

# **Grassroots; St Vincent de Paul Help Close the Gap Between The Under-Represented and Civic Participation**

On Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, representatives of the Grassroots Leadership Network met with representatives from St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall in San Rafael to discuss the difficulties that the St. Vincent de Paul diners have been experiencing at the polls over the last few years. In the meeting Cris Jones Director of Volunteer Services for St. Vincent de Paul provided us with well documented evidence detailing a number of problems that clients of St. Vincent de Paul have encountered at the polls dating back to 2004. Among the problems were: In 2004 St. Vincent de Paul registered 50 voters. However, when they arrived at the polling location listed on their registration verifications none were listed on the rolls. Also, while those same folks were offered provisional ballots, they felt that they were not treated by the poll workers the same as other people at the polls on that day. In 2005 many of the same problems occurred and led to the clients of St. Vincent de Paul becoming disenfranchised with the voting process that led to extremely decreased participation by the under-housed community in 2006.

As a result Cris provided us with recommendations that they feel would make voting easier for the under-housed community. Those recommendations were brought before Marin County Registrar of Voters Elaine Ginnold by Grassroots on Friday May 25<sup>th</sup>. The suggestions and results from the meeting are listed below.

## **Recommendations:**

- Can homeless individuals in San Rafael use Ritter House as their mailing address?
- Can we have a polling place closer to St. Vincent de Paul and at a location that the diners feel comfortable?
- When someone has to fill out a provisional ballot can we have them at a table that is not near the entrances so they do not feel rushed?
- Can we have some kind of group to oversee voter registration with the under-housed individuals in Marin County?

## **Results from Meeting:**

### **Ritter House as a mailing address:**

The Registrar of Voters said that this is something they really are committed to fixing. We told her how a good number of the under-housed are veterans and she thought it was criminal that they (as well as the other folks) did not have the opportunity to have their voices heard.

She provided Grassroots with a list of places (mostly shelters) that they have changed from the business listing to be able to be used as residence. However for some reason, Ritter House is not able to be converted in the system. But don't worry! She said an easy fix to that problem is to have anyone who wants to use Ritter House as their mailing address to simply list the corner of

3rd and Ritter as their residence. We feel it is important to note that the Registrar of Voters mentioned that this is not the protocol that the Secretary of State prefers, but she knows that the solution prescribed by Sec State simply doesn't make sense and is the reason for your prior problems which she is committed to remedying.

**Can we make the polling place closer to St. Vincent de Paul?**

The Registrar of Voters says that there is (and if there is not there will be) a polling place at the community center located at 809 B Street. However, the Registrar of Voters is currently looking into hosting a polling location at Vineyard church on B Street in San Rafael. This is a location that the diners would feel the most comfortable in.

**When someone has to fill out a provisional ballot can we have them at a table that is not near the entrances so they don't feel rushed?**

Simply put-Yes, they will be moved to a more out of the way area. The Registrar of Voters says the provisional ballot table will be located in a polling booth from now on.

**Is there a way we can have a group oversee voter registration with homeless individuals and can there be sensitivity training for poll workers?**

1) As for the oversight on voter registration with the under-housed Grassroots recommended that having St. Vincent de Paul on both the Election Advisory Committee as well as the sub-committee for Voter Education and Outreach to Low Income Individuals and Communities would help achieve that end. This would be the appropriate group that would oversee such operations and she said it would be extremely helpful to her if St. Vincent de Paul can provide a representative

2) Based on the documentation provided by St. Vincent de Paul the Registrar of Voters says that there is clearly a need for sensitivity training and will certainly be included in this year's poll worker trainings.