

Voice of the Poor Planning Committee
Notes
June 27, 2007
3:30 p.m. Vincentian Support Services

Attending: Frank Barrios, Walt Gray, Father Bill Fitzgerald, Kathy Jorgensen, John Feit, Inge Casey, John Feit, Al Moreno, Lucy Howell and Ron Meyer

The meeting was opened with the recitation of a prayer written by Father Fitz, "Litany of Mary of Nazareth" from his new about-to- be published book, The North American Prayerbook.

Ron Meyer and Frank Barrios met with Councilman Greg Stanton in early June to underscore the need for additional Section 8 vouchers as a way to expand affordable housing for low income Arizonans. Frank will represent SVdP on the trip to Washington July 16, 17 being organized by Phoenix Councilman Stanton, Phoenix Human Services Director Gloria Hurtado and City of Phoenix lobbyist, John O'Donnell. The purpose of the trip is to meet with members of the Arizona congressional delegation to request a fair share in funding Section 8, LIHEAP, CBDG and Head Start for Phoenix based on its rapid growth. A meeting to finalize plans will be held July 11.

Father Fitz reported that he continues to stay in touch with Congressman Harry Mitchell's office. Frank Barrios stated that Congressman Pastor has indicated to him that he is committed to increasing the number of Section 8 vouchers available to Arizonans. Lucy recalled that in meeting with Congressman Pastor in February, the congressman had indicated he was aware of a movement to re-evaluate Section 8 vouchers based on population.

The state budget will be analyzed in a legislative report to be sent to all Vincentians being put together by Kathy Jorgensen and Tom Finnerty. Since the majority of bills supported by VOP ended up as part of the budget, it may be difficult to link votes with legislators as was done last year. It is hoped that if the report can be kept to two pages, there may be room to include it in the August VSS newsletter along with the new League of Women Voters pamphlet on elected officials in AZ.

There are some positive aspects in the budget for low income Arizonans including elimination of the gag order for communicating KidsCare eligibility in low income areas, \$1million set aside from unclaimed lottery funds for homelessness, additional funding for subsidized childcare. A bill to add consumer protection to payday loans was not passed this session. A provision to eliminate the baseline year requirement from the Arizona charitable tax credit for the working poor did not make it into the budget. It will be important that legislators sympathetic to the needs of low income Arizonans who worked on passage of the bi-partisan budget receive a letter from Steve Jenkins thanking them for their efforts. Mentioned were Senate President Bee, Representatives Lopes, Gallardo, Sinema, Meza, Hershberger, Chad Campbell and Jennifer Burns. Senator Carolyn Allen was mentioned as well.

Re payday loans, Kathy reported that the Arizona Community Action Alliance has been successful in getting Southwest Gas to pull back from its use of payday loan stores as places where gas bills could be paid. Cynthia Zwick of AZCAA will be asked by Kathy to consider writing an op-ed on this successful effort to help raise consciousness about payday lending practices.

Kathy reported that Rep. Chad Campbell has tentatively accepted an invitation to tour the Watkins campus on Wed. July 18 at 11 a.m. followed by lunch in the Hall of Banners and discussion of VOP agenda.. Other committee members were asked to invite their State elected representatives for July 18. Walt asked Lucy to invite Rep. David Bradley. Staff of local congressional offices will also be contacted – have had staff from the offices of Congressman Franks, Pastor, Shadegg, Kyl and McCain visit in the past. Susan deQueljo will be asked to participate along with President Steve Jenkins. The tour will be at 11 followed. A tour of the Human Services campus could be offered separately due to time constraints. It was suggested that an invitation to visit the Watkins campus be issued every couple of months to members of the legislature.

Lucy announced that she would be attending a breakfast meeting on June 28 with Charlene Moran Flaherty (USCIH regional director), Eddie Sissons (ABC Mental Health), Tim Schmaltz (PAFCO) and Jacki Taylor (AZCoalition to End Homelessness) to discuss development of a communication strategy on “Housing First” to Arizona decisionmakers. Walt Gray was asked to participate as well.

Walt reported on the StopMax (use of maximum security cells) conference he attended in June with Inge. The effort is being spear-headed by AFS in Tucson. Chris Anderson continues to represent VOP at meetings on post-release planning for ex-offenders. Mandatory sentencing, the growth of the prison population, emphasis on punishment vs. rehabilitation and high rate of recidivism are of great concern. National VOP has a position statement on restorative justice that has been approved by the national trustees. It is recognized that there is a direct connection between mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, mandatory sentencing and the burgeoning prison population. It took many years for us to get to this point. Efforts to change public perception run the risk of being perceived as “soft on crime”,

Inge reported on the growing Sanctuary movement. It is modeled on the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980’s when churches stepped in to offer shelter to immigrants from central America who were fleeing for their lives. Jim Wallace and members of the Interfaith Worker Movement are using the new Sanctuary movement in an effort to change the tone of the debate. They are looking for families about to be deported whose stories can be told.

Lucy suggested that letters from Steve Jenkins thanking Senators Kyl and McCain should be sent for their work on immigration.

John Feit asked if we had heard from Catholic Charities regarding the Poverty Conference Oct. 9 and 10. Lucy will call Diana Stickney and inquire.

The SVdP local website is a vast improvement over the past one. Susan deQueljoie is posting Tom's legislative reports, Lucy's monthly newsletters and the minutes from VOP meetings.

Inge and Walt volunteered to attend a conference on advocacy sponsored by The Wallace Foundation of Arizona on September 19.

VOP will next meet on Wed., July 18. There will be no August meeting.

Lucy Howell