

St. Vincent de Paul

Society of St. Vincent de Paul - Rogue Valley District Council

A Quarterly Newsletter ■ Volume 5, Issue 3

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Upcoming Events

- Saturday, August 7 - Dinner/Auction

- Saturday, October 23: Light the Winter Fires



Editors: Patrick Wilson and Dianne Erickson

Moving Toward Greater Spirituality

You don't need to talk to Alice Nagel, President of the Ashland Social Services Conference, for long to understand that her group is pretty special and operates a bit differently than most of our other conferences. "While our role is to conduct home visits to poor families and individuals in the Ashland/Talent area, in a compassionate way; the real goal of our work is to increase our individual holiness as detailed in the Saint Vincent de Paul manual," says Alice. "We are brought closer to holiness by serving the poor."

"While most of our visits are pretty positive, we do, at times, have difficult experiences. So our process of meeting twice a

month and discussing our visits is very valuable. We start with a prayer, of course, and do a spiritual reading helping us to better understand the purpose of the society, followed by a group discussion in which everybody participates. But the major part of the meetings is focused on discussing recent home visits. This is an opportunity to share experiences and successes and to examine if there are better ways to assist the family or to handle issues we faced when they arise again. We want to determine if we used our best judgment."

"Recently, we had a particularly troubling visit for two of our volunteers. There were two men



Ashland Conference Members: From left: Fredric Berger, Carita Culmer, Chici Cutting, Debbie Waoche, Beth Hill, Alice Nagel, Peggy Coffey, Ralph Wasche, Dave Hill, Charlotte Dorsey. Missing: Claudia Van Dyke

in the home and one of them was behaving quite erratically. He should have been on meds but was not, so he was fairly psychotic. Our volunteers felt threatened by the behaviors and also learned that the other man living there felt at risk, but was too scared to take action. The volunteers soon left the home and later took action to remove the second man from danger. The visit provided a lot for us to discuss. What do we do when one or both volunteers is uncomfortable or sees a need

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LETTER FROM THE
PRESIDENT

**Dear fellow
volunteers and
supporters of
St. Vincent's,**

As I write this
letter the heat of
summer is fast

approaching. This change of season brings to mind how the needs of the poor may have shifted, but how they are fundamentally remaining the same. Yes, heat will not be that important, but requirements for such needs as shelter, food, utilities, prescription drugs, clothing, household items, emergency dental care, showers, laundry, school supplies and a "lift up" are all there. The over 230 volunteers making up our Council will be trying their best, during these summer months, to provide for those emergency needs. My thanks to you, our family of supporters. We simply could not do all of what we do without your continuing support through your donations of food, fresh fruit, household items, clothing, and funds.

Please note we have had to shift our second annual Light the Winter Fires to October 23, 2010 so be sure to mark that date on your calendars.

Thanks again for all you do with and for the needy in our area. We as a Rogue Valley Community are really better for it.

Len Hebert



Struggling With Hard Times

A Story From a Social Services Counselor

The woman sitting in front of me was probably in her early sixty's. It was obvious by her appearance she was a hard worker. Her hands showed significant wear like she did a lot of outside work, maybe she had a garden. She was dressed modestly and, in spite of her difficulties, had an air of confidence. She spoke well in presenting her situation, and I later learned she was an avid reader.

She has never had to ask for help from St. Vincent de Paul or anyone else before. Somehow she and her partner always pulled the money together to cover emergencies. This time they were hit by multiple difficulties. Her boyfriend lost his construction job and was out of work for seven or eight months. She had to go in for serious surgery which kept her away from her job for several months. With all that it was difficult to make ends meet. And then her young daughter and her two year old had to move in. "It's family, you know, so now we have two more mouths to feed. Her husband joined the Army and

won't receive regular pay until he finishes his basic training."

"We rent a unit in a old farm house and the power can get crazy at times. Our landlord, bless him, has agreed to lower our rent to help out. It's still not possible to come up with the money for the gas for cooking and heating." I could see in her demeanor it was tough for her to be here asking for our assistance.

Initially, I was afraid we wouldn't be able to help. I planned to focus on the rent but only her boyfriend was listed on the rental agreement. Later I realized since both names were on the utilities, that is where we could help.

