

Voice of the Poor National Meeting

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Hyatt Capitol Hill

Washington, D.C.

February 23, 2009

www.voiceofthepoor.org

The meeting was opened by Lucy Howell, Voice of the Poor Western Region Chair. Lucy gave out copies of the Ozanam Lecture, 2007 from St. Vincent de Paul Society, Melbourne, Australia "Love & Politics: The Revolutionary Frederic Ozanam". This compelling lecture was found and sent to Lucy by Mike Syslo.

Ed Vogel, Mideastern Region Chair, led a participatory prayer composed for the occasion by Father Bill Fitzgerald, VOP member from Scottsdale, AZ.

Ron Meyer, National Committee member from Phoenix, AZ, welcomed those present, especially First Timers. There are 90 VOP committees working across the country, 18 members on the National VOP Committee serving 8 regions. 7 members of the National VOP Committee are present at this meeting. Ron mentioned that among the handouts available at the meeting is a statement about the stimulus package emphasizing the importance of the safety net programs for the nation's poor.

Joe Flannigan, National SVdP President stated that for every \$1 spent to help the poor, \$10 is recouped in benefits. Joe spoke of meeting with New Jersey Governor Corzine and because of his work with St. Vincent de Paul was able to share stories of the impact on single mothers of some of the TANF provisions. Because of the Society's members as "boots on the ground" in the war on poverty, we are able to tell the stories of the needy. VOP has a role at the national level using the expertise and great staff at Catholic Charities who follow issues on Capitol Hill impacting the poor. *If only 10% of the 130,000 SVdP members in the U.S. become involved in Voice of the Poor, we could make a tremendous difference on how legislators vote.*

A VOP resource now available for use both by Conferences and parishes is the Voice of the Poor Workbook with video and DVD available for purchase from the national office. (www.svdpusa.org Click on "Shop").

Roger Playwin, National Executive Director, spoke about the great resource Voice of the Poor has in Ron Meyer. Ron has made a standing offer to travel to regions to give training to help get VOP off the ground. Another tool is CapWiz – an electronic alert program that will come to those who sign up for it by e-mail. It makes contacting members of Congress very easy with pre-drafted messages sent automatically to members based on your zip code. The messages come directly from the sender. Currently the Society has 7500 signed up for Cap Wiz but the goal is to reach far more. Offices of elected officials frequently tally responses – for and against on issues - Cap Wiz offers a very easy way to have your message counted. A

handout was distributed on how to sign up for CapWiz . Participants must be members of SVdP and registered on the site – it is a quick and simple process. Go to www.svdpusa.org , click on Voice of the Poor and scroll down to “Cap Wiz”. Roger acknowledged the presence of many Daughters of Charity and stated that they will soon be able to participate in the SVdP Voice of the Poor Cap Wiz program.

Roger also recommended two books now available from the national office: “Faces of Holiness” by Father Maloney, C.M. and “Seeds of Change”, actual stories of systemic change. Go to www.svdpusa.org and click on “Shop”.

Reverend Sean Carroll, S.J. spoke about the newly inaugurated **Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico**. Two years ago, in response to the immigration issue, Jesuits of the California Province discussed the idea of a ministry on the border between CA and AZ. After a time of reflection and discernment with Jesuit Refugee Services in Washington, D.C., the initiative was planned with three components: (1) Offer humanitarian assistance to deportees – currently 200-300 meals are served daily to deportees as well as clothing and pastoral support offered. The initiative has a very small apartment which is a shelter for women and unaccompanied minor children at risk of abuse (2) The education component offers education and advocacy efforts for high school, college, pastoral leaders and visiting scholars. (3) The effort is bi-national between the two countries consistent with who we are as a church family. Information and a short video about the Kino Border Initiative on the JRS Website: www.jrs.org Scroll down on the left hand side and click on Kino Border Initiative.

The initiative is a binational effort between the Jesuit Order of the California Province, the Diocese of Tucson, the Diocese of Hermosillo, Mexico and two orders of sisters.

Voice of the Poor Regional Reports facilitated by Barb Slaven and Dotye Sue Stanford:

Jim Woods (Eastern Region) announced the Eastern Regional Meeting would be held in Emmetsburg, MD 6/6-6/7. It will feature a VOP workshop given by Mary Watterson as well as workshops on governance and annual reporting.

Ed Vogel (Mideastern Region) noted that donations are down with store receipts down nearly 30%. Kentucky has had a tough winter with the recent ice storm and closing of several plants. VOP is coordinating their response with other providers of safety net services. There are 19 VOP committees in his region.

