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# The Vincentian

**Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Conference**

**September 2009**

## **115 °F: Beating the Heat**

(by Adelheid Thieme)



It is a hot Wednesday afternoon in August. As my husband and I drive by OLMC church on the way to the SVdP pantry, we read the sign in front of the church: 115 °F.

We load the food boxes into our car and hope that the frozen foods will not have completely defrosted by the time we have visited all the families assigned to us this afternoon.

Our first stop is a family of three. The grandmother, who is in her late 70’s, welcomes us in. She gratefully accepts the food boxes and shows us a shut-off notice from the electric company. With her in the apartment live her daughter and her baby granddaughter, who was born after 28 weeks of gestation and requires heart surgery. Her daughter is currently unable to work because she needs to watch the baby every minute of the day. The grandmother herself is suffering from fibromyalgia, a condition that is exacerbated by the heat. It is a real blessing for the family that we are able to help pay the electric bill and thus prevent a disconnection.

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## **“ I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet”**

(by Paul Kelley)

Many families and individuals living within our Parish boundaries face the future with very little hope and a great deal of fear.

Times have been tough in recent months as countless working people experienced sudden and unexpected layoffs. Some of the very folks kneeling next to you at Sunday Mass have had their homes foreclosed and were forced to move in with relatives.

Ninety-five percent of the families we help have children -- little ones who know what it feels like to go to bed hungry, or to sleep on floors in ramshackle motels, or to be hot in the summer and cold in the winter because their parents can't afford to have utilities turned on. (Last month was the hottest July in Arizona history.)

We have retired parishioners going back to work to pay their bills. And we still have spouses, many with children, who must literally run away from their homes and start their lives all over again to escape beatings from their mates or to protect their children.

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## Meet our Volunteers



When **Janet and Bill Richwine** were invited to join our conference at the 2008 Ministry Fair at OLMC, they volunteered to deliver food to needy families. Since that time, they have taken great satisfaction in helping people who would otherwise not be able to keep food on the table.

Janet and Bill met in high school in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and have now been married for 56 years. After graduating from high school, Bill served in the Navy for 4 years and then attended the University of Pittsburgh. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Recreation Administration and a Master's Degree in Public Administration. Bill worked for 20 years in Parks and Recreation before moving to the Valley in 1976 to accept the position of Director of the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department. He retired after 16 years.

Janet has always had a special talent for office work. For 20 years, she worked as an auditor and assistant to the business manager in the Tempe Union High School District office. Even after her official retirement in 1997, she has frequently continued to perform office work for her former supervisor.

For many years, Janet has been active in the Sodality at OLMC. Both Janet and Bill enjoy spending time with their 7 grandchildren and

and traveling. Playing tennis and doing yard work has kept them physically fit, so they are still able to carry heavy food boxes.

Visiting families in their homes is a very rewarding activity for them. Seeing the smile on the children's faces and realizing how grateful the parents are is very gratifying. As Janet says, "These people make our day, and we are happy to help them in their time of need."

## Doctor Mom

(by Ben Picone)

Recently, my son and I delivered a food box to a family in a run-down two-room apartment in a shabby apartment complex off of Apache Boulevard.

Still living in the complex was a family we had adopted two years ago in the St. Vincent de Paul Adopt-a-Family program. The mother was outside and recognized us. We chatted and asked her about her disabled 10-year-old daughter, Olivia, who had received a bicycle from us for Christmas.

She brightened up and asked Olivia to bring out her bike. When we first met Olivia, we noticed that she was barely able to walk due to a turned in foot and that she extended her arms to maintain balance. Her mother suggested at that time that riding a bike might improve Olivia's condition.

The mother then asked Olivia to ride her bike. The dirt lot was approximately 40 yards deep and 40 feet wide. As Olivia was taking off, her mother said that the training wheels had been removed just a few weeks before and that Olivia was able to ride her bike normally.

Olivia made a U-turn at the end of the lot, pigtails flying, and headed directly back at us. I thought she was going to ride right into me. She applied her brakes full force and, in a cloud of dust, skidded to a stop two feet in front of me. We were both laughing. She made my week.

## Beating the Heat (continued from p. 1)

The next family we visit, a young couple with a child, is in a similar plight. The mother had a miscarriage in the fifth month of a pregnancy. Due to unexpected medical bills and funeral expenses, there is not enough money available to cover the utility bill. Again, our financial help is greatly appreciated.

When we visit the third family this afternoon, two toddlers greet us at the door. Their dad, who is watching them while the mother is out looking for employment, recently lost his job. The family has exhausted the savings and has been waiting for food stamps and unemployment benefits for several weeks. No government agency is responding to their plight. Food is short, and there are exactly three dollars left on the electric meter. Unless help comes promptly, the lights will go out in less than two hours and there will no longer be air conditioning. The dad is already bracing himself for dealing with two hungry, sweating, whining young children. You can imagine his relief when we place two banana boxes of food on his kitchen table and call the counseling department of the utility company with a check guarantee that will keep the lights on for a while.