During the interview you could see her desperation and several times she said she was afraid she might cry. Regardless, she kept a firm demeanor throughout our discussion. At the end she emphasized she couldn't thank me enough. She ended by asking if she could donate some money to St. Vincent de Paul when they got back on their feet. •



The Pantry Works!

"A liaison from Access recently visited our pantry and said it was the cleanest and best organized pantry she ever visited in her travels in Oregon and California," say Betty Burgess, VP of the Pantry Conference. Not bad considering there are over twenty-four operating pantries in Jackson County, and we may be the largest. While most of these pantries give out groceries one day a month, we're open every week day for special needs and have grocery giveaways for 300 to 400 individuals and families on the last two Fridays of each month.

"It use to take us several hours to get ready for our Friday giveaways, but we can now do as many as 450 bags in less than sixty minutes," says Charlie Burgess, President of the Conference. "We've done a lot to better organize the pantry so everything is easily seen and quick to access, when we need to resupply the line while filling bags. Everything needed is on long tables so it is easy for volunteers to take a bag and

move it down the line until it's full while simultaneously new bags are following behind.

Of course, having six to eight dedicated and energetic volunteers that have been doing this for years really helps."

Besides preparing 300 to 400 bags of groceries for each Friday give-away, special 'no cook' bags are prepared for folks who live outdoors and another fifty-plus bags are prepared for people who are shut-ins. Different groups and individuals come by each time to ensure these get delivered.

"While we have a set menu, we supplement it with whatever we can buy inexpensively and with USDA goods that become available," says Charlie. "Every bag has packaged vegetables, beans, fruits, soups, tuna, noodles, bread, butter and a meat item that gets added at that last minute," chimes in Betty. In addition to these items, the volunteers try to adapt bags in the moment to special dietary needs. Betty says, "If I had a magic wand I would ensure every bag met the unique needs of people

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President-Elect Selected

Len Hebert has been the President of our St. Vincent de Paul Council for nearly six years, and since our charter limits the President's term to six years, a new President will take office in January 2011. Just like everything else Len has done as President, he wanted to make certain this was accomplished in an orderly and well thought out manner. In January he tasked a nominating committee with the job of identifying potential candidates for President. At the April board meeting the nominating committee designated Dennis Mihocko as their choice and he was unanimously elected by the Board.

This does not mean we will have a May coronation or a June swearing in ceremony. Dennis will spend the remainder of 2010 working closely with Len to learn the everyday tasks of serving as President of our Council. Wherever you see Len, you will often see Dennis. He will attend meetings with Len

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Reaching Out to Homeless Youth

It's estimated that there are at least 1700 homeless youth (between the ages of 12-24) in Jackson County, and that number is probably rising given the continuing poor economy. Many of the homeless youth live on the land, in the recesses of the parks in Ashland, and along the parkway in Medford, but a large number also 'couch surf' (rely on friends for temporary accommodations.) The reason for being homeless appears to vary considerably. Youth in Ashland are homeless more often because they prefer that lifestyle, while in Medford they are often homeless because of adverse home situations, such as drugs and violence.

You may remember the students from OHSU that did a study last year, looking at the adult homeless population. That study resulted in monthly clinics being offered at St. Vincent de Paul by La Clinica. Recently the Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) students decided to take a closer look at what kind of health needs homeless youth experience. The

students had a difficult time contacting many of the youth even when they worked with other care givers that had built a nominal relationship with them. Young people seem to be distrustful of dealing with adults. In the end, the OHSU students were able to survey seventy youth, either speaking to them directly or getting them to complete surveys. Most did not raise any health issues. This may have been because they are young and tending to feel somewhat invincible and/or because of their general reluctance to open up to adults. Subsequently, the students had to rely on authorities in this field to provide more in-depth information. Experts did identify several common problems; dental care, mental health, and the need for regular checks ups. It appears that our area youth actually experience some of the same health issues that students called out last year when they surveyed the older homeless. Also, like their older counterparts, these young people have difficulty accessing health care because of limited



transportation, lack of funds or insurance and, lack of trust. Many youth tend to rely on Emergency Care facilities when they suffer severe need.

Since most in this population seemed open to receiving medical services, it was hoped that monthly clinics could also be set up for homeless youth. Unfortunately sufficient resources do not currently exist to conduct parallel clinics.

