

Changing Faces of the Poor
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A writer, teacher and advocate, Nancy Amidei has experience both inside and outside government as former Director of the Washington, D.C. based Food Research and Action center, a private non-profit group. Ms. Amidei also served in the Carter Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Federal Department of Health, education and Welfare (now DHHS). In the early 1970's she was on the staff of the US Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human needs. Among her writings is a guide to policy advocacy, "So You Want to Make A Difference," and a play, "How Ms. Bill Became A Law."

A handout was provided by Ms. Amidei to Vincentians entitled, "Take Five For..."

Changing Faces of the Poor, Changing Face of Christ

Since the 1996 Welfare Reform Act (that puts people to work), the roles have gone down by 40-50% in virtually every state. The welfare role is down statistically, but the question is "Where are those people going?" The economy is good and it is easy to get a job, although the pay is not necessarily a living wage. The ability to get a job, keep the job, and get out of the welfare cycle is a different issue.

Consider the term, "Mentocracy" – Mentor and advocacy
Anyone can do it

Situation Today.

Social consciousness is not emphasized.

There is a change in value systems and how we deal with one another.

The educational system is going downhill.

There is need for responsibility and the sense of responsibility is not taught.

There is the fear by the haves to have to furnish assistance those who have not. The question is, are we willing to share for our children's children. So people do not do anything.

The truths of salvation have not changed. How do we respond. Have the readings become ritualized. Need to listen and to live the truths in our lives.

Somewhere during the 1970's, in this country, compassion turned to suspicion. (ref. Mario Cuomo speech). People became disillusioned.

There is changing ethnic diversity of those we serve – new immigrants.

In 1891 the thinking was: You will get your reward in heaven...don't worry about it.

Today: There is no pat answer. We need to develop answers. There is no easy solution.

Those that SVDP serves are harder to serve (e.g. mentally ill; addicted – alcohol, drugs, gambling; prisoners), and they are all ours! Geographic distances of families have changed. The cost of living has changed. Life skill teaching is needed. Transportation (lack of it, cost of it) is always a concern for the poor.

It is important for conferences and councils to “live up to your capabilities.” Have we changed as we’ve worked with the poor. Are we showing them the true face of Christ. Do we give the poor personal recognition – a sense of identity. Our names are important. How many times does a street person get to sign his/her name. Is there an attitude of us vs. them. Is the term “clients” used consistently or is the term, “neighbors” or “guests.” (We go out with our guests.) Do we say, “I’ve got a direct request” or “I need to visit a neighbor.”