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# The Vincentian

Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Conference

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## Meet our Volunteers

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Meet **Chris Baldi**, the man “behind the scenes,” who drives to the St. Vincent de Paul warehouse in Phoenix once a week to pick up our food allotment. Every week, he loads two pallets, 64 banana boxes full of non-perishable food, on his truck and helps our pantry workers unload the boxes. Many years ago, when Chris was doing home deliveries with his friend, Steve Petruzzella, he realized the need for emergency food boxes. His flexible work schedule allows him to take 10 hours a month out of his busy schedule.

Chris, a retired army officer, earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Management Information Systems from Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. For the past 7 years, he has successfully run a consulting company, OMR Consulting, which specializes in computers and construction. Prior to that,

for 10 years, Chris was an Executive with MicroAge and Ingram Micro. For Chris, volunteering is a way of giving back for the many blessings that he has received. Simultaneously, it is a way of instilling values in his children, 6-year-old twins, Olivia and Maximilion, and his two-year-old son, Rico, who love accompanying their dad to the warehouse. “In the military, I learned that you lead by example,” Chris says, “and I want my children to open their hearts to those who need help.”

Chris is also a member of the Dad’s Club at OLMC School, where the twins attend first grade and his wife, Susan, assists in the reading program. He is also considering serving as a Cub Scout Leader. In his spare time, Chris enjoys a game of golf or hockey. He also has a keen interest in Hyperdimensional Physics, a scientific inquiry into the geometric and mathematical foundations of other spatial dimensions, and its theological implications.

We are extremely fortunate to count Chris among our members. How else would we keep our pantry well stocked and fill emergency food boxes for about 500 people per month?

It is love for Christ that will enable us to love His children.

# Mom, are we there yet?

(by Debbie Corte)

The suitcases are packed, the children are loaded in the family car, and off you go! The days spent at Grandma's house were full of love and joy, and the way home is fun, too. The kids have their electronic gadgets, McDonald's, as well as mom and dad to keep them occupied until they reach their destination. But, not so for all.

What we walked into on a recent home visit was different from what we are all used to seeing. A woman with three young children wrapped around her legs opened the door, a look of total desperation in her eyes. We carried the food boxes into the kitchen for her and looked for a table and chairs to put the heavy boxes down on, but she had none. On the stove they went. She began emptying the boxes and putting the food in cabinets that were basically empty. She lined all the cereal boxes up according to height, neatly turning all the labels on the cans to face her. When she opened the refrigerator, we couldn't believe she had only three items in it, and the freezer had popsicles only.

As she faced us, tears began running down her cheeks. She nervously wiped them away, not knowing how we would react, and began her story. After 15 years of marriage, she had finally called the police who had escorted her husband out of their home. His dependency on drugs as well as verbal and sometimes physical abuse directed towards the children had become routine. She knew she had done the right thing for her children, and yet thoughts of self-doubt flooded her mind.

With only a brother living in town, she was totally alone. Soon after her husband's departure, she had received a phone call from her mother. Her grandmother had fallen ill, and her family had urged her to drive home with the kids. Home was on an Indian reservation in the northern part of the state, and quite a road trip. Feeling the pressure of her relatives, she had packed up the children.

On the way back, the children were bored. No McDonald's, no electronic gadgets, no movies to watch on their 5-hour journey. "Mom, are we there yet?" Listening to her children's

impatient question, she asked herself: Where's there? Will I ever be there? Where am I going to find a job? How am I going to handle the finances? How am I going to raise these children on my own? Will I have the strength to put a smile back on these tiny faces? Will I ever be loved again?

I didn't want to leave this sad woman without, somehow, making her feel that she was respected, loved, and still beautiful. The last weeks had left her stripped of hope, and she had lost her sense of identity and self-worth. With her green-brown eyes looking at us, I couldn't help but remark on how beautiful they were. She gave me a look of surprise and said thank you. As she did, she reminded me of how much she had to look forward to. If God ever was to share His plans for her and her three children, He would say, "Don't be afraid, my daughter. I've never left your side, and no one is going to turn their back on you. You're experiencing faith. I am peeling away the rind to get to the sweetness that is you."

|   |                        |            |                      |             |
|---|------------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------|
| <b>April to June 2008<br/>Financial Report</b><br> | Deliveries to clients: | 431        | Furniture            | \$2,145.25  |
|   | Food boxes:            | 862        | Vouchers for Clothes | \$1,570.03  |
|   | Food purchased:        | \$3,384.89 | Rental Assistance:   | \$10,101.00 |
|   | Medical:               | \$150.00   | Utility Assistance:  | \$ 3,743.19 |
|   |                        |            |                      |             |



### *From the President's Pen*

If you ever had any doubts about Catholic students' commitment to Christianity and the message of the Master, set them aside. Our St. Vincent de Paul conference would not be able to function fully without the strong support of the grade school and high school students in our area.