Thank you to all of you, our faithful donors, who make this assistance possible. You are not only helping these families beat the heat, but you are also giving them hope and the feeling that there are people who care.

**Note: Unfortunately, our funds are running so low that, at the end of this month, we may have to stop responding to emergencies such as the ones described above. Please be as generous as you possibly can.**



## *From the President's Pen*

At the end of my term as President, I would like to reflect on the past three years and thank you, dear donors, for all your support.

I can assure you that 100% of your donations are used to serve the poor or run the office, i.e. pay for the telephone, postal fees, paper supplies, and printer cartridges. Quarterly, we share those figures with you so you can see the impact of your individual checks. Our conference members, all of whom are volunteers, use their own vehicles to deliver food. No one gets reimbursed for gas or related expenses. We are ever so grateful that they share their time, talents, and treasure with our poor brothers and sisters.

Whenever possible, we also partner with social service agencies in Tempe for the benefit of the poor, the elderly and the disabled who seek our help. On occasion, we volunteer our time for their programs so that our clients are better served.

One of my great personal joys is to hear the grateful thanks from those who say, "You are the only person who took the time to help me know what to do." In these days of automated phone systems, we are often the first "live" persons they have encountered during their many calls. What a blessing to be there in their times of need!

In this final letter that I write to you as President of our conference, I would like to simply say "Thank you" for hearing the cry of the poor. Many thanks also to all members of our conference at OLMC for letting me serve in this small way. It is time for fresh ideas as we seek to serve the poor during these difficult economic times.

As always, blessings on you and yours.

*Barbara Pawlak*

**“I cried because I had no shoes ...”** (continued from p. 1)

The Mount Carmel Conference of St. Vincent De Paul provides emergency food, rent and utility assistance, clothing and medicine to nearly 2,000 families each year. Most of these families live within our parish boundaries. Although Tempe is an affluent community, there are still many in need living among us.

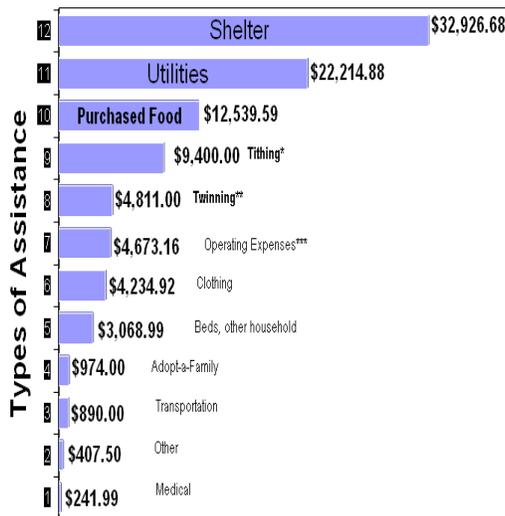
Being able to help families with emergency food or rent assistance is the best part of our work. Knowing a family will be forced from their home because we have run out of funds is the worst part.

But thanks to the generosity of parishioners, SVdP has been able to make a difference in many, many lives. Last year our income fell nearly \$10,000 short of the assistance we provided. This year, things have been worse because our savings are depleted.

If you still have a job, or are collecting a pension, or have a roof over your head and food on your table, please remember those who are not so fortunate at this time.

God bless you for your whole-hearted cooperation and for your past, present and future generosity.

**ASSISTANCE PROVIDED 2008**

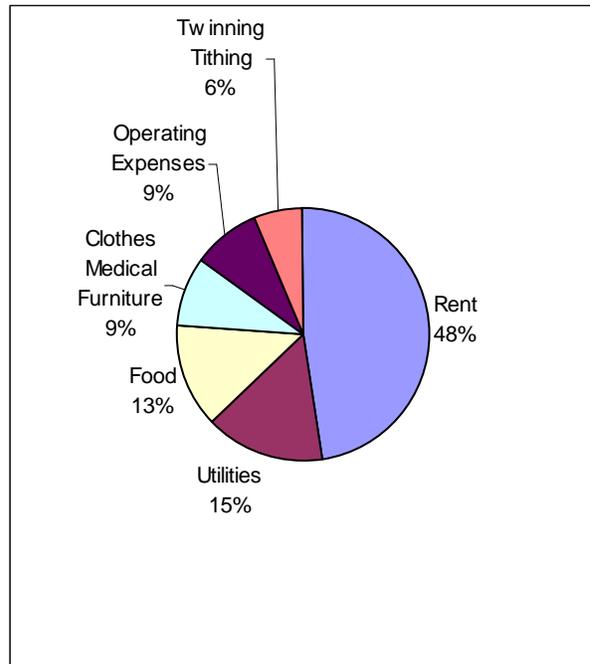


\*86% of tithing funds go to help start, train and assist other conferences in the East Valley.

\*\*Twinning goes to help two poor Phoenix parishes immediately west of Mt. Carmel.

\*\*\* Operating Expenses pay for items like telephone and office supplies so we can process people’s requests.

**April to June 2009 Financial Report**



**Total Client Assistance: \$ 20,343.06**