

We are very, very fortunate to have as one of our core members, Father Bill Fitzgerald who is our spiritual advisor and last Saturday gave a retreat with an emphasis on Voice of the Poor and immigration for 75 Vincentians. Be sure and get a copy of Father's homily "A Parable for Our Time" this evening. We are especially grateful for the participation of Ron Meyer, a past diocesan council president, who is with us this evening and has given us a strong voice for Voice of the Poor.

From the Archdiocese of Seattle:

Jim continues to work very hard to bring Vincentians into the VOP fold. Jim and Seattle Council President, Joseph Roberts, have brought forward three important issues to consider as SVdP moves forward with Voice of the Poor:

- (1) The need to focus on Vincentian spirituality as a means to help make the connection between charity and justice as promoted by Voice of the Poor and
- (2) The very special role that Home Visits can have in forming the Vincentian understanding of the need for justice.
- (3) The need to incorporate Voice of the Poor in Ozanam Formation training so that advocacy is not seen as an afterthought by Vincentians.

Sister Kieran Kneaves is working on a Voice of the Poor workbook that addresses these issues.

From the Archdiocese of Los Angeles:

Council President, Jim Weiss, reports that he is still looking for a Voice of the Poor chair. In spite of his duties as president, Jim has continued to communicate with CA congressmen regarding the needs of the poor. Father Pedro and Jim are hoping to organize an area caucus to convince Speaker Pelosi of the need for funding for programs for the poor. The Council has pledged \$1 million and challenged the Administration for matching "Faith Based Initiative" funds for affordable housing for the poor.