

St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on March 13, 2021

In Attendance: Dave Busch, Jim Erven, Mike Howden, Tom Jozwik, E. Michael McCann, Marge Sebern, Sharron Schmid, Mary Steger, John Weber and Jim Penczykowski from the Madison Diocese VOP

Call to Order: Dave Busch opened the conference call at 9 am, allowed for others to connect and called the meeting to order at 9:04 am with the Opening Prayer for Society meetings.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on February 13, 2021 were reviewed and a correction was made to the Racine Update. The Minutes had mistakenly attributed the Racine SVDP as working with a City of Racine program and it should have been attributed to a Racine County program. Revised Minutes (Rev01) contained a link to the correct program and were sent to VOP members on March 10. The revised Minutes were unanimously accepted by a voice vote.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch reported that those in need in Wisconsin received \$322 million dollars from the federal government to help with rent assistance and utility payments. The money was allocated in the economic stimulus package that congress passed in December in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statewide funding of \$322 million will be supplemented by another \$65 million that will be made available through local units of government, including the cities of Madison and Milwaukee, as well as Milwaukee, Waukesha, Dane and Brown counties. Wisconsin residents at risk for housing instability, lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and earn a household income at or below 80 percent of the county median income may receive up to 12 months of assistance. Rent and utility bill payments will go directly to the landlord or utility provider. The new program comes as utilities are seeing higher than usual balances of unpaid bills from customers. The Public Service Commission, citing public health and safety concerns, has barred disconnections of residential customers until April 15.

It's unclear what the breakdown will be in terms of how much will be allocated for rental assistance and utility bill assistance. People in need can find out more about the moratorium on utility shutoff by going to the COVID-19 resources page on the Citizens Utility Board web site at:

<https://cubwi.org/covid19/>

Health Care - Marge Sebern reported that at this time, Medicaid Expansion will not be considered by the state legislature. However, adult enrollment in Wisconsin Medicaid grew by nearly 23,000 people since the spring of 2020, due to COVID-19 job and income losses.

The US Supreme Court will hear the arguments regarding work requirements for Medicaid recipients on March 29. Prior to leaving office the Trump administration asked the Court to decide if Medicaid work requirements are legal. If the Biden administration is able to reverse the work requirement order, the argument will be mute.

People that are fully vaccinated can:

- Visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing
- Visit with unvaccinated people from a single household who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 disease indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing
- Refrain from quarantine and testing following a known exposure IF asymptomatic

People who are vaccinated and unvaccinated should follow current guidance for stopping the spread of COVID-19, even after they are vaccinated. This includes wearing masks in public, avoiding medium to large gatherings, staying 6 feet away from others, and following all other applicable workplace or school guidance.

As of March 12th, the average number of new Covid-19 cases per 100,000 is 550 for Wi. This is down from 832 last month. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/cases.htm>

Lack of access to quality health care, housing, transportation, and job opportunities, often referred to as systemic racism, has exacerbated the [disparate impacts of COVID-19](#) experienced by Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other communities of color in Wisconsin, including disparities in vaccine rates.

Housing: Rose Lue-Hing was still experiencing problems with her phone and was not able to attend this meeting. John Weber reported that the Frederic's E-Gazette from the National SVDP Society included information on a monthly Zoom meeting hosted by our Society's Housing Task Force. The National Housing Task Force and Voice of the Poor Committee also has a webinar on Housing and Homelessness During the Pandemic that outlines our strategies and resources and is available to Vincentians. However, the link supplied in the newsletter, (<https://www.svdpsusa.org/members/Programs-Tools/Programs/Housing>) does not appear to be working.

Mary Steger reported that the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program (WRAP) has ended but the Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance program (WERA) has funds available for COVID-19 rent relief. More information can be found here: <https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/WERA.aspx>

Weber also supplied us with a phone number for the Milwaukee County rent abuse legal assistance line: 414-270-4646. And he also gave out the number for the Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center: 414-895-7368.

