

Notes from Voice of the Poor Planning Committee
Monday, March 26, 2007
3:30 p.m
Vincentian Support Services

Attending: Cindy and Art Miner, Catherine Hanley, Katie Archer, Frank Barrios, Ron Meyer, Walt Gray, Inge Casey, John Feit, Julie Douglas, Kathy Jorgensen, Tom Finnerty, Lucy Howell. Special guests: Paul Martodam, CEO Catholic Charities – AZ and Tricia Hoyt, Catholic Charities Office of Peace and Justice.

The meeting was opened with the recitation of a Lenten prayer composed by Father Fitz.

Presentation: Catholic Charities Booklet “Poverty in America: A Threat to the Common Good”

Paul Martodam gave a brief overview of Catholic Charities USA. The core mission includes service, advocacy for systemic change and bringing communities together. The focus continues to be on children and families. In 50% of the dioceses in the U.S., Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul are combined. The SVdP National President, Joe Flannigan, serves on the CCUSA board. SVdP nationally is partnering with CCUSA in support of a meaningful reduction of poverty in this country.

The “Poverty in America: A Threat to the Common Good” booklet written and now being circulated by CCUSA lays out the religious foundation for the priority given to poverty, the reality in our time and a set of specific policies to reduce poverty in the U.S. A goal of reducing poverty by 50% by 2020 has been set. There are two types of poverty: situational (in and out of poverty during various periods in a person’s life) and generational . They are different and will require different approaches. The paper is available online at www.catholiccharities.org in both English and Spanish.

The big question is how can we at Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul effectively engage the community? Who are the power brokers? Who can be brought to this table for a dialogue?

Tricia Hoyt outlined the concept of a two day conference on poverty in Phoenix, possibly in June. Jodie Farr, author of “Bridge over Poverty” has been invited as a speaker. The first day would offer inservice for people in direct contact with the poor. The second day would be a series of workshops on poverty-related topics.

It was suggested that SVdP and Vincentian Support Services could be a valuable resource as well as non-profits participating in the Basic Needs Coalition. It was suggested that Diana Stickney of OPJ might speak to BNC at an upcoming meeting.

The question of how a reduction of poverty might be measured was raised by Catherine Hanley. She made the point that the need is growing in northern Arizona as evidenced by

the tripling of their Conference budget over the past five years to keep their information line going (from \$3,000 to \$10,000 monthly).

Frank Barrios stated that the goal of reducing poverty in half is very ambitious and was concerned how realistic it might be. Decisionmakers will have to “buy in” to the goal.

The comment was made that we need to “dream big dreams” and that community-based programs when put together can result in systemic change. Examples were childcare cooperatives and worker-owned cooperatives which can start with microloans.

Paul stated that a planning leadership group/steering committee is needed for the poverty conference. A larger advocacy campaign – education – is needed. The idea of a half day session for elected officials was mentioned as well as a Resource Day for the community. Frank stated that broadening the base beyond the usual non-profits and faith-based organizations will be essential.

Starting within the Catholic community to inform and galvanize Catholics about the numbers in poverty and policies that have contributed to the situation will require collaboration between SVdP and CC at the parish level. Kathy noted that while Vincentians are often called for emergency assistance, Catholic Charities can step in with ongoing case management. We need to think of true change, not the same old things in our collaboration. This is the linking of charity and justice that must happen.

Legislative Report: Tom Finnerty

The legislature continues to work on the budget behind closed doors. Most of the bills VOP supported this session are now part of budget negotiations. Kathy did a great job of testifying about payday loans at House Financial and Insurance today against HB1446. The bill essentially eliminates the sunset provision and does not address the exorbitant interest rates charged or database needed to prevent borrowers from having multiple loans. The bill passed out of committee 4 –2 –2. Robert Meza voted against the bill stating that SVdP had played an important role in his life.

VOP Communication:

Catherine Hanley and Katie Archer were warmly welcomed, having driven down from Flagstaff to attend the VOP meeting. Both indicated that VOP is a strong interest of theirs and others in northern AZ. Catherine noted that Vincentians who are no longer able to make home visits or attend Conference meetings could be asked to make calls to legislators responding to Action Alerts. Realizing that this is a very long drive, Lucy indicated that she would contact District President, Gene Grandy, and ask if VOP could put on a program in the fall at a District 1 Meeting.

The committee is concerned that Vincentians on the VOPNET can easily be overwhelmed with the amount of information sent out. Lucy noted that the VOP Core Group receives far more information than the rest of the network as she feels it is important to have adequate background information. Inge stated that the VOPNET

receives the following: 1) Action Alerts 2) Weekly Legislative Reports 3) Monthly newsletter 4) VOP Meeting Agenda 5) VOP Meeting Notes. It was agreed that a questionnaire should be put together for the VOPNET asking members which items they wish to receive. In addition by the fall, it is hoped that we will have the facility to post links to the SVdP website for VOP information which should reduce the volume.

Announcements and Next Meeting:

- Lucy distributed a draft VOP Task and Timeline document to members who were asked to read it and make suggestions by e-mail or at the April meeting.
- Kathy was thanked for taking over for Lucy on Sat. at the SVdP General Membership Meeting Workshop on AHCCCS applications. It has been suggested that VOP workshops on Sat. be stand alone programs.
- Ron Meyer will represent Lucy on the National VOP Committee at Mid-Year in St. Louis at the end of April.
- Tom Finnerty will represent Phoenix VOP at Western Region in Billings, MT in June and will be working with Deborah Payne on a VOP workshop.
- Frank Barrios, representing SVdP and VOP, will accompany Councilman Stanton and a group from Phoenix who will meet with members of the AZ congressional delegation to D.C. on the topic of Section 8 vouchers for AZ. Tentative dates are 4/16-18. Frank was asked to coordinate with Kelly Dalton, the Councilman's Chief of Staff.
- Time being short, Lucy asked Walt if the discussion on restorative justice could be placed first on the April agenda.

Lucy Howell