



## Love In Action: 7.9 Million Hours of US Volunteer Service

Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a 175-year-old Catholic lay organization, provide emergency assistance. No work is foreign to the Society. In the United States members, 128,000 strong in 4,700 Conferences, visit families in their homes and give emergency help through shelters, food pantries, visits to prisons, hospitals, care homes and other assistance. **Last year 7,974,434 hours of volunteer service was provided to the needy in communities across the United States.** National and international in scope, worldwide 700,000 members in 51,000 Conferences, along with 1.5 million+ volunteers, serve in 142 countries sharing their time, talent and resources.

It takes a community working together to create real, sustainable change, yet without adequate assistance and support individuals and families have limited hope of moving from poverty to self sufficiency. Government must be a catalyst for change working with industry and the community to identify, assist, oversee and supply big-picture solutions that create opportunities for those suffering in poverty and for workers in crisis. Considering that 35% of all persons in poverty are children, strengthening and supporting families is critical. The well being of our country depends on it.

## Health Care

Health care reform must protect the lives, dignity, consciences and health of all from conception, through maturity, and aging.

### We Support:

- ♥ Provisions against abortion and in favor of conscience protection, affordability and immigrants' access must be part of a fair and just health care reform bill.
- ♥ Easy access to quality, affordable and compassionate treatment for every person seeking care.
- ♥ Policies that provide integrated mental health and substance abuse treatment.

## Housing

The Society receives ongoing calls for emergency housing assistance and requests for help with utilities nationwide.

### We Support:

- ♥ Fully funding affordable housing programs such as **Section 8 and Section 202** and preserving housing vouchers for extremely low-income households.
- ♥ Comprehensive reform of the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program** which includes the **Emergency Food and Shelter Program** and the **Emergency Shelter Grant Program**.
  - √ Increased funding for homeless assistance programs along with providing housing first with supportive services.
- ♥ **Homeownership** and strengthening programs aimed at increasing homeownership.
- ♥ **Capitalizing a National Housing Trust Fund.** Increasing permanent housing for low and moderate income families.
- ♥ Keeping families caught in the sub-prime lending crisis housed.
- ♥ Identifying **innovative housing alternatives** that provide do-able solutions to homelessness.
- ♥ **Utility assistance**, such as **The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** to help needy individuals and families.

## Hunger

Thousands of calls for food assistance pour into the Society from individuals and families in need.

### We Support:

- ♥ **EMPOWERMENT.**
  - √ Adequate funding for health and nutrition programs that serve food insecure individuals and families.
  - √ New funding is needed to invest in federal child nutrition programs, which must be reauthorized in 2010. The **National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children, the Child and Adult Care Food Program**, play critical roles in preventing hunger and promoting healthy diets.
  - √ Adequate funding for **The Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.**
- ♥ **ACCESS.**
  - √ Food assistance programs need to be easily accessible to those who qualify and must work in conjunction with any poverty reduction program.
  - √ Prompt and effective emergency funding of food programs to alleviate immediate suffering is critical. This includes quickly responding to the newly hungry in disasters.
- ♥ **EDUCATION.**
  - √ We support stepping up education efforts regarding eligibility along with simple registration procedures to those eligible for food assistance programs. Program access, participation, and nutritional improvements is crucial.
- ♥ **TACKLING GLOBAL HUNGER.**
  - √ Special attention must be given to the 1.1 billion persons who live in extreme poverty, making less than one dollar a day.
  - √ Food sufficiency and adequate access to safe, nutritious food and water must be a global priority. By embracing the least, the entire world reaps abundant benefits.
  - √ Global leaders, both public and in private industry, must focus on the mitigation of circumstances that affect safe food and drinking water, along with agricultural self-sufficiency of the poor. The promotion of sustainable agricultural practices that protect farmland, natural resources and wildlife for future generations is everyone's responsibility. US farm subsidy program practices that do not comply with international trade obligations and disadvantage poor farmers in developing countries must be eliminated.

## Income and Assistance

Sufficient government oversight coupled with targeted, well-crafted financial programs that focus on meeting basic needs to build up individuals and communities is needed now. Government must take responsibility, act responsibly to prevent further erosion, repair damage, shore up the economy, and restore trust.

### We Support:

- ♥ **Expanding employment and training opportunities especially for low income workers with an emphasis on self sufficiency, pride in work, and dignity.** National, state and local governments must work together with private industry, trade associations, and communities to identify opportunities, develop mentoring programs, build skill sets, and provide on-the-job training that leads to productive workers, who are fully-employed with living wage jobs.
- ♥ Amending the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to **increase the minimum wage.** By most measures, the minimum wage is not a living wage and low wage earners must be able to provide basic needs for their families.
- ♥ Encouraging eligible families to apply for **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** and **Child Tax Credit** and support further reduction in income level requirements for this program.
- ♥ Providing adequate funding for the **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** and **preserve funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).**
- ♥ Improving the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** program including: progress to reduce child poverty, expand employability of recipients, provide affordable, quality child care, promote adequate family income, support marriage and family life.
- ♥ **Discouraging the use of predatory loans** by establishing stricter guidelines for lenders. Encouraging **small loan alternatives for low income communities.** Providing opportunities which allow individuals and families to **bank safely.**

## Immigration

Immigration policies need to be based upon the following guiding principles.

- ✓ People have the right to find opportunities in their own homelands.
- ✓ People have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- ✓ Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.

Human dignity and human rights of the undocumented migrants must be respected.

Reference: "Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope," A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, January, 2003. Nos. 33-38.

### We Support:

- ♥ **Adoption of an immigration policy that is comprehensive and provides legal status and legal avenues for entry into the United States.**
- ♥ Allowing children of undocumented immigrants who have been in the U.S. for five years, were under the age of 16 when they came to our country, through no fault of their own, to become legal permanent residents thus allowing them to qualify for in-state tuition and other educational benefits.
- ♥ Providing temporary agricultural workers with a path to legalization while providing them protection of U.S. labor laws, job portability and a just wage.



## Restorative Justice

The number of incarcerated adults continues to expand. Bureau of Justice statistics reports 1 in 31 US adults in jail or prison, on probation, or on parole. The failure of the correctional system has resulted in a recidivism rate (individuals returned to prison) of over 50% in most states. When correctional system budgets, equal or surpass education budgets, it is clear systemic change is needed.

### We Support:

- ♥ The development of a **new model for our nation** based on restorative justice, a process to right wrongs and to begin the healing needed for victims and their families, for offenders and their families, and for the community at large.
- ♥ **Retooling the current system** with a focus on reparation, forgiveness, hope, and rehabilitation.

## Neighborhood Safety + Excellence in Education

Safe neighborhoods encourage common values and a sense of community pride. Public safety, clean communities, educational opportunities, teaching the intrinsic value of every person is do-able when neighborhoods are safe. Seeking ways to remove fear and distrust among residents will go a long way in deterring crime and violence.

### We Support:

- ♥ Making **education** a national and local priority with access to quality early education for children who live at or below the poverty level.
- ♥ Educational building blocks and a path, from primary through high school that is **measurable, provides life skills, and leads to real opportunities.**
- ♥ Encouraging stronger volunteerism within communities. Finding opportunities for **mentoring programs**, such as, between youth and the elderly, to help solve problems of isolation, build community spirit, establish a good value orientation, and begin to solve moral dilemmas encountered by those who do not have the family structure to learn basic core values.
- ♥ Encouraging **peace centers.** Safe havens within troubled communities, can be an important first step in bridge building.
- ♥ Developing **activities for youth** to encourage their development and to create hope for a better world.