Also, the Waukesha Council held a meeting of all their conference presidents. Out of that meeting came a report that most landlords have been very responsive to working with the SVDP Conferences on making up overdue rents. And thanks to the Payroll Protection Plan stimulus money from the Federal Government to the Thrift Stores, the Waukesha Council was able to allocate ten thousand dollars to each and every conference, to be used specifically for the anticipated eviction crisis.

Food/hunger: Tom Jozwik reported that President Biden's American Rescue Plan that was finally passed last week has 12 billion dollars allocated to combat the hunger insecurity crisis that is growing in America. The plan includes a 15 percent increase in SNAP benefits and supplies 1.3 billion dollars for all 50 States can use for help with administrative costs of implementing the relief effort. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA Foods, received cash for increasing their outreach to seniors. And the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program received extra cash for people that lost the benefit of receiving meals through school lunch programs due to pandemic school closing orders.

Lauren Bauer is a Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution. Her research focuses on social and safety net policies, including on federal nutrition assistance programs. She stated that certain one-year tax changes in the American Rescue bill, such as expansion of the earned income tax credit, child tax credit, and child care tax credit could also--if made permanent—put a sizeable dent in food insecurity.

Marian Lamoureux asked Tom about his report from last month which stated that only 42 percent of eligible seniors participate in Food Share benefits.

Tom stated that the figures were published by Feeding America which is considered a knowledgeable source. Marian asked if there was a way that we could help seniors in getting these resources. Dave Busch mentioned that the easiest way to receive benefits is to apply online at: <https://access.wisconsin.gov/access/> but many seniors are technically challenged or may not have internet access. He stated that we could look into methods for spreading the word to seniors on how to apply for Food Share, and agreed to follow up on this topic at future meetings.

Mike Howden mentioned that the [Milwaukee County Senior Centers](#) are doing a great job of distributing meals to seniors with a pickup program outside of the buildings, now that the lunch program has been suspended due to the pandemic. John Weber voiced his support for the job [Hunger Task Force](#) is doing in supplying food to Food pantry operations throughout the Archdiocese.

Immigration: Sharron Schmidt reported that last week, President Joe Biden issued three migration-related Executive Orders related to removing barriers and restoring due process in the legal immigration system. These actions include orders to: (1) address root causes of migration from Central America and expand opportunities for legal migration; (2) create a task force to reunify families separated during the prior administration; and (3) strengthen integration and inclusion efforts for new Americans. Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, auxiliary bishop of Washington and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration, issued the following statement: "We welcome these Executive Orders on migration, which will help to ensure that immigrants and refugees are treated humanely and in accordance with their God-given dignity."

Sharron also reported that the House will vote on the "[Farm Workforce Modernization Act](#)" (HR 1603) and the "[Dream and Promise Act](#)" (HR 6) next week. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA) is a bipartisan bill that would provide undocumented farmworkers and their families with a pathway to citizenship and would reform the H-2A temporary agricultural visa program. The Dream and Promise Act would *finally* create a pathway to permanent residence for DREAMers and individuals eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) – affecting an estimated four million people.

Marge Sebern added that the US Catholic Bishops have long supported immigration reform efforts. Marge also mentioned that she will be meeting next week with an aid to Congressman Glen Grothman to discuss his position on immigration issues. Marge also reported that the [Asylum-Seekers Sponsorship Project](#) is looking for sponsors of asylum seekers. If you are interested in learning more about sponsorship, Asylum-Seekers Sponsorship Project is holding a few upcoming Zoom orientation sessions to give more information and answer questions you might have. Joining these calls does not obligate you in any way to sign up – they are intended as a way for people to find the best fit for you in the movement, to ensure that those seeking asylum in the U.S. have the support they need to do so.

Mary Steger mentioned that she is working on a project to find people and organizations willing to sponsor immigrant families, and asked if anyone knew of parishes that have sponsored families in the past or might be interested in sponsorship in the future.

