

Voice of the Poor Meeting Minutes
February 15, 2010 3:30PM
Law Offices of Ron Meyer

Opening Prayer: Fr. Fitzgerald led us in prayer, reading a passage from his new book "A Contemporary Way of the Cross". Father read the station *Jesus is Condemned to Death*.

Attending: Steve Zabilski, Lucy Howell, Ron Meyer, Francisco Alatorre, Ruth Ballas, Frank Barrios, Inge Casey, Tom Finnerty, Father Bill Fitzgerald, Charlene Flaherty, Walt Gray, Kathy Jorgensen, and Julie Douglas.

Special Guest: Steve Zabilski spoke to us about recent legislation related to the Pay Day Loan industry. He shared with us that at the Feb 17th board meeting, the board had received our committee's unanimous recommendation to allow the current legislation lapse July 1, 2010 under the existing "sunset clause" and that the board had also voted to follow this same path.

Report from Catholic Social Ministry Gathering: Lucy said that while the trip was unusual due to the record snowfall, plane cancellations, etc, some progress was made with visits to the offices of John McCain, Ed Pastor and Jeff Flake. A visit to the office of John O'Donnell, the lobbyist for the City of Phoenix was also made. Lucy said it was amazing that the Arizona delegation ended up being one of the largest at the gathering, with herself, Ron Meyer, Lisa LaLiberte, and Debbie DiCarlo there to represent our VOP committee and others from the Diocese of Phoenix and Tucson also arriving. Lucy said they were able to talk to John O'Donnell about the situation with LIHEAP, it will be less this year, and about problems with the budget. We need to strongly petition to members of the legislature and Gov. Brewer to keep this the same. Lucy said that while she was in Washington she was kept in the loop on our state budget crisis. She said that efforts by Chad Campbell, Lucy Mason, and Bill Konopnicki to work on the alternative, or "stealth budget" was to be applauded and that we should send them e-mails and calls to thank them for going out on a limb to construct this compromise plan.

New Business: Lucy talked about the 1% state tax and said that this is important to our state. Without it, the prospect of the loss of much needed services to the poor is staggering. It will be important for us to relay this to the conferences. Perhaps Joe Riley can have a voter guide insert. We need to find out when this needs to be turned in. Also "Action Alerts" to the same effect.

Constant Contact update Charlene, Lucy, Ryan, and Chris Q, will set a date for a meeting to move forward on this database.

Charlene said that she was at a meeting in California and HPRP Programs were discussed. She said that in Tempe that the funds are being distributed differently than in Phoenix, with more of a basic emphasis on keeping the homeless off the street. It will be important to possibly have input on how the 2nd round of funding for HPRP will be structured. Charlene talked about the new Housing Dtr, Mike Traylor. She said that his heart is really in the right place and his

passion is homelessness. He does seem to see good prospects in working with faith-based organizations as partners.

Frank Barrios talked about the impending budget cuts. He said that even though there have been huge cuts that departments like the parks and recreation, for example, have laid off over 1,000 employees. In the public safety area, last year police and fire had no cuts, but people have seen the reality that this year cuts might be necessary. For instance, the unions have agreed to 3.2% pay cuts, which is quite unusual for a union to agree to this.

City of Phoenix Food tax Walt Gray talked about his membership with the Phoenix Community Alliance and their stance on the food tax. He said that they were opposed to the tax because it is a regressive tax that affects the poor to a disproportionate degree. Others said that although this was not something that our group would champion, we also realized we were in uncharted waters, with cuts that affect the poor potentially being heavier, if there is not additional revenue through some source (plus cuts in spending). The alternate idea of the discretionary spending sales tax was also discussed for Phoenix instead of the food tax. There was some concern by some that this would only worsen Phoenix's problems if consumers then went to neighboring cities to purchase cars and other high-ticket items where the taxes were less. It was also discussed that purchases made with food stamps would not be taxed, and that we should put more effort into making sure that all families that qualify for food stamps know how to do so. It was noted that homeless individuals also can apply for food stamps. Some discussion also centered on the need for income tax revisions in general. It was decided that our committee would not make a statement on the city food tax issue since there was not overwhelming agreement on the issue.

HPRP update: Julie said that the program is going well and that the team is doing an excellent job in working with the referrals from the conferences and also with Darryl Fuller with the City of Phoenix. Successful cases have been helped with up to \$2,100 in financial assistance, so this is welcome news for cash-strapped conferences and the people they serve. Kino Border Initiative: Fund raising event has been under discussion, and possible dinner or silent auction has been considered. This would be planned by another outside group of volunteers and KBI, and is not a VOP action. Kathy Jorgensen talked about plans for an upcoming

Navigating the Benefit Maze. She said that possible subjects might be SNAP (food stamps), WIC, and Vita Sites (free tax prep). Kathy said that either March or April might be possible. Lucy said that there were new VOP members and we will make sure that they receive the info.

Closing Prayer Fr. Fitz led us in prayer with another excerpt from his book, "A Contemporary Way of the Cross". The station *Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross* was read.

Meeting closed at 4:50PM

Next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 at 8:30AM at St. Francis' Parish Center.