The students in next quarter's leadership class will continue collaborating with community partners to seek to reduce barriers to providing health care to homeless youth in Jackson County. Meantime, the students will help with the free monthly clinics at Saint Vincent de Paul. They are surveying those who use the clinic to find out how they can be improved and what additional services are needed, plus developing policies and procedures for the smooth running of the clinic. •



Jim Rainery Says Good Bye, Sort Of

Jim Rainery, our most senior counselor in Social Services, has decided to take a well deserved break. He is leaving his counselor position in Social Services and will be looking for something a little less taxing at SVDP.

Jim started at SVDP just a short eighteen years ago. "I always said I would do two things when I retired, payback to the Vets in gratitude for coming home safely after World War II and help the poor," says Jim. So when he retired from his sales job in the San Francisco Bay area and moved to his new home in Shady Cove twenty years ago, he set about to keep that promise. He began working with the veterans at the Dom in White City and as a volunteer here at SVDP in Medford.

"Initially I helped out in the Store, but I only stayed one month," says Jim. "I talked to Lil Howe, who ran the show then, and told her I really wanted to work more directly with the people we were

helping. I sat with her for a month and learned what a counselor needed to do. It was all pretty simple then. When somebody came in, we asked a few questions, filled out a little card and put it in the file when we were done. I think the maximum help we could give was \$25. We had two or three counselors in the group and the pace was certainly a lot slower."

Today there are around twenty counselors. "The whole process is much more serious," says Jim. "There are so many people that need help because of the tough economic times. We see so many more people every day. Even with a much larger facility and many more counselors, some days we have to close the door when the lobby is full and ask the other folks to come back tomorrow. In addition, the job is much more complex. All the files are maintained on computer and, of course, we need to collect a lot more information. Our clients are much more desperate. Life has changed in America and in Oregon. I feel like people my

age have been lucky. We lived the good years."

Jim will still be working at the Dom. He feels really close to the Vets he works with. And you will still see him around SVDP, hopefully looking a little less stressed out. And, just maybe, he will spend a little more time with his wife, Shirlene, and their three daughters and families all who live in this area. •

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and sit in on many of the decisions Len makes. While Len will continue to make the final decision through the end of the year, Dennis will take on some tasks Len has done in the past. We will also have to reduce some of the tasks Dennis has been doing, but he has let us know he wants to continue to be responsible for the maintenance of the facility.

We all wish Dennis well in his new role. Please give him your full support, he has a lot on his plate. Each of you can help in his and St. Vincent de Paul's success. •



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who have special health problems, but we do the best we can."

"Some people think all our food is donated but we could never offer this level of support to so many people if that were the case," Betty mentions. The pantry needs about \$ 50,000 a year to operate. They get a FEMA grant each year for \$25,000 and that requires lots of record keeping so they can prove they are using all the funds only for food for the underprivileged. "Cheryl Tatman, our secretary / treasurer has been invaluable in keeping our feet to the fire so we are straight with FEMA," says Charlie. Besides the FEMA grant, Shepherd of the Valley sends a check every month. They recently received a check for \$367 from the Knights of Columbus at Shepherd in gratitude for several baskets Betty prepared for them for a special event. Betty also is very active in preparing the special baskets for our dinner / auctions. Each time we

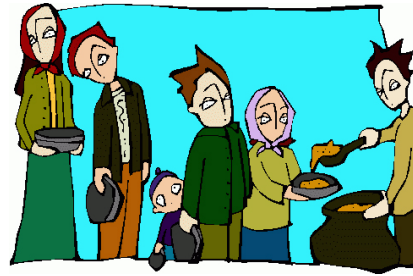
have an auction Betty and her volunteers spend the week before arranging and pricing candy, cookies and other specialty items donated by Harry and David for sale that evening. These sales can bring in another \$900 to \$1500. Besides all these funds, there is a continual flow of donated canned and packaged goods delivered to the pantry or through the Thrift Store.

Most of the food supplied comes from Access, nearly 70%, but only the USDA food is free. That is about 20% to 30% of what we receive from Access. Charlie and Betty are always checking prices to make certain they get the best deal. "This can make a big difference," says Betty. "We buy from Thunderbird, Food for Less, Cash & Carry, Winco, and Costco, whoever has the best bargain." In addition, the pantry receives donated milk, juice and pastries from Rays twice a week; periodic large shipments of milk from Darigold; and breads and pastries from Safeway. Many of these donations go to the

kitchen and some are placed on the tables for the folks at the noon meal. In the prime months particularly, large quantities of vegetables and fruits are put out for diners. These are the product of the Gleaners, USDA at Access, Harry and David, and a special fruit program operated by Naumes Fruit Co.

