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The Vincentian

Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Conference

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Angels with a Future

(by Valerie Nigro)

Ten days before Christmas, we visited a family in dire straits. The client who welcomed us into her home had fled from a domestic abuse situation with her two young sons, 6 and 9 years old. Because of a recent break-in, during which everything of value had been taken from their new apartment, they had fallen behind with their rent. They had no car, and this woman was presently unable to work because she was pregnant and would give birth in a few weeks.

In spite of such daunting challenges, we learned that this mother was determined to become self-sufficient. She had found a decent place for her family to live, had secured some public assistance, and was now trying to get child support assistance from her children’s father. Also, she was a student working toward certification as a Medical Assistant -- to be completed in May. She plans, eventually, to enter a program in nursing. As she explained to us, it is important for her children to know that “they, too, can continue their education,” when the time comes.

As my husband discussed the financial situation with her, the children visited with

me, talking about school and the older boy’s desire to become a police officer some day. The boys were very personable and polite, and invited me to see their bedroom. I asked “Mom” if it was O.K., and with her permission they led the way. I was quite surprised to see how carefully the beds had been made and how the room was in perfect order, most likely because of the scarcity of playthings to “clutter” the space. They seemed quite proud of the room they shared.

We were impressed with this woman’s parenting and her resolve to improve her family’s situation. We were glad that we were able to provide the rental assistance she had requested. She was also very appreciative of the groceries we delivered. “You don’t know how much this means to me,” the mother told us tearfully. Before leaving, we prayed with the family, asking for God’s blessings and reminding them of His love for them. The courage of this woman touched our hearts that morning, and we felt privileged to have shared her hope for a brighter future. We continue to pray for those angelic children and their tenacious mom.

OLMC Students Collect 12,000 Diapers



In the month of December, the wonderful students at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School organized a diaper drive for needy families “in honor of Baby Jesus.” Under the direction of **Lisa Townsend**, a parent at OLMC School, they collected a total of 12,000 diapers! A heart-felt thank you to the students, teachers, and parents.

From the President's Pen

(by Barbara Pawlak)



I was recently reflecting on the most important accomplishments of our conference since I became president in October 2006. One major achievement is that we have successfully established a close working relationship with groups and agencies that help us to better serve our clients.

Many times, our clients' needs exceed what we can provide, so we refer them to other Tempe agencies, especially those with government grants or funds. For instance, the **Department of Economic Security (DES)** has a fairly new program for grandparents or other relatives raising children of family members who, due to death, divorce, or incarceration, are unable to parent those little ones. DES also provides counseling, food stamps, AHCCCS health care, subsidized child care and school lunch programs.

The **Phoenix Council of SVdP** has received funding for a Family Aid Ministry which assists with rental emergencies. It also loans medical

equipment, supports a medical and dental clinic, ministers to the incarcerated and their families, and runs the Ozanam Manor shelter for the elderly and disabled.

The **Buddhist Relief Fund** provides food, financial assistance, furniture, appliances, clothing, and sometimes handyman labor for the poor. They are very active in our area.

Proper identification is more important than ever now. The **Salvation Army** is just one of several agencies that will help citizens obtain proper birth certificates to replace those lost or left behind during many moves. The Salvation Army also administers SHARE funds for SRP and APS. They also help with rent, clothing, furniture, and transportation.

All these agencies have visited our conference meetings to give details about their activities, describe their guidelines, and tell us of their operations. We continue to learn, network, and care for those who cannot help themselves without our guidance and that of others who seek to serve. We cannot do this without your generous support or without your prayers. God bless all of you.

Volunteering Produces Health Benefits

(from *Voluntarily Yours: A Newsletter for City of Tempe Volunteers*, Spring/Summer 2007)

Volunteers help themselves to better health while helping others, according to a study recently released by the Corporation for National and Community Service that reviews findings from more than 30 rigorous studies. Research suggests that just two hours of volunteering a week can bring meaningful benefits to a person's body and mind. The report states the following:

- A study of adults age 65 and older found that the positive effect of volunteering on physical and mental health is due to the personal sense of accomplishment an individual gains from his or her volunteer activities.
- Individuals who volunteered after experiencing heart attacks reported reductions in despair and depression – two factors that have been linked to mortality in post-coronary artery disease patients.
- Individuals over 70 who volunteered approximately 100 hours (about two hours per week) had less of a decline in self-reported health and functioning levels, experienced lower levels of depression, and had more longevity.

Helping others makes people happier and healthier. So the word is out – it's good to do good!

