

BASIC VOP WORKSHOP

THE CAMPAIGN FOR 10%

The science of charity reform is not transmitted through books and at assemblies' tribunes as much as by climbing stairs in the home of the poor, kneeling at his bed, suffering from the same cold as he does, and discovering the secret of a grief-stricken heart in the course of a friendly conversation. When we have accomplished this ministry, not for months, but over long years; when we have thus studied the poor at home, at school, at the hospital, not only in one city but in several, and also in the country, in whatever condition God placed him, then we can start to know the formidable problem of misery, then we are entitled to propose serious measures....

Blessed Frederic Ozanam, 1848

Introducing Advocacy to Vincentians

A/V Resources

(Requires laptop and projector or TV and DVD player)

- **Why is Voice of the Poor necessary?**
Ron Meyer, Voice of the Poor, Phoenix Council
Member, National Voice of the Poor Committee
- **Will You Help?**
Poverty Video produced by DePaul University
- **Voice of the Poor Power Point**
Diocese of Trenton Council

How Do We Start a Voice of the Poor Committee?

The following steps are offered as a suggested plan based on “trial and error” with our advocacy efforts in Phoenix. A comprehensive guide from national for Voice of the Poor can be found at www.voiceofthepoor.org. Click on “Information.”

Under the guidance of Frederic and Rosalie...

1. Ask your Diocesan Council to APPOINT A BOARD LIAISON for Voice of the Poor.

This Vincentian must be genuinely interested in advocacy and have e-mail. The Board Liaison’s first task is to become familiar with www.voiceofthepoor.org, learn what other committees are doing and understand the wealth of resources available and review the national legislative agenda and SVdP Voice of the Poor position statements. A list of VOP Mentors is found below.

2. PUBLICIZE Formation of Voice of the Poor to Vincentians, Parish Peace and Justice committees and local clergy.
3. DISTRIBUTE A FLIER AND AGENDA announcing the first meeting of Voice of the Poor.

FIRST MEETING AGENDA might include:

- A motivational speaker on Catholic social teaching (the “why” behind advocacy by the Society). [Ten Foundational Principles in the Social Teaching of the Church](#)
- Have available copies of Part 7 of The Rule, “Relationship with Civil Society: Work for Social Justice” for review.
- Meeting discussion should include mention of the Voice of the Poor National Legislative Agenda and official SVdP Positions Statements as the “issue umbrella” for VOP at the national and local levels. (See www.voiceofthepoor.org)
- Sign in sheet for all attending including (printed): Name, address, telephone, e-mail (very important) and Conference (This is your initial roster for VOP and the VOPNET).
- Set a standing time and place for VOP meetings (monthly to start).

Other resources:

- Workbook and video “Serving in Hope” Module IV: ‘Our Vincentian Mission’ on Catholic social teaching available from national.
- Coming soon! VOP WORKBOOK from national on Voice of the Poor (available 9/08 at the National SVdP Meeting)

4. Always have an agenda for meetings and send it out in advance by e-mail.
 - Plan for no more than 90 minutes total.

The Significance of Home Visits

Vincentians, through their observations and experiences during Home Visits, are in a position to advocate for justice in addition to addressing immediate needs through charity.

What Home Visits are All About by Phil Schlosser of Seattle Voice of the Poor, tells of the surprising chain of events resulting from a Home Visit. (www.voiceofthepoor.org, click on “VOP Information” and scroll down)

*Listening to the Stories, a practical “How to” regarding follow up Home Visits comes from the Milwaukee Council Voice of the Poor. The suggestions are for follow up visits when Vincentians are called to return or when Vincentians initiate a return visit with a family. Listening to those we visit may identify **root causes of poverty** that could be appropriately addressed by Voice of the Poor.*

