

**Voice of the Poor  
Planning Committee Meeting  
Notes – November 19, 2007**

Attending: Julie Douglas, Lucy Howell, Father Bill Fitzgerald, Frank Barrios, Walt Gray, Kathy Jorgensen, Tom Finnerty, Inge Casey and Chris Quintenz.

*A workshop on how to participate in GoogleGroups was given by Inge Casey at 3 p.m.*

Meeting was opened by Father Fitz leading us in a participatory prayer written for Voice of the Poor.

**Old Business:**

**Meeting reports:**

**MAG:** Walt Gray stated that the Homeless Count this year has been schedule for Jan. 29 .Volunteers are needed across the valley to assist. Each city will coordinate the count within its boundaries.

**HealthLinks/Keogh Foundation :** Lucy will attend a lunch meeting on 12/3 sponsored by the Keogh Foundation in an effort to bring providers of healthcare to low income Arizonans together to share information. Keogh is looking for sites to set up HealthLinks intake based on State-determined zip codes where significant numbers of eligible but unenrolled children reside. Lucy has suggested SVdP District 4 be a site.

**Basic Needs Coalition:** Kathy reported that Ginny Hildebrand of AZ Assoc. of Food Banks (SVdP is not a member but often shares food) is concerned that the donation of turkeys is down this year. (Note: This meeting occurred before SVdP Turkey Tuesday when over 20,000 turkeys were donated. Some were shared with AZ Assoc of Food Banks).

**Faith-based outreach by Az Democratic Party:** Frank Barrios, Father Fitz and Kathy Jorgensen attended, as individuals, a meeting for Catholics called by Democratic leaders in the state. Dems appear to be sincere in wanting to initiate a dialog. The Church prolife position is understood. Committee members again stressed that VOP is a non-partisan effort.

**Valley Interfaith Issues Conference:** VOP reps Frank Barrios, Inge Casey and Walt Gray attended this meeting on Nov. 15. VIP's role in the community is to organize and empower people across a broad range of issues. Occasionally there is cross-over with the VOP agenda.

**DES Reauthorization Hearing:** Kathy Jorgensen attended and reported that the agency was reauthorized for 10 years. DES has recently reached out to faith-based and non-profits in AZ in an attempt to understand programs in the community that are used by low

income people. A current program being promoted by DES and the Governor's Office is training of volunteer tax preparers for VITA sites across the Valley where low income families can go for free tax services including application for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

### **Updates:**

**St. Vincent de Paul VOP Legislative Agenda for 2008** as edited by the committee and presented to the executive board on 11/7 is on the diocesan board agenda for 11/21.

**Conference Survey Results:** 20 surveys have been received and collated by Kathy Jorgensen. Wording and purpose will be reviewed prior to this effort next year. The point was made that Conferences need to understand we are asking them about issues they see, not solutions to the problems. Final responses will be communicated to SVdP in January along with approved legislative agenda.

**Small Dollar Credit Study Group:** Kathy reported that the group may be recommending an FDIC program for use in AZ high schools re money management. Still looking at alternatives to payday lending. Senator Debbie McCune Davis has taken over leadership of the initiative drive that would ban payday lending in AZ. AARP supports the initiative. Kathy gave out information re where consumers can file complaints with the State re payday lending or other predatory loans:

By e-mail: Go to [www.AZDFI.gov](http://www.AZDFI.gov). By phone call (602) 255-4421 or toll free in AZ at (800) 544-0708 and as for Consumer Affairs Division or by letter address to:

Arizona Department of Financial Institutions  
2910 N. 44<sup>th</sup> St. #310  
Phoenix, AZ 85018

**EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit):** DES and the Governor's Office are promoting recruitment of volunteer tax preparers for the VITA sites (no cost tax prep for low income Arizonans including determination re eligibility for EITC and child tax credits). Reminders to Conferences of the importance of the EITC to low income clients have been part of Up to Date (Conference and District presidents) and Vincentian Support newsletter.

**LIHEAP:** Frank Barrios and Steve Jenkins received letters from Congressman Pastor and Secretary Leavitt announcing a second round of emergency LIHEAP funding with over \$400,000 coming to AZ. This is a success for VOP and the City of Phoenix for low income energy assistance.

### **New Business:**

**Outreach to legislators, council members, local congressional office this year:**

Tom Finnerty reminded the committee that the budget deficit will primarily dictate what happens at the State legislature this year – the deficit is already at \$800 million with some predicting it will be at \$1 billion by the end of the year. There will be on tax increases proposed in this environment. The House is already looking at cutting back on programs. Senators Allen and O’Halloran have stated they will oppose cuts in education. Oddly enough 580 bills have been drafted to date (2 times as many as at this time last year). JLBC has produced a list of possible cuts that is alarming but it is a list, not a concrete proposal.

In spite of the financial picture, VOP still needs to continue to meet with elected reps and their staff with the message “Don’t cut programs necessary for the survival of low income Arizonans”.

**Communicating with the Society and “Growing VOP”:**

Lucy and Inge have spent considerable time and effort reconciling the current VOP database. This is always a “point in time” list but currently includes 207 Vincentians representing 74 of the 87 Conferences in northern and central AZ. In addition there are 17 Society employees who have asked to receive VOP e-mail information and 32 community organizations or individuals. Some Conferences have multiple members which is most desirable due to the time sensitive nature of action alerts from national and within AZ. Our Lady of Joy has 12 members, St. Gregory has 11 and several other Conferences have 5.

We do not know how often VOP information is passed on to Conferences or how many Vincentians are actually taking action when an alert is issued. Two responses from Vincentians to the VOP Conference Survey have made it clear that there is a lot of communication that still needs to happen with our membership re what VOP is, how we operate, our relationship with the board, etc. The committee will schedule an additional meeting in the next 2-3 weeks to discuss and formulate a plan for more effective communication by VOP with the Conferences.

**Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering:** Registration packets are expected shortly from USCCB. Going this year from AZ: Ron Meyer, Lucy Howell, Father Fitz, Kathy Jorgensen, Inge Casey, Julie Douglas, Frank Barrios and Walt Gray. Joanne Welter (Diocese of Tucson Office of Peace and Justice) will attend and is bringing a priest. There will also be 2 or 3 from Catholic Charities. Ron Meyer will be making initial contacts with the congressional offices to schedule meetings on the afternoon of Feb. 26.

The meeting was closed with Father Fitz leading the Voice of the Poor participatory prayer.

VOP will hold its next regular meeting on Monday, Dec. 17 at 3:30 p.m. in Vincentian Support. (There will be an additional meeting in Dec. to be determined).