

**Voice of the Poor Meeting Notes
Wednesday, September 19, 2007
3:30 p.m. Vincentian Support Services**

The Vincentian prayer was led by Walt Gray.

Attending: Walt Gray, Inge Casey, Julie Douglas, Ron Meyer, Frank Barrios, Lucy Howell

Old Business:

Meeting reports:

Tom Finnerty attended the District 2 meeting on August 17 in Kingman speaking about Voice of the Poor. District 2 has only two VOP representatives and Tom was there to encourage more participation.

Kathy Jorgensen attended the Basic Needs Coalition (BNC) Summer Camp in August. (The coalition includes the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness, Arizona Coalition to End Domestic Violence, AZ Association of Food Banks, AZ Community Action Association and St. Vincent de Paul; the coalition meets monthly during the State legislative session to discuss action on pending legislation). Discussed during summer camp was concern about impact to social service agencies from lowered State revenues and possible resulting cuts in programs. Next session's BNC agenda will include: (1) EITC for State (2) addressing predatory loans (3) Housing First for homeless families and singles (4) Continued outreach to children eligible for KidsCare. Kathy mentioned that SVdP will continue to press for simplification of the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit.

Julie Douglas and Kathy Jorgensen attended the Governor's Roundtable on KidsCare (Arizona's SCHIP) in July. The conference was well-attended by representatives from social service and healthcare agencies who want to see KidsCare continue successfully in AZ. The biggest issue remains the number of children who are eligible (families earn under 200% of the federal poverty level) for KidsCare but are not enrolled. Kathy came back with the name and contact information of a representative from HealthLinks who would be interested in putting on a workshop for Vincentians interested in helping enroll eligible children.

Lucy Howell attended the SVdP National Meeting in Austin, TX at the end of August. Voice of the Poor national committee is working on ways to reach out to regions and conferences without VOP. A basic workshop on VOP is being put together to be offered at national and regional meetings. VOP representatives are being encouraged to attend the annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington Feb. 24-27, 2008. The Western Region allocated funding to help defray the cost of attending this conference for VOP members from the western region who could otherwise not afford to go. A CD by DePaul University about SVdP will be available this fall.

Frank Barrios will represent Voice of the Poor at Catholic Charities Poverty Conference in Phoenix Oct. 5 and 6. Frank will show the VOP CD and talk about Voice of the Poor's advocacy role in the Society.

Predatory Loan Study Group: Kathy Jorgensen has been representing VOP at a group organized by Rep. Chad Campbell. The group, staffed by Allen Elder of the House Democratic staff, is calling itself "Small Dollar Credit" Study Group. The consensus of the group is that this will be a year of study, not action. The sunset date for existing payday loan legislation in AZ is 2010. The focus of the study group is to identify viable options for small loans that will not involve the huge interest rates currently charged by the industry. A second focus could be development of budget workshops for the public, perhaps by the association of CPA's. The third focus will be identification of workable consumer protection from predatory loans based on experience of other states. The group believes that an outright ban of the loans (as proposed by an initiative currently being circulated) will result in unintended negative consequences – should not take something away without a better alternative. The diocese has a pilot micro-loan program offered through Catholic Charities with maximum amount borrowed of \$200 to persons who are employed. Ron Meyer noted that we need to be exceedingly careful about supporting initiatives since the minimum wage initiative contained provisions that hurt employment of the disabled and the only way to undo an initiative is to pass another initiative.

Housing First Study Group: Rep. Chad Campbell has also organized a study group around Housing First as a solution to homeless families and singles. Walt Gray reported that there are 30,000 homeless in AZ, 12,000 of these are in Maricopa County with 6,000 of these in the category that could be assisted by Housing First. (Half of the 6,000 are homeless families). This is the group that is chronically homeless, substance abusers and/or mentally ill and ongoing treatment is very costly to local governments. The first priority is to help educate legislators about the concept and tell the success stories from other cities. Rep. Campbell sees this as a long-term project and does not anticipate introduction of legislation this session. Representatives from the Department of Housing and DES have not yet been contacted. This is a program that emphasizes getting homeless off the streets FIRST followed by regular treatment by professional teams for mental and physical health and substance abuse. Rep. Robert Meza has indicated that he will continue to pursue additional unclaimed lottery funds for homelessness.

October VOP Newsletter: The survey sent to Conferences last year in the Vincentian newsletter was reviewed and edited for the October newsletter. An addition was made related to post-release programs from prison.

New Business:

A draft **Voice of the Poor Job Description** was discussed. Ron Meyer mentioned that he believed this was a crucial step in recruiting additional members for VOP and indicated he would work on the content in the next couple of weeks. Others on the committee were asked to get back to Lucy with suggestions.

Change of date for next VOP meeting: Old date – Monday, October 22 to NEW DATE of Wednesday, October 17 at 3:30 p.m. in the Vincentian Support Conference Room.

Tour and lunch for decisionmakers: It was suggested that both candidates for District 7, Phoenix City Council as well as other members of the Council be invited to tour the center at 11 a.m. followed by lunch in the Hall of Banners. Agenda item: Arizona's Fair Share for LIHEAP, Section 8, HeadStart and CBDG. Lucy will contact members and let the VOP committee know about response.

League of Women Voters Elected Representative Pamphlets for 2007 have been picked up by Julie Douglas. Distribution will be an ongoing project for VOP. Julie will attend the General Membership Meeting on 9/22 and give copies to Conference presidents to give to their members.

Other Business:

As requested by Gloria Hurtado, City of Phoenix, a letter requesting reconsideration of distribution of **additional LIHEAP funds** for Phoenix in view of the excessive heat this summer will be drafted for Steve Jenkins and Frank Barrios to sign. Letters will be sent to all members of the AZ congressional delegation and to HHS Secretary Leavitt.

Google Groups: Inge Casey gave a brief overview of how Google Groups could be used to facilitate committee communication on issues. She would like to add all members of the committee to this pilot program. One example of its use would be drafting of the VOP Conference Job Description where all on the committee would see what each person had added or edited.

Meeting with Democratic Party reps on Oct. 1: Catholic community leaders have been invited to meet with Democratic Party leadership to discuss "how faith informs your perspective on community issues, the appropriate lines between church and state and the national political climate. The meeting will be held between 1 and 3 at 2910 North Central Avenue in Phoenix. VOP members planning to attend are Walt Gray, Frank Barrios and, hopefully, Father Bill Fitzgerald. Lucy will ask Tom Finnerty if we would like to participate as well. Lucy suggested that members take a copy of the VOP national legislative agenda with them to give to the Democratic leadership (www.voiceofthepoor.org)

Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering Feb. 24-27: Lucy will meet with Ron in mid-October to go over the scheduling of the meetings with members/staff of the AZ congressional delegation during the conference. VOP members who are committed to attend: Ron Meyer, Lucy Howell, Kathy Jorgensen, Walt Gray. Considering attending: Inge Casey, Julie Douglas, Frank Barrios. VOP has a small budget available to help cut the costs. Early plane reservations are an important cost-saving tool.

The meeting was adjourned at 5 p.m. with Inge Casey leading the closing prayer.