1. Purpose of a follow-up visit:
 - Best time is NOT when family is in immediate crisis.
 - Deepen relationship through listening and sharing.
 - Allow time for concerns, problems and issues to be brought forward.
 - Invite participation in identifying and creating solutions
2. Arranging a follow-up visit:
 - If you and your partner feel this would be useful, try to arrange a follow-up time at the end of the first visit or call later to arrange a follow-up visit.
 - When arranging the follow-up visit suggest a time to meet for about half an hour.
 - Call ahead as a reminder before actually going on this visit..
3. Preparation for follow up visit:
 - Review the case with your partner.
 - Take time to focus and say a prayer.
 - Allow time for re-introductions when you arrive
4. Developing the relationship:
 - Ask questions that were not addressed during the first visit – how long have they been living here, where did they live before, why did they move here, etc.
 - Are they active in a church? If so, has it been supportive?
5. You are looking for their story – common areas of concern to raise during the visit:

Children and youth	School and education	Family pressures
Affordable housing	Employment	Transportation
Violence and crime	Gang activity	Drug activity
Use of payday loans	Healthcare concerns	Day care
6. Look for trends and remember to ask what ideas they have to create solutions.

Conference Job Description

Voice of the Poor Representative

Provided by the Milwaukee Council Voice of the Poor

Overview:

The Voice of the Poor Conference Representative promotes the justice concerns of the poor on the local level. The contact serves as a liaison between the Archdiocese or Diocesan Voice of the Poor and the individual Conference. Vincentian advocacy must be present in the public, political arena but it is always non-partisan. To speak with “one voice”, special attention needs to be given to emphasize official positions on issues (from the National VOP, U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops or the archdiocese/diocese council), not an individual member’s special interest.

Primary responsibilities:

1. Receive and promote educational and action alerts (See CapWiz page)
2. Consult with Conference President to put VOP concerns on the agenda.
3. Report to the archdiocese/diocese council VOP the results of Conference action and communicate local concerns.
4. Attend a yearly formation session on Voice of the Poor.

In addition the Phoenix Council Voice of the Poor includes the following in its description of the VOP Conference Representative:

- Due to the time sensitive nature of the legislative process, **the VOP representative must have regular access to email.**
- There is NO limit to the number of persons in each Conference who receive VOP information by e-mail. Some Conferences have 5-10 members on the network.
- Formation of a VOP Committee by each Conference is encouraged.

VOP activity by Conference representatives is considered active Vincentian work.

Voice of the Poor Mentors

Contact your Regional Voice of the Poor Representatives for assistance in finding help close to you.

Rita Cannestra	Archdiocese of Milwaukee, WI
Jim Bloss	Archdiocese of Seattle, WA
Maureen Sloan	Archdiocese of Portland, OR
Deborah Payne	District Council of San Mateo, CA
Lucy Howell	Diocese of Phoenix, AZ
Mary Watterston	Diocese of Trenton, N.J.

To find your regional VOP representative go to:

<http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/Contacts/contacts.htm>

First Project

Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is *Justice's* role to prevent the attacks. Frederic Ozanam

1. Early meeting agendas might include:

- Development of MISSION STATEMENT/FLIER about VOP for distribution to membership and interested community groups. Examples can be found on www.voiceofthepoor.org, click on “Information” and scroll down to “Regional information”.
- REVIEW VOP GUIDELINES from national office on website.
- Ways to CONTACT CONFERENCES in your area and ask for volunteers to participate in Voice of the Poor. (Conference VOP Job Description is found below).
- IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONS in your community for collaboration. Contact these groups and ask if one of your members can attend their meetings. (Examples: Peace and Justice Parish Committees, other non-profit service providers and coalitions, governmental agencies providing social services).
- DEVELOP A SIMPLE SURVEY of advocacy issues for local Conferences to discuss and return to you. Prioritize and select no more than 3 issues to follow at any given time.
- LOOK FOR ISSUES THAT ENGAGE EVERYONE INVOLVED!
- IDENTIFY LOCAL LEADERS/decision-makers involved in these issues. and introduce them to SVdP. (Establish your credentials as someone who works directly with the poor).
- ASK FOR VOLUNTEERS to research and report back to committee on the selected issues.

