

Report from National: VOP's Coast to Coast

Western region (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA): VOP members in CA participated in a Catholic Lobby Day in Sacramento last April. Issues addressed with members of the legislature included Medi-Cal for San Mateo County residents and prison reform. They plan to make this day an annual event. Arizona reported support of the Diocesan Council to prevent cuts in social service funding at the state level including maintenance of general assistance. Copies of the Voice of the Poor notebook compiled for Western Regional Meeting were distributed (30).

Eastern region: (DE, D.C., MD, NJ, PA, VA, WV) VOP members led by the Camden (N.J.) Diocesan Council are asking members of the Eastern Region to write to members of Congress on behalf of residents of impoverished counties in West Virginia. Residents of parts of West Virginia have a mean income under \$17,000, double digit unemployment, significant illiteracy, lack of potable water, lack of schools and lack of transportation.

Midwest region (IN, IL, MI, OH): Distributed copies of a letter about the death rate from malaria in Africa with support requested from the Vincentian Family for help from international organizations for medication.

North Central region (IL, MN, ND, SD, WI): Working to change the law on payday loans in the state of Wisconsin where interest rates can range as high as 700%.

Issues at National VOP:

The 20 member National VOP Committee researches *national* issues and makes advocacy recommendations to the national president. At the national meeting in Atlanta in September, reports were given on the proposed National Trust Fund and immigration issues. Actions taken:

TANF - A letter was sent from SVdP President Gene Smith to the Senate Finance Committee urging additional funds for child care and other recommendations of the US Conference of Bishops be adopted.

Child Tax Credit for Working Poor Families: A letter was drafted to members of the House of Representatives from President Gene Smith urging that the \$400 per child credit be extended *without delay* to families whose annual incomes are between \$10,000 and \$26,000 (these families were omitted from the earlier legislation).

Mid-Year Meeting to Focus on Advocacy:

SVdP Mid-Year Meeting will be part of The Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C. February 20-25. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul will be one of several Catholic organizations meeting with members of Congress regarding

domestic and international policy priorities set by the U.S. Bishops. Registration booklets will be sent out in October.

Impact of SVdP at the Polls:

According to a recent estimate, if all members of the Society are registered to vote, the number of voters would be 64,000. If family members, friends and supporters were included, the number could be as high as 300,000.

Useful Websites:

The following websites are filled with information about issues and legislation affecting the poor:

St. Vincent de Paul National Voice of the Poor: www.voiceofthepoor.org

Updated frequently, this is the website of VOP at the national level. Postings include activities undertaken by VOP committees across the country. Policy papers on Affordable Housing and Just Wage are posted. Health Care for the Poor has been approved and is being edited.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org

Easy to use, this website contains a comprehensive listing of policy papers approved by the National Conference of Bishops. This site is an excellent source for the position of the Church on various issues with reference to Catholic Social Teaching.

Network: National Catholic Social Justice Lobby www.networklobby.org
Network is the only registered Catholic lobby in Washington. Founded in 1971 by 47 sisters in support of justice. There are 11,000 members on Network.

Vincentian Family Website www.famvin.org
www.famvin.org/cm
www.vincenter.org

Coordinated by John Freund, C.M., these websites are a daily e-newspaper for members of the Vincentian family

Bills in Congress: www.thomas.loc.gov
Bills can be researched by number or topic

Arizona Legislature www.azleg..state.az.us