Joan Delaney (Northeastern Region) Joan of Rockville Center, Long Island, N.Y. and spoke of the impact to the New York economy caused by the trouble on Wall Street. Only state-mandated social service contracts are currently being honored. Donations to their stores are also way down. Of their 54 Conferences, only 9 have reported having problems serving the poor. Joan fears that they have not yet seen

everyone in need. The Northeastern Regional Meeting will be held in Rhode Island in June.

Alan Fulton (North Central Region) Alan is focusing on education about Voice of the Poor with their members. They are working hard on getting started.

Bart O'Leary (Southeastern Region) reported that they are visiting people in Florida that they don't normally see. Hours have been cut back as a result of decreasing donations. Only 3 states in his region have Catholic Conferences. They are emphasizing Voice of the Poor as part of Ozanam School. Bart is a formator.

Barb Slaven (Midwestern Region) reported that VOP Nebraska anticipates a big boost in interest with the recent coordination and joining hands with the NE Office of Catholic Social Justice.

Michael McCann (Archdiocese of Milwaukee) reported that Voice of the Poor continues work on immigration. Milwaukee now has a housing trust fund due to efforts by Voice of the Poor. A VOP member serves on the board of a local utility committee, a decision-making body when utilities are not being paid. Milwaukee VOP also has a payday lending committee. Michael McCann recommended a resource who led the Ohio campaign against payday lending.

Janet Deckenbach (Archdiocese of Chicago) Janet is working with district presidents to collect e-mail addresses for Voice of the Poor in order to encourage people to sign up for Cap Wiz. There is a large concern in the Chicago area that if the Olympics are awarded to Chicago, residents in older, poorer neighborhoods will be displaced.

Handouts (as attachments to these minutes):

Ann Dibble, Archdiocese of Seattle, spoke about her handout on common sense approach to mortgage counseling for those facing **foreclosure**. She pointed out the HUD website which is a resource for reliable information in all parts of the U.S.

Hot Topics, updated by VOP National Chair, Deborah Payne. A rundown on several topics significant to VOP and those we serve and resource references. Can be used when visiting congressional offices.

VOP Council Reports in writing from Randy Heinz (Billings, MT), Joan Delaney (Rockville Centre, NY), Maureen Sloan (Archdiocese of Portland, OR), Jim Bloss (Archdiocese of Seattle), Lucy Howell (AZ Budget Cuts Report to the Phoenix Council). Also given as a handout – a church bulletin announcement from St. Charles Parish, New Jersey submitted by Mary Watterson on contents of the stimulus package related to the safety net.

Voice of the Poor Resources: Lucy Howell outlined the Voice of the Poor Basic Workshop and Appendix as a useful resource for those wanting to start a VOP. It can be found at www.voiceofthepoor.org, click on "VOP Information" and scroll down. The workshop and appendix are highlighted in yellow. Also available from national are copies of the poverty video and the VOP Workbook written by Deborah Payne and Sister Kieran Kneaves (www.svdpusa.org, click on "Shop"). Lucy also talked about a successful recent workshop in Phoenix called "Navigating the Benefit Maze" – local providers of federally funded programs were invited to come and update interested Vincentians. They brought hand-outs. We thought there might be 40 attending and ended up with 140! This was a very easy and successful program and could be used as a way to get started. Finally, National Committee member, Ron Meyer, is available to speak and offer Voice of the Poor workshops regionally. He asks that his hotel and registration be covered but he will pay his own airfare.

The meeting was closed with Father Fitz' participatory prayer led by Ed Vogel. Intentions mentioned included Deborah Payne and her mother.

SAVE THESE DATES – 2009 MidYear, Regional and National SVdP Meetings

April 22-25	St. Louis, Missouri
May 15, 16	South Central Regional Meeting (Houston, TX)
May 21-23	Southeast Regional Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
May 28-30	North Central Regional Meeting (Baraboo, WI)
June 5-7	Eastern Regional Meeting (Emmitsburg, MD)
June 12-14	Northeast Regional Meeting (Providence, RI)
June 16-18	Mideast Regional Meeting (Cincinnati, OH)
June 18-19	Midwest Regional Meeting (Dubuque, IA)
June 24-27	Western Regional Meeting (Everett, WA)
September 1-5	SVdP National Meeting (St. Louis, MO)

**ANNUAL CATHOLIC SOCIAL MINISTRY GATHERING – FEB. 7-10, 2010
Washington, D.C.**