NUTS AND BOLTS

1. TAKING A VOP ISSUE TO YOUR COUNCIL:
 - VOP can **never** take a position without approval of the diocesan council.
 - Research, summarize and write up your recommendation.
 - Ask the council president to put VOP on the agenda.
 - Board action on a VOP issue should be communicated to SVdP membership (e-mail, flier or brief newsletter)
 - Official SVdP communication to decision-makers is done by your council president (may be phone call, letter, FAX or e-mail) with members asked to follow up with their own messages.
 - A crucial job of the Voice of the Poor is to simplify the message to be delivered and give information to members regarding HOW TO CONTACT DECISION-MAKERS, generally by e-mail, FAX or telephone.
2. The national office now sends national alerts via Capwiz, greatly simplifying the process for national issues.
3. A major role for VOP involves EDUCATION through the identification and communication of community services or changes in procedures helpful to those we serve. (Examples: changes in food stamp requirements, child care applications, low income healthcare applications, WIC, utility discounts, foreclosure helplines, Earned Income Tax Credit resources, etc.)
4. INFORMATION WORKSHOPS are a perfect opportunity to introduce Voice of the Poor! Always have SIGN UP SHEETS available to “grow” VOP.
5. Confine the use of the VOPNET (e-mails) to information pertinent to issues.
 - Learn how to send messages to your VOPNET using “Blind Copy” so that e-mail addresses are protected.
 - Do not overwhelm your membership with information.
 - NEVER share your VOP e-mail address file; it is confidential information.
5. Remember that Voice of the Poor is a LONG-RANGE PROJECT!

Survey Example

A sample survey for Conferences is found below as an example of how to gather information to prioritize issues for Voice of the Poor. This survey was sent by e-mail to Conference presidents who were asked to poll their conferences and respond by a certain date.

Voice of the Poor Conference Survey

October, 2007

Phoenix Diocesan Council Voice of the Poor

Please help Voice of the Poor prioritize advocacy issues for this year. Conference responses will be tallied and used to develop the annual VOP Legislative Agenda. Please discuss, reach a consensus and rank the issues listed below in order of importance. (One would be the highest priority and ten would be the least). Look for results in December.

- ___ **Support programs that facilitate transition from prison to the community.**
- ___ **Increased emergency funding for utilities.**
- ___ **Support healthcare coverage and program enrollment for eligible low Income children.**
- ___ **Increased funding for affordable housing.**
- ___ **Support a fair and just immigration policy.**
- ___ **Increased funding for shelter and services for the homeless.**
- ___ **Eliminate the KidCap in AZ (prohibits any child born or conceived while the mother is on welfare from receiving cash benefits),**
- ___ **Support increased childcare subsidies for low income working parents.**
- ___ **Support alternatives to payday loans and other predatory lending practices.**
- ___ **Support educational opportunities/job training programs to raise pay level.**
- ___ **Issue or concern not listed that your Conference believes is important to those coming to SVdP for assistance:**

Conference: _____
Contact person: _____
Phone: _____
E-mail: _____

Advocacy Areas Identified by Voice of the Poor

Over the past six years, Voice of the Poor participants have identified seven areas where legislative change could make a difference in the lives of those stuck in a cycle of poverty. Members of the National VOP Committee have drafted Position Statements approved by the National Council of the Society in these areas. These statements are the “policy umbrella” for national and local action on the following topics and can be found at www.voiceofthepoor.org, click on “Position Statements”.

Voice of the Poor Position Statements

- Affordable Housing for the Poor, February 2002
- Health Care for the Poor, Feb. 2004
- Position Statement on Immigration, Sept. 2004
- Position Statement on Fair Wages, Sept. 2005
- Position Statement on Restorative Justice, Sept. 2006
- Position Statement on Predatory Lending, April 2007
- Position Statement on Homelessness, Aug. 2007

Society of St. Vincent de Paul National Legislative Agenda

In addition, the National Voice of the Poor Committee annually submits a National Legislative Agenda to the National Council for consideration. This agenda is based on the content of the Voice of the Poor Position Statements. The approved legislative agenda for 2007-2008 can be found at www.voiceofthepoor.org, click on “Legislative Agenda” on the Home Page. Several Diocesan Council Voice of the Poor Committees have submitted their own legislative agendas for local council approval based on priorities in their area as recommended by their membership.

