



OUT OF POVERTY...

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Western Region
INFORMATION FROM VOICE OF THE POOR

Year 5, No. 2

MARCH 2015

Dear Western Region Vincentians:

The March 2015 issue of *OUT OF POVERTY...* includes several articles inspired by the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, which took place in Washington, DC on February 6-10. Among them: the reflection by Archbishop Wenski of Miami on "God Takes the Side of the Poor", followed by articles with more specifics about the Gathering by Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M and by Dave Barringer.

Based on the comments made by Fr. Louis Arceneaux, other articles were developed, one on the "Life and dignity of every person" and another on "Comprehensive Immigration Reform", talking about Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson testifying on behalf of the USCCB, before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security. Immigration was also the focus of three short pieces, concluding with an opportunity to take Action.

As several Councils are now planning the program called "Getting Ahead in this Just Getting by World", we felt the need to discuss how we integrate "Bridges out of Poverty" into the work of the Society. Perhaps, based on your experience, you might have much more to say about this. Please let us know.

Starting on Page 14, we analyze the significant issues that people in poverty face in Arizona, because of a very weak public education system and a state budget that exacerbates the problem, instead of resolving it. We are aware that others states face similar issues.

From Page 15, we provide information about the 2015 Western Region Meeting in Burbank, CA and the Social Action Summer Institute in Portland, OR. On May 28, in Burbank, Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty will offer a pre-conference seminar, open to all Vincentians.

The "News from the Western Region", include brief updates from Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. We know that more VOP action is happening elsewhere in the Region, and we look forward to hearing about it for the next newsletter.

Giulio Grecchi
Tucson Diocesan Council
Voice of the Poor - Western Region Representative

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VOICE OF THE POOR

Voice of the Poor does not take positions for or against a political party or individual candidates.

However, Voice of the Poor is interested in working with those elected officials of either party, who support initiatives that will benefit people in poverty, children, elderly, immigrants (documented or not), and all of those that SVdP serves.

VOICE OF THE POOR PRAYER *(by Ruth Zemek)*

Lord of all people,
During your time on earth you identified with the poor and instructed us to care for one another, for our neighbor
and especially for the least of our brothers and sisters.
Be with us as we advocate for the poor.
Help us to persevere in joy and love on their behalf.
Add your voice to ours as we speak out for those who are not heard in our communities.
Guide us as we work, comfortable in the knowledge that we are doing your will for this day, and time, and place,
and that you will take care of tomorrow.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, his Blessed Mother, our patron St. Vincent and our founder Blessed Frederic.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

GOD TAKES THE SIDE OF THE POOR

Homily by Thomas Wenski, Archbishop of Miami, on Feb. 7, at the start of the 2015 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C.

In the Gospel reading, we find Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry - he is doing the things that reveal him to be the promised Messiah of God: He preaches with authority, he casts out demons, he heals the sick, and he devotes quality time to prayer. He even heals - we learn - Simon Peter's mother-in-law.



Thomas Gerard Wenski - [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Gerard_Wenski)

But this healing is instructive - for the Gospel tells us that once "raised up" by Jesus, she got up and began to serve them. *Jesus*

doesn't answer our prayers or bestow his gifts on us just for our own private gain or advantage - he answers our prayer and heals us (and the most important healing we receive is the forgiveness of our sins), to equip us for service, the service of our brothers and sisters as missionary disciples of Christ. That's the reason that brings you to Washington and to the meeting of Catholic Social Ministries.

Two great principles of Catholic Social teaching are in evidence here - principles that are not in conflict (although some on the Hill might think so) but are mutually complementary: solidarity and subsidiarity. Let me give a special shout out to the Council of Catholic Women and to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

St. Vincent de Paul, as you know, was the Mother Teresa of his time. He organized a lot of direct service to the poor but he was also a good advocate on their behalf. He was what we would call today a "lobbyist." Hopefully, this week you will have the opportunity to follow his footsteps and do some lobbying.

As Catholics, we must continue to be involved in the issues of world hunger, human rights, peace building and justice promotion. This social ministry is not opposed to the ultimate spiritual and transcendent destiny of the human person. It presupposes this destiny and is ultimately orientated to this end. If this earth is our only highway to heaven, then we must seek to maintain it – as Catholics, we are concerned about ecology - both natural

ecology and human ecology. In other words, we have to make sure that this highway is cleared of the obstacles which sin - both personal and structural - has placed in the path of those traveling on it.

For Catholics, spirituality must be more than an exercise of navel gazing (or what Pope Francis would call "being self-referential.") *We are called to the margins: to go forth encountering Christ in the heart of the world.*

In a message for a World Peace Day some years ago, Pope St. John Paul II wrote "...How can we exclude anyone from our care? Rather we must recognize Christ in the poorest and the most marginalized, those whom the Eucharist – which is communion in the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us – commits us to serve. As the parable of the rich man, who will remain forever without a name, and the poor man called Lazarus clearly shows, 'in the stark contrast between the insensitive rich man and the poor in need of everything, God is on the latter's side'. We too must be on this same side."

The Pope wanted to remind Catholics that involvement in what are sometimes called "peace and justice" issues is not optional – nor is it the purview of those who would label themselves either "liberal" or "conservative." Rather such involvement is a constitutive part of the living out of our faith. Solidarity as the pope once said is another word for justice in our day. It is "a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good." (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis#38)

Today's first reading presents us with the "Lazarus" of the Old Testament: Job. If Lazarus suffered because he remained "invisible" to the rich man who was indifferent to his plight, Job suffered an even greater indignity - for his friends blame him for his miseries. *Today, in a world of increasing inequality, as Catholics we must struggle against what Pope Francis termed the "globalization of indifference" as well as that tendency - seen especially these days in the debate over immigration reform - "to blame the victim" for his or her ills.*

As St. John Paul II said, "in the stark contrast between the insensitive rich man and the poor in need of everything, God is on the latter's side. We too must be on this same side." *This conviction is born of our Catholic faith - and that conviction leads us to engagement in the public square where as "faithful citizens" we claim our rightful place.* For while faith is "personal" we can never allow it to be reduced to the "private."

