



Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 420 W. Watkins, Phoenix, AZ 85003

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contact: Norma Salas, Communications Manager
Office: (602) 850-6755, Cell Phone: (602) 421-9543, E-Mail: NSalas@svdp-phx-az.org

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Society of St. Vincent de Paul mourns loss of leader, friend

First woman elected President served the poor for 20 years

PHOENIX, AZ – Nancy B. Spencer, who committed the last 20 years to working for the poor through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, lost her battle with cancer on February 27, leaving many at the Society reminiscing about her dedication and commitment to serving the poor.

“For 20 years, Nancy has inspired and motivated her fellow Society members, volunteers and staff with her dedication, wisdom, and perseverance,” said Steve Jenkins, President of the Board.

“Nancy had a way of challenging the rest of us to strive harder to serve those in need,” said Steve Zabilski, Executive Director of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. “She always put the poor first and foremost in all she did. Her commitment was absolute. She felt it was her obligation not only to serve the needy, but to reach out to others and get them involved as volunteers and advocates for the poor.”

Nancy was born in Boston, Massachusetts on April 8, 1936. She moved to Arizona in 1957, and worked as a registered nurse in Tucson, Showlow and Morenci before moving to the Phoenix area in the early 1970s. In the Phoenix area, she worked as an emergency room nurse and a director of nursing before retiring.

Nancy joined St. Vincent de Paul as a member of St. Mary’s Conference in Chandler in 1985. She soon became president and served in that capacity from 1986 to 1992. She served as district president from 1992 to 1996 and was the first female elected president of the Phoenix Diocesan Council in 1996, a position she held until 2002.

Nancy was instrumental in establishing the Wayne Unruh Memorial Dining Room in Mesa while president of the Chandler Conference. She was personally involved in every aspect of the project, from finding the land, to raising funds and choosing the name. The dining room project was so meaningful to her that she always carried a key to the dining room.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a non-profit organization, dedicated to serving the poor and providing others with the opportunity to serve. Programs include services for the homeless, medical and dental care for the working poor, five charity dining rooms and general assistance for individuals in need.

Nancy also served for 10 years on the Adopt-a-Family Christmas Committee, matching sponsors with needy families to ensure each family member receives a Christmas gift; and the Youth Clothes Closet, providing new clothes for children at the start of each school year.

Nancy felt a kinship with Frederic Ozanam who founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833. While president of the Diocesan Council, she commissioned a life-size statue of Ozanam, the only such statue in the United States. It is now at the entrance to the main Society of St. Vincent de Paul campus, welcoming the homeless and needy who come for services.

Prior to her death, Nancy started a special ministry. She visited former volunteers who are elderly or home-bound due to illness. She thanked them for their service and reminded them that by following God's call to serve the poor, they had made a difference in the lives of thousands of homeless and working poor.

Several weeks before her death, the Board of Directors honored Nancy by dedicating the Society's chapel in honor of her dedication and service. During her presidency, she had spearheaded the expansion of the chapel to double its original size.

"It was her life's work, and she was very passionate about it," said a friend, Marcie Ptacek. "At one point in her life she found herself truly alone. It was a soul-searching period in her life when she wanted more meaning out of her life, and she felt a calling to serve the poor. She believed it was her spiritual vocation and she followed that vocation, often having to scrimp and save so she could give her last nickel to those who needed it more than she did."

Nancy loved outdoor activities, including fishing, motor home touring, and horseback riding. She also enjoyed making jewelry, painting and woodworking. Another of her favorite causes was animal rescue, which was evident by the long line of rescued cats and dogs she nurtured over the years.

"She will be dearly missed." Said Zabilski. "However, the people for whom she has labored for so long and so hard, will benefit from her work well into the future," said Zabilski.

Note: Photo attached (Duke Photography has given permission for publication, with credit line)

Caption: Nancy B. Spencer served the poor for 20 years through her work at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Photo by Duke Photography.