

# The Vincentian

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## Spotlight on ...



**Julian Natividad** has been a member of our conference for three years, devoting about eight hours a week to helping the needy in our parish. "Volunteering comes naturally to me," he says. "My parents raised me with the understanding that 'you live to give and you give to live'."

Julian's commitment to volunteering started long before his retirement. During the 30 years when he was working as a Bailiff for the Criminal Division of the Phoenix Municipal Court, he made it a point to devote a fair amount of time to the Optimist Club and the Valley Big Brothers and Sisters. For several years, he has also served at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist and as a Minister to the Sick, bringing communion to the homebound every other day.

Three years ago, when during a ministry fair at OLMC, Julian heard that the conference was in need of bilingual volunteers to handle phone calls, he knew that he had found his place. He is putting his well-honed communication skills and his knowledge of Spanish to good use when answering up to 30 calls every Wednesday and Friday afternoon. After taking messages off the answering machine, he calls the families back, assesses their need, and prints out requests for food and financial assistance. "I feel for these people," he says. "Many are just desperate. They have lost their jobs, are facing eviction, and are suffering from serious health problems. They are pleading for help. It is crucial to answer every single call."

In addition to answering the phone, Julian picks up our conference's monthly food allocation from the United Food Bank. Recently, when he had knee surgery and was unable to do any heavy lifting, his son helped him to pick up our pallet of food that usually consists of five cases each of fruit juice, nuts, peanut butter, potatoes, raisins, and instant milk. Especially around Thanksgiving, volunteering for St. Vincent de Paul becomes a family affair for the Natividad family: Julian's wife, Lydia, their three children and their families become involved.

Julian is a much-appreciated member of our conference. We all love his warm smile and his compassionate heart. Thank you, Julian, for giving so generously of your time and your talents.

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## Adopt-A-Family Sponsors Needed

We are still in need of sponsors for our Adopt-A-Family Christmas program. A sponsor buys and wraps two new presents (one toy and one clothes item) for each child between the ages of 2 and 11, and one present for each child ages 12 to 14 and each parent and grand- parent, if living in the same home. The sponsor also provides for a full Christmas dinner for the family. A general guideline is \$35 to \$40 per person in the family for both present and food items.

To obtain more information about our Adopt-A-Family Program, please pick up a brochure in Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church or call our St. Vincent de Paul office at 480-966-1974. We invite you to share the holiday spirit with the less fortunate. May God bless you for your generosity.

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# Financial Report

(Third Quarter 2004)

Food expenses:	\$1,131.00
Rents paid:	\$8,462.62
Utilities paid:	\$7,157.01
Transportation/bus passes:	\$180.00
Clothing Vouchers:	\$501.37

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## Phone Persons Form Frontline in Service



Our photo shows (from left to right) some of our volunteers who answer the phones: **Julian Natividad, Eva Picone, Ramona Verdugo, Alice Allen, Barbara Pawlak, and Albert Marquez.** Not pictured, but equally well appreciated are **Nancy Anderes, Debbie Corte, Linda Dunn, Frances Garcia, Myrna Morgan, Shirley Ouellette, and Mary Jean Tate.**

Every day, many families in need of emergency food boxes and financial assistance call our office. **Barbara Pawlak**, our Treasurer and one of our volunteers who answer the phones in our office, made herself available to answer some questions about this crucial part of our ministry:

**Q: How many calls do we receive per day?**

**Barbara:** On a typical day, between the hours of 9 and 11, we receive about 15 calls. People who call after hours are encouraged to leave a message on our answering machine. There are days when we find 30 recorded messages. Every afternoon, one of our volunteers comes in to return every call.

**Q: What does the work of a phone person involve?**

**Barbara:** After taking down the client's name and address, we first need to determine if the client lives in the area we serve. If callers live outside of our area, we advise them to contact the Catholic church closest to them. If they live within our parish

boundaries, we assess their need. Many clients need a food box to tide them over the next days; others need help with rent and utilities. If they have an eviction or a disconnect notice, we try to respond immediately.

**Q: Can we help every client whose need has been established?**

**Barbara:** Unfortunately not. We are short of food and can only help with food every 40 days. Also, in many cases, our clients need more money than we can give. Last week, for example, a client needed more than one thousand dollars in rent money. We referred her to Tempe Community Action, the Salvation Army, the Family Assistance Ministry, and the Buddhist Relief Fund. With all agencies pulling together, we were able to help her pay her debt and get her back on her feet.

**Q: What is the toughest part about answering the phones?**

**Barbara:** Due to our scarce resources, we often have to say "no." Our priority is to help families with young children. If we are short of food or funds, we cannot afford to help adults who are not taking care of children. I wish we could offer material assistance to every caller. But we do not only tend to material needs.