And, because works of charity as Pope Benedict XVI warns in *Caritas in Veritate* must be rooted in the truth about the human person, lest they are distorted on one extreme into mere sentimentality or on the other into "a false compassion," as Catholics we must continue to oppose those policies born of a defective anthropology like legal abortion, euthanasia or so-called same sex marriage.

The Eucharist reminds us that our commitment as Catholics to work for peace and justice in the world is not born of some ideology or political platform; rather, it is born of a person, Jesus Christ. Therefore, our "solidarity" with the world of pain is a call to a commitment expressed in allegiance not to lofty propositions but to concrete persons in whom we are to see the face of Christ – this solidarity is lived out through the practice of what the Catechism calls the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

God takes the side of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized – through the works of mercy, the saints show us that we too can and must take their side as well.

Catholic Social Ministries Gathering

By Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M., New Orleans, VOP National Committee Spiritual Advisor

Fellow Vincentians,

From February 6 to 10, I joined several hundred clergy, religious and lay women and men in Washington, D.C. for the annual "Catholic Social Ministry Gathering." This event brings together leaders of the Church involved in many social ministries throughout the United States.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was represented by a good number of our members, including President Sheila Gilbert, Executive Director David Barringer and National Chair of the Voice of the Poor, Jack Murphy.

During the Gathering, we heard presentations from organizations such as Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and Catholic Campaign for Human Development. We had a meeting of members of SVDP Voice of the Poor committee from various parts of the nation and we had the opportunity to participate in workshops on various topics related to serving the needy.

One of the highlights of the Gathering was for attendees from the various states to go to the Hill and meet with our Representative and Senators, or their assistants. Beforehand, we were briefed on two international and two national issues that the U. S. Bishops wanted us to focus on in the meetings. This year we focused on maintaining sufficient funds in our national budgets to continue to provide humanitarian aid to those in need internationally, as well as nationally, especially regarding programs dealing with children. We also continued to support the two state solution to the situation between Israel and Palestine, as well as comprehensive immigration reform in the United States.

Members from SVDP went with their own state delegations to urge their Congress men and women to support our positions on these issues. I went with Tom Costanza and with Fr. Etido Jerome from Xavier University and seven of his college students. We met with staff members of both Louisiana Senators and two Representatives.

I write about this gathering to show you that our U. S. Bishops do want us to advocate with our government leaders to support programs and issues rooted in Catholic Social teaching.

Too often, I have heard that the SVDP ought not to get involved in politics and that the Voice of the Poor program is too political. The reality is that we need to be involved with political issues related to Catholic Social teaching. One way we do this is by advocating with our government leaders. We do not support individual candidates, but we do support many issues that affect the poor, so that our leaders are able to make laws and provide financial support to the needy.

As you probably have heard, Pope Francis is going to address a joint session of Congress on September 24.

What he will do in his presentation is advocate for those who are in need and call our leaders to focus not on their own political interests, but on the common good of all and on the needs of those who are voiceless, the poor. In making this presentation, Pope Francis is going to remind all of us that we have a right to advocate for those in need and we therefore ought to call our congressional leaders to hear the voices of the voiceless as we speak for them.

Sincerely in St. Vincent, Blessed Frederic and Blessed Rosalie,



Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M

VISITING THE HILL

Excerpts from article by SVdP U.S. National CEO Dave Barringer, in the Frederic's E-Gazette 1-29-2015



The Hill Days are important because like it or not, sometimes success is in showing up.

But, the factor that means the most is often the one most bungled. When a group descends on Washington to “tell our story” or “make our point” the effort is often diluted, because the members involved go off the script and waste precious time with anecdotes and personal matters. But, to me the worst transgressions are the wrong messages. Nonprofits are particularly selfish.

You see, the real reason why most nonprofits visit the Hill is not what is in their mission statement. Actually, it is the development of resources in order to accomplish what is in the mission statement.

Once you understand this, you can understand the typical Hill Days. Instead of informing Congress about the cause, too much time is spent defending one’s tax issues, fighting threatened postal hikes, or on other topics that impact the nonprofit’s ability to raise money.

So with all this energy spent just on holding the business together, **who then speaks for the poor?**

That needs to be us.

As Catholics, we have the annual Catholic Social Ministries Gathering in February, where advocate leaders can speak to that year’s threats and opportunities involving our faith.

In addition, we can contact our elected representatives throughout the year in their home offices – where such meetings are always more welcomed and appreciated – and speak to real-life poverty concerns. We can join with the Voice of the Poor committee, and sign up for CapWiz and other communication tools, to give that unique Vincentian perspective of walking with the poor. We can inform government leaders at all levels about what it is really like in our - and their - neighborhoods and parishes.

Who speaks for the poor? Do we? Do you?

Right: Sal Gonzales, Darlene Miller and other California Catholics at the office of Sen. Feinstein



THE VINCENTIAN COMMITMENT TO LIFE AND DIGNITY OF EVERY PERSON

By Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, Voice of the Poor, Western Region Representative

Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M, in his article on page 4, wrote that we need to be involved with the political issues related to Catholic Social teaching, which defends and protects the life and dignity of every human person.

For the Church, there is no distinction between defending human life and promoting the dignity of the human person. Pope Benedict XVI writes in Caritas in Veritate that "The Church forcefully maintains this link between life ethics and social ethics." Then, he continues "a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized." (no. 15).

The Church proposes a “**consistent ethic of life**”, coming from its scriptural tradition that all human beings, without any exception, are made in the image and likeness of God and that, without any exception, Jesus Christ died for all of us. Therefore, each human person is sacred from conception to natural death and the life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition.

As Catholics and Vincentians, we embrace and support the full body of Catholic Social teaching. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul focuses on addressing poverty and its root-causes, but we respect and admire other Catholic groups that work on other critical concerns, such as those seeking to protect the unborn by assisting pregnant women in difficulty, or those trying to end death penalty, torture and wars, or those dealing with other issues.

No one group can do everything. To be effective, Catholic social work had to become specialized, But, we are all part of the Body of Christ and we are all working in a common effort of building the “kingdom of God”.

While we fully embrace the teaching of the Church regarding the “consistent ethic of life”, we realize that there are Catholics and non-Catholics, who do not. Some look at the social teaching of the Church as a menu, from which they can pick what is more convenient, or what seems closer to their intellectual preferences. Also, many social and political groups claim exemptions from one or more of these principles, often for utilitarian purposes, or for political, or economic advantage. This is not the Vincentian way. Let’s be clear about that!

