



The Vincentian

Newsletter for supporters of the
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Conference

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2121 S. Rural Road, Tempe, AZ 85282
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Thanksgiving Food Drive

Thank you for your overwhelming support during our Thanksgiving food drive. You donated 70 banana boxes of food and approximately 3,000 dollars, which we used to purchase food for the Thanksgiving food boxes. We also appreciate all the turkeys you donated as well as your help in delivering Thanksgiving food boxes to 160 families. God bless you for your generosity!



Getting ready to deliver Thanksgiving food boxes: Ken Burger, Joe Romano, Bob McKay, Don Ong, Liz Anderson (left to right, second row), Alan LaFontain, John Schiffer, Linda Reichert (first row).

He who is generous to the poor lends to the Lord; he will repay him in full measure.

-- Proverbs 19: 17-18

From the President's Pen

(by Barbara Pawlak)



As the new President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, I feel privileged to be working with a wonderful group of donors and active members. We are all friends of the poor. Whether, as members, we are devoting our time and talents to help the needy or, as donors, giving from our surplus or our own need, we are doing the good that we do in the name of Jesus. We are the hands and feet of Christ as we provide food and financial assistance to as many as 200 families per month.

During the next three years, our goal will be to make our great group even greater by education, training, and cooperation with many of the other groups in Tempe and the Valley that offer resources for the needy. We have a "heads up," or perhaps "feet up," on most agencies because we make home visits. Other groups and agencies often are confined to office settings so that the clients have to visit them. This is a hardship for many of them, especially for single moms with toddlers, for the disabled, for the elderly for whom daily living is an almost unmanageable chore.

Since we visit our clients in their homes, we can interact with them on a personal basis. We are able to look the mom or dad in the eyes and explain that we are there to help. Most of all, we are able to join hands in prayer with our clients, asking God's blessings during difficult times and hoping that their way in the world will be made easier through the

services provided by the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

The 76 men and women who make up the OLMC Conference are indeed very special for taking time from their busy schedules. Some work full time, others are involved in many ministries, and still others are raising their own families. They are all very dedicated, often coming in for extra shifts, staying way past their scheduled times, or calling from home to ensure that a needy client was served. All are anxious to find better ways to serve and to share. All this they do because they take to heart Jesus' call to help others, especially the poor and powerless.

Meet Our Volunteers



The friendly voice on the phone that our clients have heard every Monday morning for the past five years belongs to **Frances Garcia**. Frances, who has also recently accepted the office of conference secretary, is fully bilingual in English and Spanish and can thus easily communicate with all of our clients.

Frances uses her proficiency in Spanish not only at the St. Vincent de Paul desk, but also in her volunteer work at Aguilar Elementary School. Frances has always had a strong interest in education. She earned an Associate's degree in Education from Mesa Community College and was employed as a teacher's assistant at Aguilar Elementary School for thirteen years. Even though she is now retired, she continues to go there once a week and helps the children develop their English skills. "I like to be active," she says, "and helping the children with reading and writing is very rewarding."

Besides her volunteer work, Frances enjoys spending time with her six daughters, 13 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren. Her hobbies include reading, singing (she used to be a member of a Hispanic choir), and listening to Mariachi music. She is also a member of the Sodality at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and an active member of the Lady of Guadalupe Rosary Group.

In Memoriam: Anita Lynch



Anita Lynch, who was a member of our conference since 1995, passed away on October 6, 2006. She dedicated herself to helping the poor as long as her health permitted her to do so.

For many years, together with her friend Minnie DiVirgilio, she delivered food boxes to the needy. When carrying the heavy boxes became too difficult for her, she volunteered to answer the phone in the office, where she coordinated assistance for our clients. Anita had a kind word for all callers and was sensitive to their deeper needs. Until recently, she would also stock our pantry refrigerator with 6-8 dozen eggs per week, which she had purchased from a grocery store at a reduced price.

We will keep Anita in our prayers and remember her selfless spirit, her cheerful smile, and the unconditional love she gave to all she met.

Undaunted Spirit

(by Trisha Brandt-Fox and Mary Vrizuella)

Tina, who was disabled, had called St. Vincent de Paul for a food box. When we knocked on Tina's door, we heard a loud yell: "Just a minute, I'm a little slow." Initially she was hesitant to open the screen door, but upon hearing that we had a food box for her, she said cheerfully, "Oh great, come right in."

When we asked her how she was doing, she replied, "Let's see. I'm a wheelchair-bound amputee, I'm almost deaf, and I have terminal cancer." We told her that we were sorry to hear that. She responded, "Oh, don't be sorry. Cancer tried to kill me at 27. I just turned 50. Cancer has taken my leg, but not my spirit."

So there was Tina, mangled, disfigured, and yet perfectly beautiful. As we were leaving, Tina said, "I'm so glad you came today."

So are we, Tina.

Adopt-A-Family 2006

The St. Vincent de Paul Christmas program under the direction of **Mike Murphy** is in progress. Every year, approximately 100 needy families are matched with sponsors who provide Christmas presents for each family member as well as a complete holiday dinner. Please consider if you can make a commitment to adopt a needy family. The families range from a single parent with two children to couples with six or more children. For further details, please pick up one of the pink Adopt-A-Family brochures placed by the posts at the back of the church.



Matching families with sponsors and translating for Spanish-speaking families requires the efforts of a team of volunteers. Pictured from left to right: Trisha Brandt-Fox, Kathy Gibbons, Mary Banegas, Ben Picone, and Mike Murphy.