**Q: How can we help in non-material ways?**

**Barbara:** Many clients appreciate having someone who is willing to listen to them. For example, a few weeks ago, we received a call from an elderly lady who lives outside of our area. She was totally dependent on a wheelchair, and her wheelchair was broken. Since she did not have the money to have it repaired, she was confined to her bed. She had called many other agencies in vain and had left countless messages that were never returned. You can imagine how relieved she was when she was finally able to talk to a live person who empathized with her and helped her resolve her desperate situation. She called back later to thank me.

**Q: What is the most rewarding part of taking calls?**

**Barbara:** Our clients are so grateful for any help we can offer. Many do not express their appreciation in words, but you hear it in their voices. I know that the Lord works through us to relieve their suffering and give them hope. At the end of each call, we invoke the Lord's blessing on them.

## A Knock on the Door

(by Ralph Mora)

One Thursday morning, Bob and I were scheduled to visit a lady who had called our St. Vincent de Paul office for an emergency food box. We knocked on her door, but she was not home. Hoping that one of her neighbors would be so kind as to accept the food and give it to her after her return, we knocked on the door next to hers.

A young woman opened the door. We introduced ourselves and asked if she could help us out. When she heard that we were from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, she became all excited and told us that this was the church where she was married. After she had accepted the food for her neighbor, we kept talking for a while. Finally she confided to us that she was going through hard times herself. "Right now," she said, "I have no job and no money. This morning, I had to send my three children off to school without breakfast. I have no money to buy food." She started crying. Then she showed us her refrigerator, which was empty. "This morning, after my children had left for school," she continued, "I sat down and prayed. I said to God, 'Please help me. I need food for my children.'"

At this time, it became clear to us why the Lord had sent us to her door. We told her to keep the three boxes full of food for herself. Her neighbor would be served the next day. The young woman was overjoyed. She thanked us under tears and praised God.

## A Note to Remember

(by Debbie Corte)

On one of our Saturday delivery rounds, Adelheid and I arrived at the door of Brenda, who had called us for a food box and help with her rent. On the door was a note: "Had to step out for a mement. Please leave food on stoop." We went back to the car and carried the food boxes through the winding apartment community and up the steps to Brenda's door. Taking another look at the note, Adelheid said: "There's a spelling error. She must have been quite distraught." As we turned around to leave, hesitation set in. Maybe Brenda was so

distraught that she forgot to remove the note upon her return. Maybe she was home after all so that we could discuss the rental situation with her. Something told us to knock on the door.

A teary-eyed Brenda opened the door, speechless. She was clearly in a state of shock. She motioned us to come inside and pointed to her landlady, who was sitting on the sofa. Brenda was still so upset that she could barely talk. Eventually, she calmed down a bit and told us that she had fallen on hard times. She had lost her medical scheduling job, used up her savings, and was now facing eviction. She had found another job, but it would be another two weeks until she would get her first paycheck. By that time, she would be out on the street together with her 14-year-old son.

Fortunately, the landlady was willing to accept a partial rent payment from us. In return, she promised that Brenda would not get evicted. Brenda thanked us under tears. When we arrived, Brenda was desperate and crying. As we left, she was relieved and smiling. We were glad that we had listened to the inner voice that told us to ignore the note.

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## God's Angel

She came into my home,  
to see how she could aid.  
This angel sent from Rome,  
saw that I was frayed.

In a soft tone she did speak,  
as I hung my head and cried.  
She saw that I was weak,  
and unto her I did confide.

I knew not how to cope,  
against obstacles I couldn't dismiss.  
She revived a glimmer of hope,  
Among all that had gone amiss.

Before sleep, I will pray  
and exult the Lord above.  
Thank him for the angel today,  
his mercy and his love.

(A client dedicated this poem to one of our home visit team members after a visit in October 2004.)

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## Sharing the True Meaning of Christmas

(by Michael Murphy)

It was the Saturday before Christmas 2003 when we loaded up the family car with holiday gifts and food for our adopted family. This was the second year in a row that we had agreed to sponsor a family through **St. Vincent de Paul's "Adopt- A-Family" program.**

Our journey actually began several weeks prior when we began contacting our family to determine clothing sizes and gifts for the three young children. Our adopted family spoke limited English, and we ourselves spoke limited Spanish, but eventually the language barriers were no longer a problem. After a few trips to department stores and getting a lucky break by finding a refurbished bicycle, we had accomplished our shopping goals, and right on budget!

With our presents all neatly wrapped, we headed out to the trailer park to share Christmas with our adopted family. The mother greeted us at the door. Thank goodness we had my brother along to help translate. We placed our gifts on the kitchen table.

"Mama, can we open the gifts now?" the little 7-year-old asked. Her mother smiled and asked her to wait. Then, we rolled in the bicycle for her 10-year-old brother. He looked at it sheepishly, trying to mask his excitement about his new wheels.

After some light conversation in both English and Spanish – we found out that the family had lived in a cramped trailer for the past two years -- we said goodbye and wished them a Merry Christmas.

We felt blessed to be able to share the true meaning of Christmas with our adopted family. We definitely will be back next year to sponsor another family.

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