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down." (John 19:23).

Personally, I like the metaphor of the “seamless garment”, used by late

Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, as a cloak of moral issues woven together as seamlessly as Jesus' tunic, bringing unity to Catholic teaching and indicating that all of life is sacred, from womb to tomb. – Think of the unborn and the dying, the murderer on death row, the undocumented immigrant, the soldier in Afghanistan and the family in Iraq, the undernourished child and the pensioner who cannot afford a doctor. "When human life is considered 'cheap' or easily expendable in one area," Bernardin said, "eventually nothing is held as sacred and all lives are in jeopardy." Life is sacred!

Our responsibility, as Christians, is not to rip Christ's garments apart, but to keep it whole.

Catholic Social Principles

Here are the Church's ten building blocks upon which the “consistent ethic of life” rests:

1. The Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person.

"Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and, therefore, is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family."

2. The Principle of Respect for Human Life.

"Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity."

3. The Principle of Association.

"Our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society, in economics and politics, in law and policy directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community."

4. The Principle of Participation.

"We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable."

5. The Principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable.

"We believe that we touch Christ when we touch the needy."

6. The Principle of Solidarity.

"Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family.... Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world."

7. The Principle of Stewardship.

"The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation."

8. The Principle of Subsidiarity.

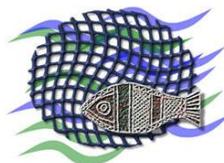
Subsidiarity is the principle that the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority decides on local matters. Central authority should deal only with initiatives, which exceed the capacity of local government or private individuals and groups.

9. The Principle of Human Equality.

"Equality of all persons comes from their essential dignity.... While differences in talents are a part of God's plan, social and cultural discrimination in fundamental rights... are not compatible with God's design."

10. The Principle of the Common Good.

"The common good is understood as the social conditions that allow all people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity."



Picture: <http://www.grdominicans.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CatholicSocialTeaching2.jpg>

Border Bishop Urges Congress to Pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform, instead of Harsh Enforcement Bills

[Information from the Justice for Immigrants web site]

Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson testified on behalf of the USCCB before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security on February 11, proving the point of Fr. Louis Arceneaux, C.M in his article that the U. S. Bishops want us to advocate with our government leaders. Dan Torrington, Tucson Diocesan Council President, said: *“Here is a Catholic Bishop telling Congress to pick the moral path. Not a path prescribed by man-made laws, but the path taught by Holy Scripture. We too should be telling our elected representatives to follow the moral path. Today is the time to write to our representatives ... that we want a compassionate immigration bill, by July 4th”.*

In his testimony, Bishop Kicanas opposed the three proposed “enforcement-only bills”, because they would harm immigrant and refugee children; criminalize undocumented persons and those who provide them with basic assistance, including religious and church workers; and allow states and localities to create and enforce their own immigration laws. In his statement, Bishop Kicanas said that the three proposed bills “would take our nation in the wrong direction”. Instead, he urged the subcommittee to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation, including a path to citizenship for the undocumented.



“Mr. Chairman, we believe these bills would not fix our immigration system,” Bishop Kicanas said. “Rather, they would make it less just and would undermine our nation’s moral authority, both domestically and globally.” Bishop Kicanas indicated the provisions in the three bills, which would harm immigrant and refugee children, including the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, affecting 600,000 children, and the repeal of protections for unaccompanied alien children fleeing violence in Central America, subjecting them to return to possible harm without the benefit of an immigration hearing.

“Our country is judged by how we treat the most vulnerable and the removal of protections from children – both those in the DACA program and those seeking refuge – flies against human decency and violates human dignity. We should not punish these children, who themselves are innocent and are only seeking opportunity and safety.”

Finally, Bishop Kicanas pointed to the provisions in the Secure and Fortify Enforcement (SAFE) Act, which would criminalize undocumented persons and those who transport them, including religious and lay faith-based workers, to a hospital, soup kitchen, or Mass.

Citing how similar provisions in a 2006 bill sparked protests across the country, Bishop Kicanas asked: “As a nation, do we want to go down this road again? Do we want to criminalize millions of persons who have built equities in this country, jail them, and separate them from their families? Instead of fixing a broken system, would we want to jail nuns and other good Samaritans who are simply aiding their fellow human beings, consistent with their faith?”

“Mr. Chairman,” Bishop Kicanas concluded, “the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the people of many faith communities, and the majority of Americans were disappointed that comprehensive immigration reform legislation was not passed in the 113th Congress. You once again have the opportunity to fix the broken system in the 114th Congress. We stand ready to work with you toward this goal.”

Bishop Kicanas’ full written statement is available at www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/congressional-testimony/upload/Kicanasfinal.pdf

IMMIGRATION REFORM IS A PRO-LIFE CONCERN

A group of Catholic leaders urged fellow Catholics in Congress to set aside “partisan bickering” and support the U.S. Bishops’ efforts on behalf of a comprehensive immigration reform, calling it a sanctity of life issue and an important step in building a culture of life. “Our nation’s inhumane and flawed immigration policies leave migrant women, children and families abandoned by the side of the road,” the group said in a letter released on Jan. 20, two days before the anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* legalizing abortion.

Among the more than 100 signers of the letter were the presidents of at least 31 Catholic universities, as well as bishops, men and women religious, former staff members at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the heads of various institutes and social action agencies. “As Cardinal Sean O’Malley put it in a homily at the U.S.-Mexico border last year: ‘we know that the border is lined with unmarked graves of thousands who die alone and nameless,’ the letter said.

Source: <http://americamagazine.org/issue/immigration-reform-pro-life-concern>

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House Passes DHS Bill, Preserves Immigration Action Funding

On March 3, 2015, the House of Representatives passed H R 240, funding the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) through September 2015. The DHS appropriations bill had been the center of a battle to prevent the President from implementing portions of his executive order on immigration. The bill passed without any language that would restrict the implementation of the newly created Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) and expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programs. For weeks, the House majority tried to make DHS funding conditional to the repeal of the Executive Orders.