Monthly, the classes at **OLMC School** collect food and personal items for our pantry. The results are remarkable. Additionally, this past year, the school sponsored a diaper drive, and we are still using the generous collection over four months later. As any mother with infants and toddlers knows, the cost of diapers involves a good chunk of disposable (pardon the pun!) income. For the poor, the cost is even more significant as they have so few dollars remaining after rent and utilities.

Monthly mission collections are sent to our conference, enabling us to help with rent, utilities, and – in rare cases – furniture. Some students join their parents in the weekly delivery of food boxes. These experiences in serving the poor will be with them for the rest of their lives. The young boys and girls at Mount Carmel see

first hand the struggles of the less fortunate, are able to share concerns through prayer, and feel the gratitude of the people we help.

On the grade school and high school level, Catholic students are asked to accumulate community service hours. Some young men have been helping with our food drives for years. They carry heavy bags and boxes as parishioners arrive for Mass on Food Drive weekend. They help sort the food in boxes by category and then stock the pantry shelves until the next Mass. Often, they work side by side with parents and grandparents.

Considering the time constraints of allocating time for study, social activities, and extracurricular events, today's students can feel over-burdened, but they still take the time to heed the Gospel message to serve. We are amazed and grateful. One of those young men, **James Erickson**, son of one of our most active volunteers, was recently called home to heaven in a tragic accident. We ask for prayers for James and for all the young volunteers who serve so significantly. The future of our Church and our community will be in good hands.

God's blessings on you and yours,

*Barbara Pawlak*

### **Four Who Stopped By**

(by Trisha Brandt-Fox)

One of the great things about collecting turkeys in front of Basha's on Turkey Tuesday is listening to the stories that people share.

First, there was the couple that had no family, so every year they each fill a shopping cart with food and donate it to us.

Second, there was Ronnie, a bright-eyed ten-year-old who decided to launch his own food drive. So he asked friends for donations and was most proud of giving two huge cans of beans.

Third, a man wearing a red, white and blue bandanna was standing there, all quiet. "Sir, can I help you?" "I just wanted to say my family in Tucson was one of those families that got a food box from you guys each year. I am so thankful that I can come today as a grown man and give one back to feed another family."

Lastly, there was a very elderly man lugging a shopping cart full of turkeys. "I am donating one for each month that I have lived this year."

Special blessings on all our wonderful donors!

## A Prayer Answered

(by Adelheid Thieme)

On a scorching hot day at the beginning of August, my daughter and I visited a family in a mobile home park in south Tempe. In the driveway stood an ancient Ford Thunderbird whose rear window was being held together by a network of duct tape. Isabel, a woman in her early fifties, surrounded by several young children, invited us in. It took some maneuvering to carry the banana boxes through the narrow entryway to the kitchen table. The children's faces lit up with excitement when they saw the food. They would have loved to open a packet of pop tarts immediately, but Isabel urged them to be patient until she had talked to us.

She placed two chairs in front of a fan and invited us to have a seat. "It's hot and stuffy in here," she said apologetically, "but I can't afford air conditioning in the whole trailer. We have one wall unit in the bedroom, where my youngest grandson, who is sick, is sleeping. I am supporting my five grandchildren with my disability check. Their mother, my daughter, cannot help right now, so I do what I can to provide for them. They know that they are loved."

While we were discussing with Isabel what kind of help we could offer in addition to the food boxes, one child was snuggling up to her, holding a can of tuna as though it were a prized possession. Another one of the children was bouncing up and down on the sofa where Isabel was sitting. Keeping up with five youngsters was definitely a chore for Isabel. To maintain her sanity, she would set aside one hour for herself in the evening when she would watch TV.

When we were about to leave, Isabel thanked us. With tears in her eyes she said, "I would like to tell you something. This morning, I got down on my knees and asked the Lord to help me. I told Him that I had no more food for the children, no money to pay the full rent, and no clothes for two of the children for whom school starts next week. This afternoon, the two of you came. You brought me food, helped me pay my rent, and gave me a voucher for school clothes. The Lord has indeed answered my prayer. Praise the Lord."

## **Join** the National **WALK FOR HUNGER**

**Saturday, Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>**

**7:00 – 8:00 am**

**420 W. Watkins Rd., Phoenix**

In celebration of the Society's 175-year anniversary, SVdP is asking Vincentians and other parishioners who are committed to serving the poor and hungry to join in this event to remember the homeless and hungry.

Come and **walk** 440 yards (or more) in the cool of the morning and find parishioners to join you on the walk (and stick around for a great breakfast and a Tour of the St. Vincent de Paul Center). Find friends, relatives, neighbors and other parishioners to pledge 1¢, 2¢, 5¢ or more for each yard walked. (All funds stay with the parish's conference.)

Participants, please watch the OLMC church bulletin for more information.