Examples of Voice of the Poor actions by diocesan councils:

- Legislation to stop payday lending activity in Oregon sponsored and successfully passed spearheaded by the Archdiocesan Council of Portland, OR
- Low income children’s healthcare outreach “Love Your Kids Day” on Feb. 14 involved Conferences in targeted zip codes by Diocesan Council of Phoenix, AZ
- Energy assistance, letter writing campaign in parishes organized by Diocese of Belleville, IL (includes East St. Louis)
- Affordable housing in collaboration with Washington State Catholic Conference-Archdiocesan Council of Seattle, WA
- “Tent City” in Milwaukee gets city commitment to a housing trust fund –Diocese of Milwaukee, WI
- Reduce recidivism, prison ministry, full-time prison chaplain and shelter for women released from prison are sponsored by Diocese of San Mateo, CA

What does The Rule Say about Advocacy?

Part VII of the International Rule of the Society, “Relationship with Civil Society: Work for Social Justice” calls Vincentians to address injustice as part of their mission of service to the poor. Excerpts from Part VII (April, 2005);

7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions.

...In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

7.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

7.5 A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

7.6 Facing the structures of sin

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structure or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak our clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

7.8 Political independence of the Society

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a nonviolent approach....

- To read Part VII of the Rule in its entirety, go to www.voiceofthepoor . Click on “Information” and scroll down to [Rule Part VII](#).

Who are Official Spokespersons for the Society?

National (Federal) Issues: The Society's National President, currently Joseph Flannigan, is the spokesperson for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Recent statements and written communications by our national president have been on poverty, hunger, S-CHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program), and affordable housing.

State and local issues: The Diocesan Council President with the approval of the local diocesan council and based on recommendations by Voice of the Poor

Structure of Voice of the Poor

Voice of the Poor is the advocacy committee of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul spearheaded by VOP committees. The emphasis is on policy. The effort is non-partisan within the IRS guidelines for 501(c)(3) organizations.

- There are currently over 80 council Voice of the Poor Committees nationwide.
- Hundreds of Vincentians are participating in Voice of the Poor at the Conference, District and Council level in the U.S.
- The Voice of the Poor National Committee is composed of two representatives from each of the Society's eight regions in the United States.
- Visit the VOP website at <http://voiceofthepoor.org/>, then click on "Updates by Region".
- Information about Voice of the Poor's structure and guidelines can be found at the same website (<http://voiceofthepoor.org/>), Click on "VOP Information" and find:

Voice of the Poor Guidebook

Voice of the Poor Structure

VOP Job Description for National and Council Committees

VOP Conference Job Description

Appendix

Articles from “Ozanam News”

1. Voice of the Poor National Legislative Agenda (2007)
http://voiceofthepoor.org/Reg&Leg%20Updates/legislative_updates.htm
2. Framework for Voice of the Poor (2005)
<http://voiceofthepoor.org/info/NATVOPFrameworkapproved%209-2006.pdf>
3. Voice of the Poor Position Statements
http://voiceofthepoor.org/position/position_papers.htm
4. Faithful Citizenship from U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (2007)
<http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/>
5. International Rule, Part VII
<http://voiceofthepoor.org/info/Rule%20part%207%20vertical.pdf>
6. Welcome to Voice of the Poor and Thank You! (E-mail information for new members)
(attachment)
7. Capwiz is Here!
(attachment)
8. A Budget for Poverty
(attachment)
9. Sample Sign in Sheet
(attachment)
10. Hot Topics
<http://voiceofthepoor.org/info/Hot%20TopicsWDC08-4FINAL08.pdf>
11. U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops: Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering (2/08)
www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/200802message.pdf
12. Difficult Questions, Catholic Answers
(attachment)
13. Ozanam News
(VOP sample article, attachment)

Attachments 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 follow.