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Sad news from Syria

Members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Syrian Christian villages were kidnapped, along with their wives and children. It is rumored that the children were isolated and put into cages. Adults who do not deny their faith will be decapitated, and their children burned alive in the cages.

Syrian SVdP leaders have made a fervent appeal for prayers for these Vincentians and all who are held hostage.

Our Christian faith moves us to pray and to hold our fellow Vincentians and their families in our hearts. It is also our obligation to make our voices heard to disapprove and condemn this barbaric behavior.

But, shouldn’t we also look at ourselves in the mirror, realize the barbaric suffering and death that our country causes to migrants crossing our Southern borders, and do something about it?

TAKE ACTION BY CLICKING ON:

<http://www.capwiz.com/justiceforimmigrants/issues/alert/?alertid=14503781&type=CO>



HOW DO WE INTEGRATE BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY INTO THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY

(By Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, Voice of the Poor, Western Region Representative)



The Goal of the Society is:
Moving people out of poverty through Systemic Change
...One Person
One Neighborhood
One Community at a time

How do we do it? How do we achieve Systemic Change?

This is our step-by-step process:

1. Home Visits

Through home visits, Vincentians establish a relationship with families in poverty and understand their issues. Two Vincentians always do this together.



2. Temporary emergency help

Vincentians take care of the urgent needs of the family they visited



3. Advice

When they can, Vincentians provide information that the family can use:

- *How to budget*
- *How to write a resume*
- *How to apply for SNAP or other benefits*



4. Understanding the Causes of poverty

Based on the stories heard during home visits Vincentians analyze the causes of their Poverty. The can be:

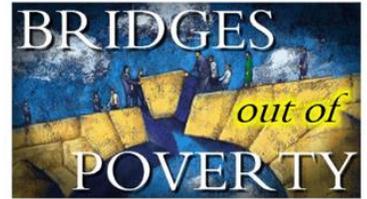
- Individual Behavior
- Absence of Human and Social Capital within the Community
- Human Exploitation
- Political / Economic Structures

Different causes have different solutions



5. Bridges out of Poverty” (Causes of poverty A and B)

With “Bridges”, Vincentians offer a method and a safe environment for motivated people in poverty to examine their behavior, to assess the impact of poverty on their life, to understand the rules and language of economic class, to learn about available resources in the community and make a plan to move-ahead. By moving ahead, they will be able to enrich their community and help solving community problems, thanks to their new skills and self-reliance.



6. Voice of the Poor (Causes of Poverty C and D)

However, there are societal issues that cannot be resolved by individuals alone, but require a collective community effort

By being the Voice of the Poor, Vincentians advocate to remove the barriers and the unjust structures that keep people in poverty (Minimum wage, Predatory lending, Medical insurance, Funding for education and job training, Visas and Path to citizenship for migrants, etc.)



7. Systemic Change

In Systemic Change, are the people in poverty themselves that engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and create strategies, including advocacy, to change those structures, which keep them in poverty (From Vincentian Family definition)

Vincentians teach Bridges Graduates and other people in poverty to advocate for themselves and to join in the work of Voice of the Poor. In this way, Bridges Graduates achieve Systemic Change.

Do you want to make a real difference for our brothers and sisters living in poverty?

Include in your process Bridges out of Poverty and Voice of the Poor to achieve Systemic Change!



One in Five American Children Now Live In Poverty

IS PUBLIC EDUCATION FAILING?

By Giulio Grecchi, Tucson, Voice of the Poor, Western Region Representative

Starting with the rush towards laissez-faire economics in the 1980s, free-market theorists, corporate strategists, and opportunists entrepreneurs, pushed elected representatives at the Federal and State level to favor the privatization of education by moving tax dollars from traditional public schools to for-profit entities.

To help accomplish this, could it be that they built the myth about public schools failing, with teachers and their unions being the cause? A direct attack to public schoolteachers, by the most part well respected educators, who helped generations of children to read, write, learn, become successful adults and good citizens, who helped building our democracy?

In Arizona the relentless cuts in public education funding, over the years, caused what was initially a myth to become a reality. According to the US Census Bureau, by fiscal year 2011, Arizona had the second lowest spending in the country per pupil for Public Elementary-Secondary Schools: \$7,666. And, more cuts will be coming – see box on page 14.



http://img.ehowcdn.com/default/ds-photo/getty/article/171/164/80704368_XS.jpg

The consequences are there for everyone to see. A student of a local public high school I talked with mentioned that in his grade four students have to share the same math textbook, meaning that each student can take the book home only once a week. How can we expect them to learn? A teacher of a highly rated public high school commented on how shrinking funds caused their excellent labs not to be able to replace essential equipment.

With the stated objective to favor private education, the AZ legislature has repeatedly cut funding from public schools or diverted and dispersed funds to a myriad of small private school. These often do not have the critical mass to build any labs, or gyms, nor to provide high quality education. Rather, some charter schools have a ratio of up to 40 to 50 students per teacher. Others have failed and closed, after the owners made handsome profits off the tax dollars received. To be fair, there are charter schools that are well run. They spend every dollar of their resources to educate students the best way they know how, and doing a good job of it. However, favoring private education has opened the door to profiteering by unscrupulous entrepreneurs.

One in five American children now live in poverty, one in three children in Tucson. A good education is their only hope to break out of generational poverty when they become adults.

As Vincentians, we are very concerned about the shortage of funding for public schools, because the vast majority of the children of the people we serve attend public schools, some of which, especially in poor neighborhoods, no longer meet educational standards for lack of resources. We know from the families we serve how inadequate education leads to a life of poverty or worse. You probably already heard that there is an undeniable connection between literacy skills and future incarceration rates.

Good public education is a Common Good issue - all Catholics should care about it. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul supports the right to good education and has a formal position paper on the matter.

A few Arizona majority legislators still support public education. We heard last summer from one of them: "Parental choice starts with well-funded and well-functioning public schools". Then, continued: "Further discussion can occur once we fix our funding formulas, once we make our public school system one of the best in the nation".

Catholic Schools are an alternative for those who can afford the tuition or can benefit from scholarships. Catholic Schools have been in existence for decades, in parallel with the public education system. They are not-for-profit institutions, created initially to educate the children of immigrants and continued as a way to provide Catholics with an educational choice for their children. If Catholic Schools did not exist, all of those students would have to be educated at the state's expense.