Memo from a 2005 Adopt-A-Family Sponsor

I want to thank you so much for allowing me to get involved with the Christmas program last December. My friend and I adopted two Hispanic families who lived in a trailer park, and both of them were so grateful!

As sponsors, we provided a complete Christmas dinner for both families. One family wanted ham, so I purchased two huge hams, all kinds of vegetables, and rolls. The other family had indicated that they liked tamales. Since it takes one to two days to make tamales, we decided to deliver the ingredients early so that the mother would have the time she needed. She did not speak English, but

her son did, so he interpreted. When the mother saw the tamale stuff, she broke down and cried, and her son, who is 14, had a chin that quivered. I had to breathe deeply to not sob out loud.

As for gifts, we chose to make out one big gift card for each family so that the mothers and fathers could go Christmas shopping for their own children. We provided transportation to Target and Food City. Both families bought clothing items as well as sacks of food, pies, cake mixes, and tangerines. When they came home with all the goodies, you could see the joy in their eyes and their hearts. My friend and I both got big hugs from the mothers and the children that were at home.

You have no idea what an impact this has made on my life. I am so thankful for my life and for my friends. Thank you so very much! Merry Christmas to you!

One More Day

(by Trisha Brandt-Fox and Mary Vrizuella)

One Monday morning, we called Christina to see if she was home so that we could deliver the food boxes she had requested. At first, she thought we were a bill collector, and she was glad to hear that we were from the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

As soon as we arrived, the door opened, and Christina came out on the porch. Three small children, two in diapers, were trailing behind her. When we asked her how things were going, she responded, "I am currently unemployed. I tried to sell Avon products, but that did not work out. My car is dead, and the bills are piling up."

We asked Christina if we could pray with her. We assured her that, even though she was struggling, she was not alone and that God was with her. As we bowed our heads in prayer, the youngest child, named Angel, reached out his hand to join our circle. We prayed that the Lord might bless Christina and her family and guide her out of her present situation.

Our visit was just ten minutes out of Christina's long day, but maybe this was a moment of encouragement and hope – for one more day.



On the Verge of Homelessness

(by Adelheid Thieme)

On busy days, our conference receives about 40 requests for food or assistance with rent and utility payments. We have our priorities, of course, mainly helping families with young children, but we evaluate each case on an individual basis. Otherwise, single adults like Charles and Laura, whom we visited recently, would not have their needs met.

Laura had called the office asking for help with her rent because she had lost her job. When we knocked on the door of her apartment, she opened the door and offered to assist us with the food boxes we had brought. Even though she was probably not much older than 40, she had major trouble walking and was dragging her left leg. After we had carried the food boxes inside, she invited us to have a seat. As we sat down on the sofa, one of her three cats jumped right into my lap and curled up to sleep. Beautiful handmade pottery plates in different shades of blue and brown adorned the walls, and the wall unit by the window had a collection of cat figurines. Laura explained to us that she was an artist and that most of the pottery we saw was her work.

Until recently, she had earned a good living as a sales associate with Nordstrom, but had to give up her job when, due to neurological problems on the left side of her body, it became too hazardous for her to climb ladders and stock shelves. A few months ago, she had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. By now, she had used up her savings. "I called several agencies," she said, "but when I tell them that I am not working and that I don't have any children, they don't even listen to my story. I have applied for disability assistance with DES, but was declined. I will appeal, but it will take several months before I will hopefully be approved. How am I supposed to pay my rent in the meantime? My parents have passed away, and my friends have limited funds."

Her landlord was willing to accept a partial payment, and the financial help we gave her would

keep her in her apartment one more month. However, if she did not receive massive help soon, she would have no place to stay. We informed her about the possibility to temporarily stay at Ozanam Manor, a home for disabled individuals, but leaving the comfort of her own home with its beautiful artwork and her beloved cats was a terrifying idea of course. We felt sorry that we could not do more for her. However, she thanked us warmly for providing at least some help and, most of all, spending time with her.

Our next stop was a few streets further down. Charles, a tall young man with dark sunglasses welcomed us into a living room that was bare except for a well-worn leather couch, a wooden kitchen chair, and an old TV set. After bringing in the food boxes, we inquired about his request for rental assistance. Charles swallowed several times before answering. It was obvious that he was embarrassed about the situation. He took off his sunglasses, and we noticed his blood-shot eyes. He told us that he had recently returned from Iraq where he had sustained an injury to both eyes. As a result, he could only see shadows and was virtually blind. He was also suffering from muscle spasms. Under normal circumstances, his veteran benefits had been barely sufficient to cover his rent, food, and utilities, yet after losing a government check, he was on the verge of homelessness. A friend was willing to lend him some money, but he needed additional funds to pay his rent.

When he heard that we had the money to cover the remainder of his rent, he covered his eyes with his hands, attempting to hide his tears. Having regained his composure, he said, "You cannot imagine how much your help means to me. I have always been strong and capable of taking care of myself. Now I have to ask other people for money so that I do not end up on the streets. I promise I will repay you every cent of what you give me today." Before we left, we wished God's blessings upon him and gave him a big hug.

In our society, the social safety net for single adults like Laura and Charles is extremely weak. Since many of them lack a support group, one major illness or one lost check may make them destitute. Try to imagine their worries, their loneliness, and their despair.