6. Welcome to Voice of the Poor and Thank You! (E-mail information for new members)

Welcome to Voice of the Poor and Thank You!

Voice of the Poor is the advocacy committee of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Voice of the Poor is a Phoenix Diocesan Council Committee and is one of over 80 such committees across the United States. There is also a national committee composed of representatives from the various regions appointed by the national president.

- All e-mail communications are sent Blind Copy. Your address will remain confidential and will NOT be shared with any other group. E-mails will come from Howishome@aol.com or VOP@svdp-phx-az.org.
- Local (AZ)VOP information: www.stvincentdepaul.net . Click on VOP for meeting minutes and basic information about the diocesan council Voice of the Poor.
- The official spokesperson for the Phoenix Diocesan Council is our president, currently Steve Jenkins.
- *Legislation supported or opposed by the Phoenix VOP is ALWAYS approved by the Phoenix Diocesan Council.*
- The official spokesperson for the national Society of St. Vincent de Paul is national president, currently Joe Flannigan.
- National VOP information, including the VOP Legislative Agenda for 2007-2008 approved by the SVdP National Board of Directors is at www.voiceofthepoor.org

Voice of the Poor, Phoenix Diocesan Council Committee meets monthly. Meetings are open. **The next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 21 at 3:30 in Vincentian Support. Agendas and notes are sent out a week in advance by e-mail.**

What you will be receiving from VOP:

- Weekly Legislative Briefing from VOP member, Tom Finnerty (when AZ legislature is in session).
- Monthly VOP E-Newsletter from VOP Chair, Lucy Howell.
- Information items regarding legislation impacting those we serve.
- Action Alerts - regarding AZ pending legislation or national legislation
- You are NOT expected to act on every alert! Just do what you can, when you can!)

Legislators tell us that as few as 5 communications from constituents can make difference in how they vote!

7. Capwiz is Here!

MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT - INTRODUCING CAPWIZ

Have you ever thought that there must be an easier way to contact your Senators and Representatives in response to SVdP Voice of the Poor (VOP) Action Alerts?

Now there is!!!!

Capwiz is an online advocacy tool that allows you to easily communicate your concerns directly and instantly to elected officials in Washington.

THREE EASY STEPS

1. Go to the SVDP National website at www.svdpusa.org (click on this link).
2. Along the top bar, right under President Joe Flannigan's photo, click on "Voice of the Poor".
3. Click on the big red "Capwiz" lettering and you are "in"

Follow the directions and enter your name, address and e-mail address (you will need the 4 digit extension of your zip code).

- Once you are enrolled, the SVdP national office will send you Action Alerts using CapWiz for instant response to your legislators.
- You can also use Capwiz to find out how your senators and representatives voted on bills of concern to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Taking a few minutes now to enroll in Capwiz will make contacting your elected officials a matter of a few clicks away (of the mouse, that is)!

If you would like to invite your friends to join the SVdP Capwiz Action Alert list, scroll down to the bottom of the Capwiz page and click on "Tell A Friend." Fill out the form, click "Send Now" and your friend will receive an email invitation to join the SVdP Voice of the Poor Action Alert Capwiz program.

4/08

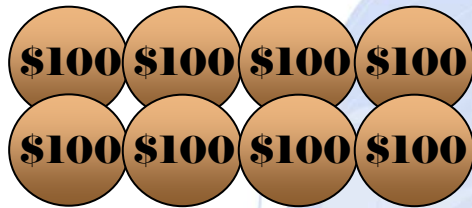
8. A Budget for Poverty

How did you do?

If your pennies didn't cover even all the most basic needs, you're not alone. Millions of families face this reality every month, even those earning, as in our example, almost twice the minimum wage.