Our Catholic bishops are obviously concerned with ensuring the future of Catholic Schools. They welcome the help by the state through the tax credits that taxpayers can directly allocate to Catholic Schools' tuition support in their yearly returns. In this sense, the privatization movement indirectly favored Catholic Schools. Many Catholics are happy with this choice and elect to contribute to Catholic education.

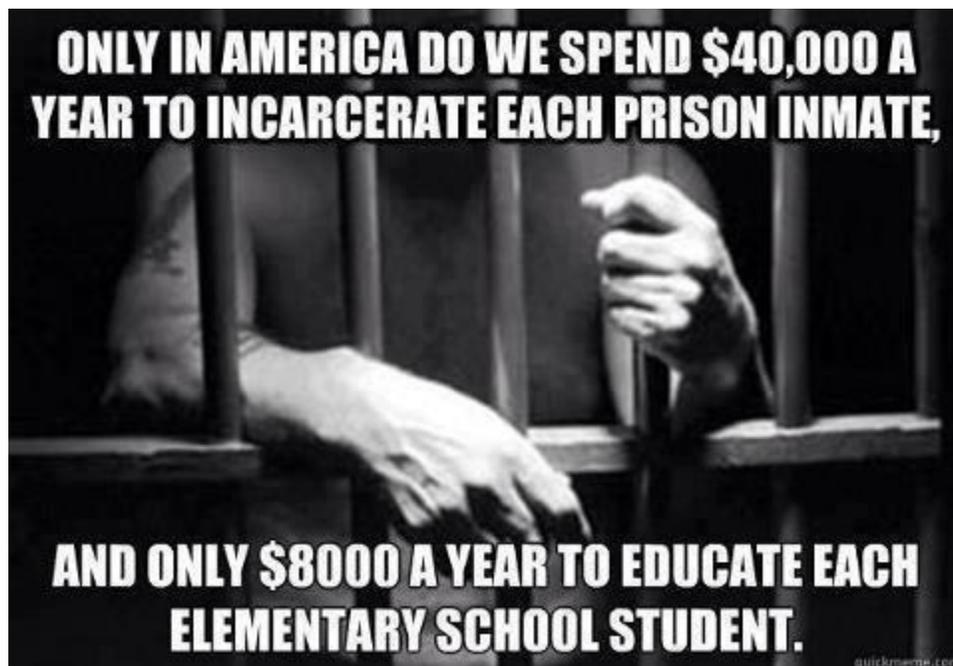


http://stpaulcos.org/school/images/13-14%20CSW_Logo_Circle_RGB.jpg

On the USCCB website, we read the following:

*"The USCCB actively monitors all federal [and state] legislation relating to elementary and secondary education. As the Church's representative for Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States, the USCCB supports policies that recognize the right of parents to be the primary educators of their children. We also advocate for legislation that assists parents in defraying the costs of choosing the type of schooling most appropriate for their children, including education in Catholic schools. **The USCCB works to ensure that all students, regardless of where they attend school, share federal benefits and services equitably.**"*

It is the last sentence that gives the people we serve some hope. **It is time that more Catholics understand the crisis of the Public Education system and help with their vote and advocacy to bring public schools to higher standards, while still maintaining the Catholic education choice for those who desire it.**



Picture from: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/412149803370117656/>

THE ARIZONA BUDGET

The Governor and the majority legislative leadership agreed behind closed doors to schedule the discussion of the state budget with no hearings, no public testimony and no opportunity for advocates to voice any suggestions. It passed at 5:45AM on Saturday morning, March 2, by one vote. The budget will devastate the AZ education system and the programs for the people we serve.

The budget includes:

--> Cuts to hospital and doctors providing care to Medicaid / AHCCCS patients total \$127 million over two years, which mean a loss of another \$508 million in federal matching funds from Arizona's economy over that time.

--> K-12 schools will suffer from a \$352 million cut in district assistance and other areas. The Tucson Unified School District is singled out for another \$17 million hit, which will be shared by Pima County, likely leading to higher property taxes for Pima County residents along with cuts. The lawsuit settlement of schools funding inflation adjustment, which the courts have set at around \$332 million, is in the budget for only \$74 million. The State has not yet paid back the \$900 million in K-12 funding rollovers, a budgeting gimmick used years ago, and public schools will continue receiving their funds not in advance, but as reimbursement -- 90 days in arrears.

--> Community colleges in Pima and Maricopa Counties will no longer receive any state funding.

--> Universities are cut \$99 million in FY16, with University of Arizona portion \$28.4 million.

--> JTED programs are cut by \$30 million in FY17, despite the pleas of 35 JTED students from Andrada Polytechnic High School in Vail, who drove up to Phoenix and stayed watching in the gallery until 2am. The cuts might cause their school -- and many others --to close and the students' careers are in danger.

--> \$1 million was taken from a fund for consumer protection in the Attorney General's office and given to a new Division of Federalism, charged to find ways to sue the Federal Government.

--> Cities and counties received more raids -- they will now have to pay for collection of sales taxes and juveniles state prisons.

--> Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), cash assistance to mothers in desperate economic straits (often fleeing from domestic abuse) was cut to a 12-month lifetime limit -- the harshest limit in the US -- although currently the average length of claims is only 14-15 months. Those cuts may put more women and families in danger of destitution.

--> \$10 million in cuts to the Department of Child Safety, despite 16,900 kids currently in state care, and rising.

--> Arizona arts funding is again zeroed out after two years of being funded at \$1 million a year.

--> \$360 million is left untouched in the Rainy Day fund. Is it raining yet?

