



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Galveston-Houston Archdiocese

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Dear Archbishop DiNardo

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has as a part of our mission the ability to provide services to the members of this community who are experiencing difficulties. With this in mind, we recognize that the survivors of hurricane Katrina are currently a part of our community and therefore, the Society has committed to continue to provide service to them as our resources and overall funding will allow.

These services have included Case Management for Long Term Recovery and Direct Assistance which includes furniture, clothing, food, shelter, transportation; rental, utility and medication assistance, life skills and career development programs, all of which depend on the resources available at the time of need. In 2006 the Society provided Katrina Survivors with over \$2million in services and direct assistance.

In keeping with our organization's mission, these services are provided through our SVdP Home Visits. Our Case Managers who we call Family Advocates visit these individuals and families daily in their homes, listen attentively to their needs and sufferings, render emergency assistance and provide them with resources to meet the challenges they face. Confidentiality has always been important to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul ministry and our confidentiality policy strongly respects the right of privacy for our clients. Our process of sharing their information with outside agencies with capabilities to assist them in their time of need strictly follows the laws pertaining to the Privacy Act and Hippa. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul works diligently to do our best to ensure that there is no duplication of services, however we recognize the needs of those we serve may go beyond what the Society has available, such as professional services and additional funding. In these cases it is necessary and healthy for both the Society and our clients to partner and collaborate with outside agencies who can respond with additional resources to better serve the individuals and families who are struggling in their recovery. Currently our list of collaborative partners include several different service organizations throughout the many counties in our community.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has served as an active member of the Houston Long Term Recovery Committee since its inception, offering our support in shared resources and providing the LTRC with our Family Advocate teams in their days of outreach to the community. In April 2006 a memorandum of understanding was written by SVdP and accepted by HLTRC (United Way governing) which made possible our participation on this committee without jeopardizing our strict confidentiality policies.

With all of this said, the Society asks for your prayers as we face a challenge that threatens to jeopardize our mission, values and genuine service to our neighbor. A new rule was recently mandated under United Way's governance of the Houston Long Term Recovery Committee. This rule states that all members of the HLTRC must turn over to United Way on behalf of the HLTRC all confidential client info and files regardless if the individual's case was brought to the HLTRC. Up until now the Society under the protection of the MOU has given HLTRC a weekly report with aggregated data – protecting the clients we serve. In cases we bring to the HLTRC Unmet Needs Committee the Society has provided all

client data so as to obtain for our clients the necessary resources awarded to them by the committee. This system has allowed the HLTRC to obtain additional funding for the Unmet Needs Committee. The committee was able to obtain this funding by the large volume of clients they reported which was a total of all member agencies. Of the 9,000 clients the HLTRC reports having – 14% of them are from SVdP. The HLTRC was awarded these funds for direct service using aggregated data not confidential information.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul does not understand the need for confidential information of all of our clients served to be given to HLTRC to be handed to United Way purely for statistical reasons. They insist that this new client data requirement is to ensure there is no duplication of services. However steps to insure this have already been in affect since January 2006. The Society through our UMCOR/Katrina Aid Today partnership shares in a national database system that protects our clients while maintaining good duplication of services control; It also recognizes that recovery requires a comprehensive approach with many agencies all providing different services for the same client. We have been given no good reason to hand over the information of over 1500 Katrina SVdP clients many of which are not served through the HLTRC.

Unfortunately this has been made a mandate in order to remain a member of the HLTRC and was done so without a due process of member vote as is required to function as a legitimate LTRC. If we do not agree to this mandate then SVDP will lose our position on the committee and all funding that should be appropriated to our clients (14% of what they have available).

After much prayer and discernment with staff, program and board directors, we have declined participation in the new mandate of their “Client Data Requirements”. In doing so SVDP has been accused of not embracing collaboration and has been asked to leave the committee. We are appalled at these accusations and have witnessed a strong arm affect by United Way brought down on all members of the HLTRC.

I will be meeting with representatives from FEMA, Red Cross and Katrina Aid Today this week to hear their solutions to this challenge. I will also ask to see the bylaws, policy manual and grievance policy for the Houston Long Term Recovery Committee – all of this to help SVdP make an educated and informed decision keeping the best interest of those we serve as priority. If you have any suggestions in helping us make this decision, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or discuss over the phone this issue.

Breaking the confidentiality of others gravely breaks the laws put into place to protect all of us. SVdP will not engage in any unlawful act both for moral reasons and in accordance with the law- but most importantly to protect the individual we visit who through this visit trusts us enough to complete a form with his Social Security number, gives us his personal financial information and shares with us in confidence he is HIV.

Thank you for your constant prayers and support.

In His Service,

W. Garaghty

Wendy Garaghty
Executive Director

Cc: SVdP Board of Directors