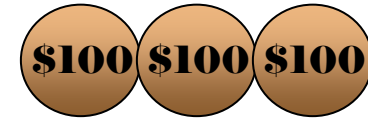
Now shall we try this for a family earning the minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour, or \$880 per month)? That family would have just nine pennies to spend, instead of 17.

Look over your budget.



Now take away eight pennies.

A Budget for Poverty



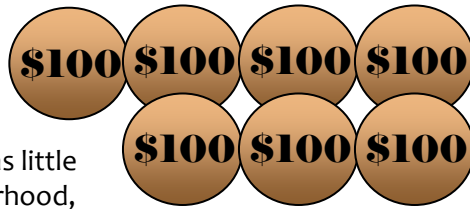
A family of four earning \$20,000 or less a year is officially living in poverty. That's \$1,667 per month, or \$9.76 per hour, almost twice the minimum wage. Let's pretend we're the head of a household with earnings just *above* the poverty level (\$1,700 per month).

Imagine you have a stack of 17 pennies, each representing \$100 of your monthly earnings to spend however you like. Inside you'll find some of the things you'll need to buy. Use your pennies to decide how you'd like to spend your income each month.

Housing?

In 2005, the average rent for an apartment in Phoenix was \$658. You might find housing for four for as little as \$600. If you want a *safer* neighborhood, try \$700.

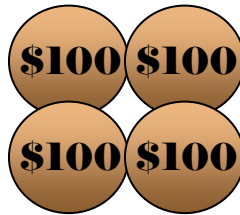
Six or seven pennies.



Transportation?

A family at the poverty line will spend \$410 a month to own and maintain a used car, and fill it with gas to go to work, day care, the store, wherever.

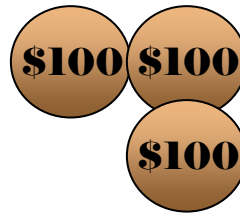
Four pennies.



Food?

Even with assistance like food stamps, families at the poverty level will spend \$343 a month to feed four people. Food boxes might bring that down to \$300.

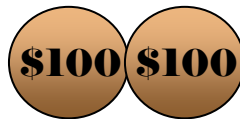
Three pennies.



Utilities?

To keep a family of four warm and secure, the average expense for utilities runs over \$192 per month.

Two pennies.



Child Care?

Child care for two kids can cost over \$13,000 a year. Even with child care subsidies, families with two small children will spend \$192 a month on child care.

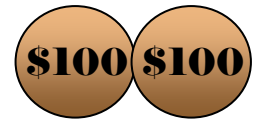
Two pennies.



Health Care?

Even if an employer pays some health insurance, a family of four would still pay on average of \$178 per month for medical expenses. The cost of not having health insurance could be devastating.

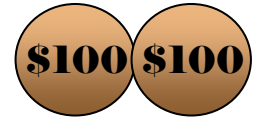
Two pennies.



Other essentials?

Things like clothing, toiletries, Laundromats, & home furnishings can really add up. In 2005, families spent an average of \$405 per child on back-to-school supplies alone, including clothing, shoes, and calculators.

Two pennies.



Save for Christmas?

And birthdays, and visit a museum or a movie once a month?

One penny.



Taxes?

Even low wage workers must pay 6.2 percent of their gross earnings for Social Security and 1.45 percent for Medicare. For our family, that's \$130 per month.

One penny.



Want to save for retirement?

You can't depend on Social Security alone. If you're 27 and work 40 more years at your \$20,000 salary, your social security check at age 67 would be just \$1,112 per month.

One penny.



Turn to the back to see how you did...

12. Difficult Questions, Catholic Answers

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Voice of the Poor

Difficult Questions, Catholic Answers

1. Why should I get involved in advocacy, such as VOP activities? I only want to do Home Visits in my Conference.

Discuss Blessed Frederic Ozanam's advocacy work; mission statement; Catholic Social Teaching

2. I cannot get involved in Voice of the Poor because I am a (Republican) (Democrat).

Discuss Faithful Citizenship document; advocate for ISSUES, not candidates.