--> \$ 24 million added costs for a 1,000-bed prison expansion for minimum-security inmates in private prisons

--> No discussion on suspending the remaining \$675 million in corporate tax giveaways that will go into effect in the next three years or the \$12.6 billion that disappears annually in special interest sales tax loopholes. The money is there, but the majority chooses to cut vital services rather than asking corporations to pay more, something that many companies are willing to do in

Picture from: <http://media.jrn.com/images/Arizona+-+Legislature.jpg>



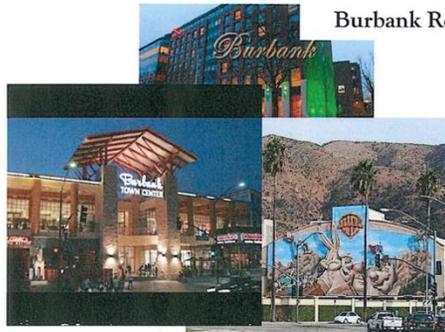
2015 SVdP Western Regional Meeting
and Workshops



Ozanam in Hollywood: *Giving aid in unlikely places.*



Burbank Registration & Information



Date:
Thursday/Friday/Saturday,
May 28-30, 2015

Check in/Reception:
Thursday May 28, 2015
3:00 PM

Location:
Holiday Inn
Burbank Media Center
150 East Angeleno
Burbank, CA
818-841-4770 Front Desk

Meeting Registration: \$75.00 per person.
Checks payable to: Society of St Vincent de Paul Western Region

Hotel Registration: \$125 per night at 818- 841-4770
(Deadline: Thursday, May 14 2015) or online at:

<https://www.ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/burbank/laxbb/hoteldetail>

Complimentary Shuttle from Burbank Airport Available

Driving directions:

General: US Highway 5, Exit 145A to East Angeleno Avenue
From Airport: Turn left at W Empire Ave. Turn right at N Victory Pl. Turn left at W Olive Ave. Take the 2nd right onto S 1st St. Take the 1st left onto E Angeleno Ave Arrive at: E. Angeleno Ave.

SCHEDULE:

Thursday May 28th 12:00 PM Meeting Registration Begins
6:00 - 8:00 PM - Meeting Reception

Friday May 29th 7:00 AM Rosary and Mass
9:00 AM Keynote Speaker
10:30 AM- Workshops:
Eldercare
Diversity
Governance - Conferences
Governance - Councils
12:00 AM Lunch on your own
1:15 PM Workshops continued
5:30 PM Hollywood Tour - assemble for busses

Join us for a trip to Hollywood. Spend the evening seeing the sights and enjoying a meal at one of the many famous restaurants where you can dine with the stars. Maps to Hollywood's favorite spots will be provided!

6:00 PM Dinner and Tour on your own. See Maps.
9:00 PM Return to Hotel - board bus

Saturday May 30th 7:00 AM Rosary and Mass-
9:30 AM Western Region Business Meeting
11:00 AM Dismissal

Who should attend the Eldercare, Diversity, and Governance Workshops?

- Council Presidents, Vice Presidents
- Council Spiritual Advisors, Formators, Trainers, Extension Representatives, Voice of the Poor Representatives, Youth & Young Adult Representatives, Multicultural/Diversity Representatives, Disaster Committee Representatives, Hispanic Involvement Advocates, Prison Ministry Advocates, Systemic Change Advocates, Twinning Advocates
- Western Region Committee Chairs & Coordinators
- Council & Conference Members who are interested in revitalizing Western Councils or Conferences
- Those interested in understanding National & Regional Goals to be implemented over the next four (4) years in the West

On May 28, 2015, Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty will offer a pre-conference seminar, open to all Vincentians. We will hold the seminar at the Burbank Holiday Inn, in proximity of the registration desk.

During the seminar, Western Region Vincentians involved with Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty will share their experiences and their plans. Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty are both part of the SVdP National Strategic Goal #4, each addressing Poverty with its own specific strategy.

If you would like to hear what Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty could do at your Council or Conference, please join us!

The seminar will start at 4:00PM and last about 1 ½ hour, so that everyone will have time to get ready for the Regional Meeting Opening Reception.

As registration begins at 12:00PM, please plan to arrive at the hotel by early afternoon, so that you can participate to the pre-conference seminar. Many thanks!

SAVE THE DATE: SOCIAL ACTION SUMMER INSTITUTE



JULY 19–23, 2015 PORTLAND, OREGON
A 5-Day National Institute for Social Action Ministers

Care for God’s Creation:
Life, Earth, and the Common Good
<http://catholicroundtable.org/sasi>



FROM THE WESTERN REGION

Edited by Lea Fisher, Tucson
Lea, welcome!

ALASKA

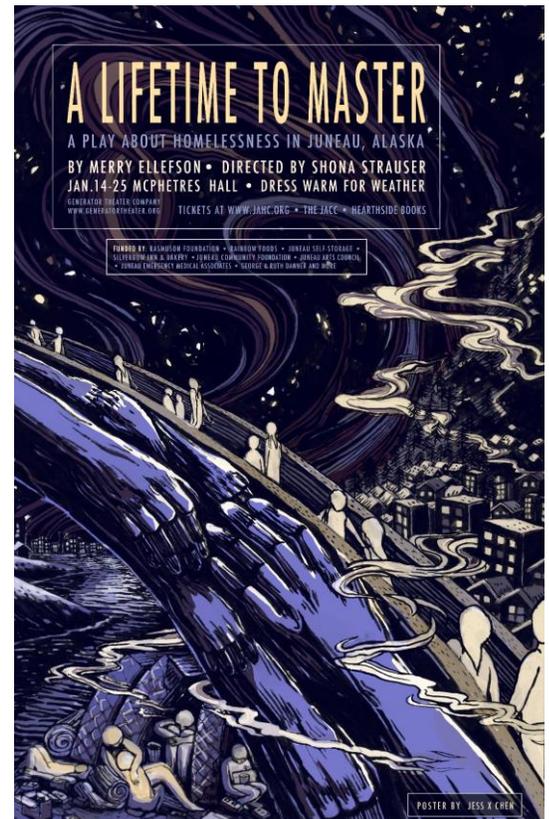
This is a poster for the play “A Lifetime to Master”. It debuted in Juneau, Alaska on January 16, 2015 after more than two years in the making. The author interviewed many of the residents of our homeless shelter. They made their voices heard.

Juneau is the most homeless city in Alaska. There are 3 times as many homeless per capita in Juneau as there are in Los Angeles County.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Juneau has built and brought under management 124 low-income affordable apartments in the last 15 years. We have four more projects in the pipeline that have been awarded Tax Credit financing. Within three years, we could have more than 200 low-income affordable housing opportunities under the ownership / management of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The population of Juneau is about 30,000 souls.