While the pantry has a slow stream of people appearing daily for emergency handouts, the real excitement is on the last two Fridays of the month. The number of people varies but there are always at least one or two rush periods with between 250 and 300 individuals and families coming in. Most people are glad to receive the help. Common comments are, "Wow, there is so much food in these bags," or "We couldn't make it without this help." Most of the people we serve are thankful and cooperative but a few pose problems. "They complain about the selection in the bags or insist on exchanges," says Charlie. "One woman actually showed up recently with several cans of fruit she had purchased locally and wanted

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Leading with Vincentian Spirit

From the writings of St. Vincent de Paul

"The streets will be long and unfriendly. The stairs will be steep, and the poor often ungrateful. You will find that charity is a heavy burden to carry - heavier than the bowl of soup, heavier than the full basket, but you will keep your gentleness and your smile.

It is not enough to give bread and soup. This the rest can do. You are the servant of the poor. You are always smiling. You are always good humored. The poor are your masters. You will find them terribly exacting. So the more unjust and insulting they are, the more unattractive they are, the more dirty they are, the more love you must give them. It is for your love

alone that the poor will forgive you the crust of bread you give them."

Sometimes it is helpful to review what our founder had to say about our calling as volunteers. •

Donating funds to St. Vincent de Paul is easy and quick using our [Donate](#) button on the website. Using PayPal or a credit card, with just a few quick clicks you'll be helping those less fortunate. Go to our website and click on [How to Help](#). Remember, our organization is the ONLY all-volunteer charity in the Rogue Valley. •

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to exchange them for pricier items that we stock."

Several volunteers monitor the people in line, asking for identification (driver's license or Oregon Trail Card) and for the number of people in their family. The Pantry is not allowed to ask for proof of family size, but staff monitor those who show up each time. Most people are honest, but there are a few who try to work the system. "One day one woman showed up with her kids and a little later another woman showed up with the

same set of kids," says Charlie. On other occasions, a father will appear and get groceries and a little later the wife will come in for the same family. "When this occurs and is caught, the people are pulled aside and warned they could lose their privileges if they don't play fair," says Betty. "In reality we have no way of knowing how many folks also go to the twenty some other food kitchens in the valley. Usually we try to have someone standing around in a SVDP vest looking official to keep order. "

Betty and Charlie work pretty much every day, often assisted by Dennis Sandley. Charlie and five other drivers make about fifteen runs during the week picking up donations and purchased supplies, as well as goods donated by stores, restaurants and others. Besides running the pantry, Charlie and his team are sort of the informal trucking company for SVDP. A lot of volunteers drop in during the week for coffee and a friendly chat. There is always a warm smile and a friendly conversation available. •

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to have a private conversation about how to proceed. And even more controversial, was what do we do when somebody in the home feels threatened and is too scared to take action? How do we maintain confidentiality and still resolve the situation? These discussions are critical, and while we may not all agree initially, we talk them through until we reach a workable resolution. While this experience was troubling, I feel certain everybody felt more capable after our discussion."

Everybody tries to make every meeting. And Alice reports that the process of meeting regularly

has brought the group closer together. "Our volunteers feel free to honestly express how they feel and to disagree. I think we've increased our volunteer's tolerance for different ideas. While it may take a couple of meetings to work tougher issues, in the end we come together. The group members trust and respect each other and I can't imagine anybody every saying a bad word about a peer behind their back." Clearly this is a healthy and productive group.

In developing this article I met with the conference to better understand how the group's meetings have impacted

individual volunteers. Here are some of their comments:

"These meetings mean a lot to us. These people are our friends. We are a group of people on a spiritual journey together." ... "Our meetings have helped me to be less judgmental. They raise my awareness to another level." ... "Sometimes home visits are emotional. It is important to have these meetings as a release valve." ... "The meetings remind me of the spirituality of our mission."

Clearly, this is a special group and the time they spend together makes them better appreciate their role at Saint Vincent de Paul. •

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