Meet our Volunteers



The friendly voice that you hear in the recorded message of our office phone belongs to **Albert Marquez**, who has been volunteering with the St. Vincent de Paul Society for three years. Every Tuesday morning between 9 and 11, he takes our clients' requests over the phone, and on Thursday mornings he and his partner, Bob Erickson, visit clients in their homes to deliver food and assess financial needs.

Albert met his high school sweetheart, **Susana**, 54 years ago, and the two will soon be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. Their love for each other is still strong. "Albert is a wonderful husband and father," Susana says fondly, "and he is getting better every year." Their marriage was blessed with seven children, and so far they have 13, soon to be 14, grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. When they come to visit, Albert's cooking skills are in high demand.

After raising her children, Susana earned a Bachelor's degree in Social Work with an emphasis on Gerontology. She retired four years ago after working 20 years for Area Agency on

Aging, Region 1, in administration. Even after her retirement, she and Albert volunteer with AARP and give presentations in Spanish on Aging Programs. Three times a year, she and Albert participate in half-day forums at caregiver conferences in Mesa for Spanish speaking audiences. They also have substantial experience volunteering for the Alzheimer Association.

Albert and Susana are thankful for the many blessings that have been poured out on them. After working as an electrical engineer for the Salt River Project (SRP) for 22 years, Albert had the opportunity to travel widely as a consultant for utility companies in Latin America and Europe. His work as an inspector in the final testing of power transformers took him to Mexico, Peru, Chile, Columbia, and Brazil, as well as Austria, France, and the Netherlands. Susana was able to accompany her husband on several business trips, and they both fell in love with traveling. They fondly remember a two-week family vacation in Austria together with their 7 children and their spouses.

In their spare time, Susana and Albert try to stay active. Albert does electrical repair work for friends and family, walks extensively, and accompanies Susana to the gym three days a week. After recovering from her cataract surgeries, Susana is considering joining him on home visits. "We have been abundantly blessed," Susana says, "and we strive to be good stewards of the talents the Lord has given us." We pray that Albert and Susana will become more and more involved with the work of our conference.

2007 SVdP Annual Report



Number of people served (approximately):	6,168
Number of food boxes delivered:	3,084
Direct client assistance (food, rent, utilities, clothes, transportation):	\$ 81,349.24
Income from donations (money overspent comes from savings)	\$ 80,126.33

Vulnerable

(by Adelheid Thieme)

“Vulnerable” is the term that best describes the elderly lady we recently visited on a chilly January afternoon. We had tried to call her to announce our visit, but she had not picked up the phone and therefore did not know whom to expect when we knocked on the door. Fearful of strangers, she opened the door just a tiny crack and peeked through the opening. Realizing that we were from St. Vincent de Paul, her face lit up and she welcomed us inside.

A tiny, frail lady in her early seventies, she was basically just skin and bones. As she led us to a table at the far end of the room, she walked carefully, holding on to furniture for support. Her face was beautiful, though, not despite but because of her deep wrinkles.

The creases around her warm brown eyes were those of a woman who had loved and laughed a lot.

Right then, however, she was terrified. For a reason that she did not understand, her Social Security check had been lost, and she did not have the money to pay her rent and her utility bill. Since the lady was hard of hearing and had great difficulty communicating over the phone, the apartment manager had kindly offered to call St. Vincent de Paul on her behalf. Usually her son took care of any problems that arose, but he was out of town. The manager was willing to wait for the rent payment until the son returned from his trip, but the electric bill had to be taken care of immediately.

“Look at this bill,” she said. “I have to pay more than I owe. I do not understand the bill. All I know is that my power will be

disconnected tomorrow and I will be sitting in the cold. I wish my son were here. But I am all alone.” We asked her permission to call the electric company about her account. As it turned out, she was on a payment plan that allowed her to pay the same rate every month, regardless of whether she had low usage, as in the winter, or high usage, as in the summer. While we were clarifying the issue, she was sitting there, moving her lips in prayer.

When we told her that we would pay her bill and that her electric power would not be turned off, she gave a sigh of relief. We then brought in the food boxes. “Oh my,” she exclaimed. “I have not seen so much food for a long time. That will last me for weeks.”

As we left, she thanked us and gave us a blessing. Mary was her name.



Mike Sauve, Don Ong, Bob McKay, Ben Picone (back) and Mary Sauve, John Schiffer, and Joe Romano (front) preparing to deliver Thanksgiving food boxes, complete with turkeys.



Barbara Pawlak (left), Mary Vrizuela, and Rachel Arroyo accepting turkey donations in front of Basha's.