Yet, the real impact on poverty was the creation of 12 livable wage careers with St. Vinnie’s. These are maintenance and management positions and have been filled mostly from the ranks of the poor—residents of our campus.

Contributed by Dan Austin, General Manager



ARIZONA

PHOENIX

Consumer Flex Loan

A dangerous new bill has been introduced in the Arizona House. This bill, HB 2611, allows for a new version of predatory lending called a Consumer Flex Loan. Loans of this nature create a debt trap similar to those of payday loans – only worse.

Under the current statute, loans up to \$3,000 can carry 36% interest plus a one-time loan origination fee of 5% up to \$150. HB 2611 also allows interest of 36% but *allows fees far in excess of existing rates, which can be charged repeatedly.*

Lenders would be allowed to charge a “customary fee” of 0.5% of the loan's principal balance on a daily basis: *this is the equivalent of a 182.5% annual interest rate.* At these rates, *a borrower would have to pay back over \$8,500 to extinguish a \$3,000 loan after a year.*

HB 2611 also creates built-in incentives to refinance. *Lenders will be allowed to refinance 60 days of unpaid interest, causing debts to mount quickly, and to refinance unpaid interest from an old loan right into the new loan.*

We have sent out Action Alerts to all on our VOP e-mail distribution list. HB 2611 has already passed in the House (though by a narrow margin) and we are now putting all our efforts into lobbying the Arizona Senate.

Catholic Social Ministry Meeting

In other news, three Phoenix VOP members and Sister Leonette Kochan from the Diocese of Tucson attended the Catholic Social Ministry Meeting in Washington D. C. from Feb 7-10. Both Senators McCain and Flake were visited, as well as all nine of our Representatives. Issues discussed while on the Hill included Immigration Reform and the protection of valuable social programs from upcoming budget cuts. A representative from Catholic Charities' national office also accompanied us on our visits and presented poverty statistics specific to each district. This was very effective in every office we visited.

Contributed by Julie Douglas

TUCSON

State Advocacy

Tucson VOP issued a series of Action Alerts opposing Consumer Flex Loans, as already explained above.

An action alert was also issued on the State Budget, but the proceeding followed by the legislative majority with no hearings and no public testimony did not give advocates any opportunity to voice suggestions. As explained in the article on page 14, the budget passed by one vote. Funding cuts will devastate the AZ public education system and the programs for the people we serve.

The Phoenix and Tucson Councils are coordinating their actions on these issues. We are also collaborating with Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona and with the Pima County Interfaith Council.

As minority legislators already support our positions, we focused our efforts on convincing those members of the majority, who are sensitive to social issues. For instance, when Consumer Flex Loans legislation passed in

the Arizona House of Representative by the slim margins of 31-29, several majority House members voted against it, thanks to the many e-mails, phone calls and legislative visits. But, we needed a few more representatives to vote NO, to stop the bill from passing.

Bridges out of Poverty

Tucson Voice of the Poor acted as the incubator for Bridges out of Poverty. Tom Jefferson is leading that effort and formed a Bridges start-up team of about 10-12 Vincentians. Several have trained extensively in the Bridges methodology and/or as Getting Ahead facilitators.

This is a summary of our future steps:

- The first Getting Ahead program will start on March 26; for this cycle, we do have the needed facilitators, enough investigators, but we are still looking for more mentors
- We expect to run the program again for a new group of people in poverty in the fall (perhaps starting in September); the second program will benefit from the experience we will have gained in the meantime
- We are in touch with several other groups in the community to recruit candidates for the fall program, in addition to candidates met by Vincentians during home visits
- We expect to do mentor training after the March program has started.



From right to left: Tom Jefferson and Christine Krikliwy, Tucson VOP Vincentians with Jack Murphy, National VOP Chair

We are collaborating in this work with Pima County. Pima County is pushing the Getting Ahead program, as part of their economic development strategy. Tom Jefferson, Joan Grecchi and myself represented SVdP at a series of workshops, which complemented the training that we had already received by SVdP. Because of our previous training, we were able to contribute to the discussion.

It was also very interesting and useful for us to connect there with several community leaders and various agencies, which we will be able to work with in the future.

Co-workers in the Vineyard



The SVdP Tucson Council participated in the two-day diocesan conference, Co-workers in the Vineyard, with a table and displays about Voice of the Poor and Bridges out of Poverty. Several new people signed-up to receive action alerts and *the OUT OF POVERTY...* newsletter.

Bishop Kicanas' opening talk was about Faith Hope and Charity. He used SVdP as the example for Charity. At the Mass, the Bishop included a prayer for the Syrian Vincentians held prisoners and over a thousand people offered their prayers for them.

PCIC Celebrated 25 Years

On March 8, 2015 at St. Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church, PCIC celebrated its accomplishments over the 25 years of community organizing in Tucson.

They honored long-time leaders Episcopal priest Paul Buckwalter, Methodist Pastor David Wilkinson, PCIC/AIN Lead Organizer Frank Pierson, former Tucson Diocesan CCHD rep. Joanne Welter, and deceased former Tucson Mayor and PCIC leader George Miller.

Bishop Gerald Kicanas was the Master of Ceremonies. Congressman Raúl Grijalva, Mayor Jonathan Rothschild, former State Rep. Ethan Orr and Southern Arizona Leadership Council Chair Lisa Lovallo (Cox Communications) were among the speakers. Looking at the future, six young leaders shared their stories and their commitment.

VOP of the Poor collaborates with PCIC on many advocacy issues and some VOP members have been long-time leaders of PCIC, as well.



Photos by PCIC



Contributed by Giulio Grecchi

CALIFORNIA

PATTERSON

The Social Justice Ministry at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Patterson, CA is continuing its work in immigration reform. A forum on the Executive Actions on Immigration (DACA & DAPA) was held in collaboration with the Congregations Building Community (CBC) in the church's school gymnasium in February. Attendees heard an immigration lawyer discuss the details of President Obama's executive action. Members of the ministry and CBC registered people for more information about this opportunity to receive a legal work permit in the United States.