Mike Howden added that there are a couple of good resources online that give daily updates on immigrant issues. He recommended Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) found at: <https://cliniclegal.org>, and the Hope Border Institute, found here: <https://www.hopeborder.org>

Human Trafficking - Mary Steger reported that Janesville Congressman Bryan Steil has introduced a bill in Congress aimed at exposing the financial side of Human Trafficking. [H.R.233](#) modifies the minimum standard for foreign government action toward the elimination of human trafficking. Specifically, an assessment of whether a government has made serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking and must include consideration as to whether the government vigorously investigates, seeks to prevent, and prosecutes financial crimes associated with Human trafficking. Mary then reported on a recent incident in Outagamie county. An Ohio man was arrested after being found with a juvenile he met online. The Manitowoc County Sheriff's Office says it was dispatched shortly before 2:30 a.m. Saturday for a possible trespassing violation at a home in Eaton township. Deputies were informed that the homeowner spotted a pick-up truck in his driveway and a passenger ran when he approached. Deputies were able to identify the driver as a 22 yr. old man from Uniontown, Ohio. The passenger was identified as a 12-year-old girl from rural Valders. After interviews and a search of electronic devices, it was found that the man met the girl online and went to her home to pick her up. He was intending to take her back to Ohio with him, the sheriff's office says. The sheriff recommends that parents and grandparents talk to their children candidly about meeting people on the internet. Children are clearly unaware of the potential danger in this. Mary then spoke on how she sometimes feels overwhelmed by how big these problems really are. But she sees hope in programs such as [Runaway And Youth Services](#) (RAYS) in Sheboygan. RAYS is a program offering help to runaway teens and their families. They are sponsoring a program to inform young people from age 10 to 21 years on the ways homelessness contributes to sex trafficking. Another program doing good work in Sheboygan is [Bridgeway and Beyond](#), sponsored by the Sheboygan County Interfaith Organization. Bridgeway is a 13 bed residential transitional living program for homeless women with children. Bridgeway can serve 4-6 families at any given time. Bridgeway is designed to work with extremely at risk families living in instability.

Labor/Minimum Wage – Dave Busch reported that Wisconsin's unemployment rate in January was 3.8 percent, down from the seasonally adjusted December rate of 4.0 percent, while the national unemployment rate was 6.3 percent in the same month. The data shows that Wisconsin added 11,100 total non-farm and private-sector jobs in the month of January, bringing the unemployment rate close to pre-pandemic levels. Nothing new to report on efforts to raise the minimum wage in Wisconsin.

Criminal Justice: E. Michael McCann reported that the George Floyd Policing Reform bill was indeed reintroduced in the 117th Congress as [H.R.1280](#), and has already been passed by the House and sent to the Senate. He has finished his point by point review of the new bill and he is confident that our letter to the National VOP does not contain any statements that they would not be able to support.

McCann also reported that the Expungement of Criminal records bill, [AB69](#), was reintroduced in the Wisconsin legislature. This bill has widespread bi-partisan support and is moving through the Assembly review process. Under current law, a court may order a person's criminal record expunged of a crime if all of the following apply: 1) the maximum term of imprisonment for the crime is six years or less (Class H felony and below); 2) the person committed the crime before the age of 25; 3) the person had not been previously convicted of a felony; and 4) the crime was not a violent felony. Current law specifies that the expungement order must be made only at sentencing and then the record is expunged when the person completes his or her sentence. This bill removes the condition that the person committed the crime before the age of 25 (the bill retains the requirements that the crime be no greater than a Class H felony, the person had no previous felony convictions, and the crime was not a violent felony) and makes

certain traffic crimes ineligible for expungement. This bill also provides that, if the sentencing court did not order the record expunged, the person may file a petition with the sentencing court after he or she completes his or her sentence to have the record expunged.

Also, a bill prohibiting no-knock search warrants and limiting the execution of a search warrant to the hours between 6 am and 10 pm, unless a judge orders otherwise, has been introduced in the Assembly as [AB137](#). McCann thought that this bill makes good sense and could reduce the number of police encounters with poor people resulting in bad outcomes.

Lastly, McCann reported that Medicaid expansion is important for the poor in Wisconsin. Governor Evers presented the expansion of Medicaid in his budget for this new biennial and McCann stated that he will track progress on the Governor's proposal and report back to us.