3. Isn't it illegal for me as a Vincentian to advocate for candidates for public office? Couldn't we lose our non-profit status with the IRS?

Discuss legal procedures for advocacy; what NOT to do, how to proceed.

4. What if I disagree with the statements in the VOP Position Papers?

Discuss Catholic Social Teaching; SVdP Rule; Background resources of the documents.

5. I think all illegal immigrants should be locked up, sent back, etc. Why should we advocate for them? They broke the law!

Discuss Welcome the Stranger; CST; St. Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic, Blessed Rosalie

6. How can I get people fired up about VOP?

Use the resources available on the VOP web site; partner with other Catholic groups; use bulletins, SVdP communications; start small, grow with persistence and prayer; use Home Visit stories; find a local issue; List resources that are available.

7. Where can I get more information and resources to start a VOP Committee in my Council?

VOP website; VOP National Committee member; VOP Council Committee member. List resources that are currently available.

13. Ozanam News Contribution

November 6, 2007

Society Joins with Catholic Charities to Reduce USA Poverty

By Paul Novotny

The USA is one of the world's wealthiest nations, yet 36.5 million of its citizens, including 12.8 million children, continue to struggle in a life of poverty. As Vincentians, we see the personal tragedy of poverty first hand, and have done much to help overcome it. Last year SVdP members spent more than 5 million hours assisting more than 17 million people in distress, offering them services valued at more than \$400 million dollars.

These are pretty admirable numbers, an accomplishment that should make our Society proud. But have we done enough? Part 1, chapter 1 of "The Rule", the document that defines our Society's actions and principles, states "... The Society is concerned not only with relieving need but also with redressing the situations that cause it".

Responding directly to this need to overcome the causes of poverty, Society president, Joe Flannigan announced earlier this year that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul would join forces with Catholic Charities USA to reduce current poverty levels 50% by the year 2020. "Through the Catholic Charities USA's *Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America*, we will encourage our members of Congress and elected state government representatives to improve programs and policies in four key issue areas; (1) health care, (2) affordable housing, (3) nutrition assistance, and (4) economic security for the poor and vulnerable," said Flannigan. Information on the Campaign to Reduce Poverty is located at <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, also issued the following statement regarding this effort. "Each day we work to help lift people out of poverty, but much more needs to be done. What will it take to shake our nation's leaders out of complacency and convince them that America's promise of a better life and a better tomorrow rings hollow for millions of people who are working hard but falling further and further behind. It is time for Congress to get to work and find the political will needed to make poverty a top agenda item and help the most vulnerable in our nation."

At a hearing conducted by the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Fr. Snyder clearly described a situation that many Vincentians have experienced. "Each year, local charitable agencies are facing an increase in demand for emergency assistance, primarily among working families that are unable to make enough to provide for their basic needs. The moral test of a society is how it ensures the needs of the most vulnerable. The existence of such widespread and long-term poverty amidst such enormous wealth is a moral and social wound on the soul of our country, even while the economy as a whole prospers."

The Society's Voice of the Poor Committee (VOP) will assist President Flannigan in leading SVdP efforts to make this campaign a success. Under the leadership of Chairwoman Deborah Payne, the VOP committee has already written position papers on health, housing, nutrition, economic security and a number of other issues that effect the level of poverty in the United States. Society members will then be able to use these tools as a guide to speak out as one voice to assist the poor of this country.

These position papers can be found at:

http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/position/position_papers.htm

Regional Vice presidents are encouraged to include time at Regional Meetings for VOP representatives to present an overview of the campaign, its goals and objectives. SVdP members will then be asked to support ongoing legislation that is needed to reduce the causes of poverty in their country, in their state, in their community, in their parish.

The slogan to be used for the campaign sums up the joint efforts of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Charities USA very effectively.

Cut Poverty in Half / Make our Country Whole Again!

And to that we all say AMEN!