In January, the ministry adopted two additional projects: reducing carbon emissions and advocating a just wage:

- The environmental justice group is working with the Stockton diocese to inform the parish about the benefits of installing solar energy in homes. The group is also developing a sheet of tips to help everyone reduce carbon emissions.
- The just wage group developed a survey designed to reveal the number of parishioners living below the poverty line. Working with their pastor, Fr. Rex Hays, the group will distribute the survey to the parish this month. Based on the results, the group may organize a job fair including employers and resources to help parishioners and others in the community improve their employment status.

VOP Vincentians are active in the Social Justice Ministry of Sacred Heart Parish.

Contributed by Janet Dolan

From Sister Anne Marie Berthiaume (Patterson) on January 30 - Yesterday, I had some great news from a Hispanic woman that I attempted to teach English to, so that she could apply for citizenship. This was back in 2000! At that time, she did not learn enough English to pass the test. Today, 14 years later, she is an American citizen thanks to DAPA and DACA. Maria took the test in Spanish and passed. She made my day!!!

IDAHO

BOISE

Frank Monasterio recently testified before a sub-committee on the Medicaid expansion bill (now called Healthy Idaho). This would be a three-year pilot program, and we are now concentrating our political efforts on seeing it implemented with great hope for positive results.

Earlier efforts at increasing the minimum wage have been put on hold for the time being.

The committee is still working on trying to find an alternative option for payday lenders. We plan a meeting with a gentleman whose congregation has been seeing their share of requests for relief from these unscrupulous lenders. If we can implement a disbursement plan similar to the plans in Illinois or Michigan, there is a source of funds for borrowers, seeking relief, through alternative lending. Please keep us in your prayers; our state could use a program like this, and it would be a good first step for us. I hope we can give you good news in May at Western Region Meeting.

Contributed by Kelly Anderson

VOP Boise has been issuing monthly bulleting inserts for the parishes where they are present. This is a sample.

VOICE OF THE POOR

‘Did you know... More than 332,000 People – 20% of Idaho’s population receives some sort of federal or state aid. More than 211,000 Idahoans depend on food stamps in order to avoid going hungry. Only one-third of Idaho 1.5 million residents earn a sufficient wage to provide for a family of four. Idaho has the highest percentage of minimum wage jobs than any other state’. Quoted from Richard Armstrong, Director Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Voice of the Poor call for all individuals to contact their local elected officials to encourage a debate in Idaho on what is a fair minimum wage, so all those who work can pay for their own needs and not be dependent on state or federal assistance.

“Out of Poverty” is the Western Region of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies/Voice of the Poor newsletter, which helps us understand the complicated issues of poverty, hunger, homelessness, just wages, medical needs and much more.

Visit the website: www.wrvop.org to learn more about our voices. To receive the email version of the newsletter, please send a note to kelly.anderson@svdpid.org with the word **newsletter** in the subject line.

OREGON

PORTLAND AND SALEM

Six Vincentians attended the Interfaith Advocacy Day in Salem on February 11. We joined members of other faith communities in what was the largest gathering ever for this advocacy event. We heard from leaders of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. Then, we divided into groups to hear presentations on the three focus issues for the day.



The themes of this year's gathering were "Confronting Poverty", "Promoting Economic Equality" and "Preventing Gun Violence". Maureen Sloan, VOP Portland, reports that she attended the presentation on economic equality, which dealt with proposed legislation to increase the minimum wage and prevent wage theft. Carl Beals and Sue Woodford-Beals attended lectures on "Confronting Poverty" and on "Housing and Hunger."

After listening to these presentations, attendees visited their legislators; armed with the information they had just heard at the presentations, hopefully all were able to make a fine case for their support of these various issues.

A highlight of the Interfaith Panel was the delivery of Rev. David Knapp, St. Luke Lutheran church. He spoke at length about the difference between Direct Service and Advocacy, the individual skills required for each of the two, and how some people may be well suited to one but not the other.

A representative of the Catholic Sentinel Newspaper was present and interviewed the Catholic group from Portland, including Maureen Sloan, for a follow-up article in the newspaper.

Following the event, Ms. Sloan continued her work with committees, making the case for legislation on housing and abolishing wage theft. The Fair Wage Recovery Act was scheduled for a public hearing on March 9. Voice of the Poor's contacts were encouraged to email testimony to the committee hearing.

Contributed by Maureen Sloan, Sue Woodford-Beals, Carl Beals

WASHINGTON

CATHOLIC ADVOCACY DAY IN OLYMPIA – THURSDAY, MARCH 26



PROCLAIM JUSTICE
& LIFE FOR ALL

Please join the Catholic Advocacy Day in Olympia on Thursday, March 26! The theme is Proclaim Justice & Life for All.

The time together will include:

- ♣ Briefings on legislative issues and stories of how advocacy is making a difference
- ♣ Mass
- ♣ Appointments with legislators

The purpose of Catholic Advocacy Day is to meet with legislators to advocate for people who are poor and vulnerable based on Catholic Teaching. **The priority issues can change depending on the current legislative agenda.** The areas to be addressed may include 1) economic justice, 2) housing, 3) access to health care, 4) child welfare, 5) life issues, 6) environment and 7) criminal justice.

Buses for the trip to Olympia will leave from different locations, depending on registrations. All bus departures will be early in the morning. Stops will include following locations: ● BELLINGHAM/BURLINGTON ● EVERETT ● TACOMA ● SEATTLE ● KIRKLAND ● RENTON ● VANCOUVER/LONGVIEW ● BELLEVUE ● FEDERAL WAY. For those who travel on the

buses, there will be an opportunity to review the information packet and have updates on the issues. Alternatively, you can travel by car.

Over 110 appointments with legislators have been scheduled. Participants from the same district will meet together with their legislators. For those who do not feel comfortable about speaking on an issue, your presence will be a witness of your concern and commitment. Thank you for considering participating for this communal witness for life and justice on Catholic Advocacy Day. Information will be available on these websites: www.ccsww.org , www.thewsc.org , www.ipjc.org .

Catholic Advocacy Day is sponsored by:
Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center • Washington State Catholic Conference
Catholic Community Services • Archdiocese of Seattle • Pierce County Deanery • St. Vincent de Paul

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**For More Information on Voice of the Poor,
Visit Our Website by Clicking on: [Www.Wrvop.Org](http://www.Wrvop.Org)**

Then, find the information you need by clicking on the Tabs on the left rail