Waukesha Update: David Anderson was not able to attend this meeting so conversation on this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

Racine Update: Jim Erven first expanded on his report from last month, regarding the Racine SVDP Society entering into a relationship with the Racine County's "[Here-To-Help Program](#)". Their mission is to coordinate resources across a wide variety of funding streams, with the goal of helping families and individuals remain in their homes and prevent homelessness. SVDP of Racine is listed as a financial resource on the Here to Help web site. Funds used to help prevent homelessness in this program are not restricted by citizenship. And proof of legal status is not required when applying for help from this program.

Jim also reported that Vincentians in Racine are in the middle of another recruitment drive. They are trying hard to get younger people interested in the Society. Dave Busch mentioned that social media might be something worth exploring as a recruitment tool to attract a younger demographic. Younger people who grew up with social media are not keen on attending meetings, but they do like to attend events. Setting up an instant messenger or Tweet account and sending out invites to attend an SVDP event might help to get younger people to show up.

Old Business:

Support of Policing Reforms – Mike McCann reported that he had completed a review of the new policing reforms bill [H.R.1280](#) - the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021" McCann stated that he made several changes to references made in the new bill so that our letter now corresponds to the points we had voted to support in the *previous* bill. The 2021 version was passed by Congress on March 3rd and is now sitting in Committee in the Senate.

A copy of the cover letter and the updated analysis by McCann was emailed to all VOP members on Friday night, March 12th. Because the work on this letter was completed on the day before our meeting, Busch asked the members to please read the "SVDP Policing Reforms Advocacy-Final" document this week and asked everyone to contact him by Friday March 19th, if they should have any objections to our position or any suggested changes to our letter to the National VOP.

POST MEETING NOTE: No changes or objections were put forward by the VOP members.

Informational webinar on the VOP Mission – This report was moved down the agenda to ensure that we had ample time to discuss our support of the Policing Reforms bill. VOP Chair Dave Busch reported that the PowerPoint presentation on "The Mission of the VOP" has been completed and we have gotten a date to make our presentation to the Council Presidents that make up the Executive Board of the Society for the Milwaukee Archdiocese. Busch stated that Marge Sebern and Marian Lamoureux made several contributions to the content

of the presentation, and thanked them for their help with the preparation of this pitch. The Board was polled on their availability and Monday April 5th, at 5:30 pm was selected for this presentation. Busch asked that all VOP members try to attend this virtual meeting as well, so that we might all learn firsthand about some of the concerns that the Board members may have regarding statements made by the VOP.

New Business:

Defining Racism: In February, Dave Busch had sent out a one page document to all VOP members, that contained some practical definitions regarding the terms: institutional racism, structural racism and systemic racism. At the end of this meeting, he quickly read through these terms and their meanings, then asked the members if they could agree on these definitions. Our goal is to be very specific when we communicate on the subject of racism when we are speaking to others about the work of the VOP.

All members agreed that they will try to use these terms when communicating to other groups.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held on the phone, or through an online Meeting on Saturday, **March 13, 2021 at 9 am.**

Watch for an invitation to a FreeConference meeting. It may land in your spam or junk mail folder, due to the number of names it is being sent to.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned at 11:04 am with members saying a prayer together on Lenten “fasting with the body, while feasting in the spirit.”

#

MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF POOR COMMITTEE

Bill Thimm	witsheart@sbcglobal.net
David Anderson	ajand1339@gmail.com
David Busch	dabusch99@yahoo.com
E. Michael McCann	emichaelmccann@yahoo.com
Jim Erven	erven.jm@gmail.com
Joan Gulczynski	joangul123@gmail.com
John Weber	jjweber46@sbcglobal.net
Julie McIntyre	jm@stvincentwaukcnty.org
Lynne Crowley	lynne.crowley@gmail.com
Marian Lamoureux	marianlamoureux@gmail.com
Mary Steger	msteger6568@gmail.com
Michael Howden	mjhowden@att.net
Randy Bedore	ranshorewood@yahoo.com
Richard Fedler	rfedler@aol.com
Rob Shelledy	shelledyr@archmil.org
Rose Lue-Hing	414-445-9224
Sharron Schmidt	sfs5085@aol.com
Tom Jozwik	mjozwik@hotmail.com