



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

# Hot Topics

From the National Voice of the Poor Committee

[www.voiceofthepoor.org](http://www.voiceofthepoor.org)

Charity provides a little salve in troubled times, but healing deep wounds requires much more. Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 100,000 strong, visit families in their homes and give emergency help through shelters, food pantries and other assistance.

**Millions of American lives can be transformed if given the opportunity— dignity of work, educational opportunities for every child, basic health care, food accessibility so that no one need go hungry....** Every American, including the most vulnerable in our country, should be able to live a decent and happy life. Adequate federal funding, appropriate oversight, local involvement to fill gaps and provide practical assistance and skill building, along with a community safety net, particularly for parents with young children, is critical considering that one in ten families live in poverty — over half are single mothers with children. America needs holistic solutions.

- We call for an involved government that seeks tactical change through carefully thought out, collective efforts, and purposeful measures that move individuals and families from poverty to self sufficiency.
- We ask that government policies be enacted with long-term, realistic, do-able solutions.
- Considering that 35 percent of all Poor are children, strengthening and supporting families is critical.

## Health Care

Recent reauthorization and expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program is an excellent first step. Every person should have easy access to quality and compassionate care. Life is a precious gift from God and every person has value. The protection of life from conception, to maturity, and aging must be honored and respected. The needy should not have to choose between food, shelter and medicine. The sanctity of life must be protected.

### We Support:

- + Providing quality and affordable healthcare to all.
- + Maintaining the integrity and strength of the Medicaid program.
- + Policies that provide integrated mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- + Promoting senior care.

## Housing

The Society receives ongoing calls for emergency housing assistance and requests for help with utilities nationwide. Government must identify and act on big picture solutions to help poor families and vulnerable workers in crisis.

### We Support:

- + Providing adequate funding for federally subsidized housing programs.
  - √ Raising the number of rent subsidy programs especially for extremely low-income households.
  - √ Full funding for affordable housing programs such as **Section 8 and Section 202**.
  - √ Preserve targeting Section 8 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** programs, such as **The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** to help Poor families.

## Hunger

An estimated 36 million people do not have reliable access to food in the USA; around 26 million receive Food Stamps. Children are over half of the participants. Families and children receive nearly 80% of all benefit dollars. Thousands of calls for emergency food assistance pour into the Society annually 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.
- + **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 for those who live at or below poverty is crucial.

## Income and Assistance

All persons should have the opportunity to adequately provide for themselves and their families.

The US economy has been shaken. It is the responsibility of government to restore trust in the system. Sufficient government oversight coupled with carefully targeted and well-crafted financial programs that focus on meeting basic needs to build up individuals and communities is needed now. Government must take responsibility for the situation, act responsibly to prevent further erosion, repair the damage, shore up the economy, restore trust.

### We Support:

- + **Expanding employment and training opportunities for low income workers with an emphasis on self sufficiency, pride in work, and dignity.** Government, trade associations, and private industry sectors must work together 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.
- + Encouraging eligible families to apply for the 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.
- + Promoting policies that **support and strengthen families**, including low-income fathers.
- + **Discouraging the use of predatory loans** that prey on the vulnerable by establishing strict guidelines for lenders.
- + Encouraging the development of **small loan alternatives for low income communities.**
- + Providing opportunities which allow individuals and families to **bank safely.**

## Immigration

US immigration policies should 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. + The human dignity and human rights of the undocumented migrants should 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, based on the US Bishops' document, "Strangers No Longer," and Pope John Paul II's, "Ecclesia in America."
- + 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 has been increasing. The Bureau of Justice statistics reports **1 in 31 US adults in jail or prison, on probation, or on parole** at the end of 2007 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/correct.htm>). An estimated 13.5 million people spend time in jails or prisons during the course of a year, and the failure of the correctional system has resulted in a recidivism rate (individuals returned to prison) of over 50% in most states. State correctional system budgets, equal or surpass education budgets.

### We Support:

- + The development of a **new model for our nation** based on restorative justice, a process to right wrongs and to being 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

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:

- + Building **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.
- + Encouraging stronger volunteerism within communities. Finding opportunities for **mentoring programs**, such as between young 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.

