

*Voice of the Poor*  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Report from the Western Region  
Everett, WA  
June, 2009

Lucy Howell, Western Region VOP Chair  
Phoenix Diocesan Council

**Western Region VOP E-mail Network:**

Voice of the Poor continues to grow! There are **98 contacts** on the regional network currently. This includes Vincentians in Washington, Oregon, Montana, California, Idaho, Hawaii and southern Arizona (Tucson). This is a mixture of VOP representatives at the Council, District and Conference levels.

**Have you and your fellow Vincentians registered for CapWiz?**

Cap Wiz makes it very easy for your voice to be heard at the national level whenever there is an **ACTION ALERT** from the SVdP National Office and President Joe Flannigan. It is highly likely that alerts will be coming during the debate on healthcare and on immigration reform once it is introduced.

Sign up for CapWiz by taking the following steps:

- Go to [www.svdpusa.org](http://www.svdpusa.org)
- Click on "Voice of the Poor" (under Joe Flannigan's picture)
- Scroll down to CapWiz E-mail Sign Up
- Follow the directions and you are signed up!

Alerts will not come regularly but are dependent on what is happening in Congress. 7,000 Vincentians have signed up – our goal is at least 10% of our membership or 12,600!!

**Report from Marin County:**

Steve reports that he has signed up for CapWiz, the California Legislative Network and information from the California Catholic Conference and regularly passes information on to his board.

**Collaboration in Marin!** The SVdP Marin County District Council is a member of the MOC (Marin Organizing Committee) and successfully advocated this year for

additional shelter space. The Council is also a member of the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, hosting a "Business After Five mixer at their dining room in June. A local neighborhood association had their board meeting at the dining room, part of community outreach of the SVdP mission.

**Youth participation!** Local high school and university students and Dominican University Campus Conference helped with voter registration, worked the polls and advocated for registration changes to eliminate discrimination to the homeless. Youth were also involved in a letter-writing campaign for additional shelter beds and a medical respite program. Outreach and internship for two classes at Dominican University (Catholic Social Teaching and Social Justice) by creating a youth conference that does home visits with mentors.

Steve Boyer, Executive Director

### **Report from SVdP Seattle Archdiocese Council VOP:**

Jim is looking forward to seeing all of you in Everett. His council VOP committee is working on a Mission Statement and a 3 year plan. Each of the 5 committee members are being encouraged to collaborate with at least one other like-minded community organization.

- Seattle/King County District Council is meeting with our Catholic Community Services regarding affordable housing and homeless services.
- Snohomish Council is conducting a Council-wide Needs Assessment to determine overlooked areas as well as avoid duplications.
- VOP members rotate through Archdiocesan Council Meeting and Washington State Catholic Conference Meetings.
- Hopeful that Archdiocesan Council will be able to help VOP representatives attend the annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering.
- Looking into alternate forms of communication (Skype, Wiki) that will save commute time for VOP.

Jim Bloss, Seattle Archdiocese VOP Chair

### **Report from Lucy Howell, Phoenix Diocesan Council VOP:**

#### **State Budget nightmare continues:**

Hopefully there will be agreement on the 2010 Arizona State Budget by the time you are in Everett. While the vast majority of states are finding this to be a terrible budget year, Arizona is in the unenviable position of having the highest deficit per capita of any state. The legislature and governor have been battling over how to close the gap for 2010 and in the future. The legislature believes that continued cuts in programs (including education, healthcare, child care, child protection) is the way to go while the governor has stepped out in front of a small

tax increase to minimize cuts. Voice of the Poor and the Phoenix Diocesan Board are behind the governor's position as less harmful to Arizona's poor.

### **VOP visits the Kino Border Initiative**

In May, 7 members of Voice of the Poor made a round trip to Nogales, Sonora, to observe first hand the bi-national mission serving recent deportees. Jesuits of the California Province, Mexican Province, the Diocese of Tucson and Sisters of the Incarnate Word are operating the KBI as a humanitarian and educational mission. An average of 250 meals are daily served from a tiny soup kitchen. There is a small shelter for women and children who are at grave risk upon deportation to Nogales.

Voice of the Poor is planning a presentation in Phoenix on Sept. 20 featuring Jesuit Father Pete Neeley talking about the mission and the stories of those served. We are working on publicizing this program to as large an audience as possible.

Lucy Howell, Phoenix Council VOP

### **VOP Report from Billings, Montana**

The Billings District Council has been concentrating this legislative session on payday loan and SCHIP legislation.

On February 5<sup>th</sup> the Montana Catholic Conference hosted a "Catholic Advocacy Day" at the state capitol in Helena. Randy Heinz attended and was able to create new relationships with like-minded groups from the Helena Diocese which covers the western part of Montana. Billings is in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. Randy also met with several groups within the Great Falls-Billings Diocese who were unfamiliar with the true mission and workings of the Society and the Voice of the Poor.

January 2008 we celebrated the installation of a new bishop and our Executive Director, Harry Merchant, arranged for members of the Billings District Council Board of Directors to meet with Bishop Michael Warfel and his Excellency expressed strong support for the Society and especially the work of the Voice of the Poor Committee. The Bishop urged us to work to expand our outreach to more of the surrounding communities. He has also pledged to support us through prayer and fiscally as soon as he has a strong handle on the Diocesan finances.

We continue to ask our Diocese and the Montana Catholic Conference to send representatives to the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering and we may have them in the near future.

Tom Landry, VOP Chair

Randy Heinz, SVDP Staff