

Welfare Reform
Notes From the SVDP Western Region
Seattle, Washington - June 21-25, 2000

The Honorable Frank Chopp
Democratic Speaker of the House

Representative Frank Chopp is Co-Speaker of the House. He is a lifelong Washington resident serving his third term in the State Legislature as the representative of the 43rd Legislative District, and he Co-Chairs the Legislative Rules and Executive Rules Committees. Representative Chopp told the audience that as a teen a Vincentian, who was his teacher, influenced him. In addition to serving in the Legislature, Representative Chopp is president of a non-profit community service organization that assists thousands of people annually.

Welfare Reform should be judged not on the number of people off the welfare roles but on the number lifted out of poverty, said Representative Chopp. Legislation often punishes the poor rather than taking steps to lift the poor out of poverty. He described a “mob mentality” about bashing in groups of people. It is important to fight back against anger and ignorance and advocate.

Sometimes it is hard to see the face of poverty. For example, people with learning disabilities can learn read. In that same way, by discovering the cause and changing the way one learns, an individual can be lifted out of poverty and their life can be changed.

Turn a welfare check into a paycheck through community jobs. When the mindset is a paycheck rather than a welfare check there is a change of attitude. Give someone a job and treat it as a welfare check and go so far as to take unemployment and FICA deductions from the check. The key is not to isolate but to bring into the mainstream.

Bits of wisdom from Representative Chopp.

1. “Love is to Share”

2. “Act on Faith”

A – Awareness not anger

C – Clarity not cynicism

T – Truth

O – Organization

N – Need (What is it)

F – Focus

A – Advocacy

I – Inspiration (What brings tears to your eyes.)

T – (Initial of a Chopp family member) For us “T” - Testimony” i.e., tell the story

H - Health