



St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on April 9, 2022

In Attendance: David Anderson, Dave Busch, Jim Erven, Michael Howden, Tom Jozwik, Marian Lamoureux, E. Michael McCann

Call to Order: The Chairperson logged into the Zoom meeting at 8:55AM. There was some general conversation regarding the end of mask mandates in the city, county and around the state. Some parishes are still offering a mass with masks required, and some parishes report splitting the church into a section for those preferring to wear masks and a section for those choosing not to wear a mask. The meeting was called to order at 9:07AM.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on March 12, 2022 were not reviewed. The Chairperson asked all of the members if they had any corrections that needed to be made to last month's minutes and the answer was a unanimous no. The March minutes were accepted by general consent.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch told us that State regulators this month voted 2-to-1 to approve a proposal from Milwaukee and Green Bay utilities to build a new natural gas power plant at a cost of \$171 million.

The Citizens Utility Board urged the Public Service Commission to vote against the plant, citing concerns over the utilities' overly optimistic assumptions about future natural gas prices and the utilities' failure to analyze the value of the projects in their "generation reshaping plan" in a variety of future economic scenarios.

Case in point: natural gas prices. The utilities chose to examine the value the project would have for customers under a narrow range of natural gas prices. But CUB's experts pointed out that natural gas prices have swung far beyond that narrow range.

In the end, the utility agreed to an analysis based on a wider range of natural gas prices, and that analysis found that this project wasn't the most cost-effective alternative for customers in a majority of the scenarios they evaluated.

The recent surge in natural gas and petroleum prices prompted by the war in Ukraine underscores why utilities, and regulators, need to analyze a wide range of scenarios when deciding which utility projects truly need to be built and paid for by utility customers in eastern Wisconsin.

There was no information supplied by the utility nor CUB, on how this will affect utility bills once the new power plant comes on-line.

Criminal Justice: E. Michael McCann reported that [Wisconsin Assembly Bill – 935](#) which requires the Wisconsin Department of Human Services (DHS) to enforce the “work requirement” rules on able-bodied adults and the drug screening, testing, and treatment requirements in order to receive FoodShare benefits. DHS must immediately withdraw any waiver or suspension of the time limits on eligibility for FoodShare, for not fulfilling the work requirement. Work requirements had been suspended during the pandemic due to the high rate of people out of work. The Assembly had scheduled a public hearing on this bill for February 8th and on February 22, the Senate passed the bill along party lines and sent this to Governor Evers for his signature. The governor is expected to veto this bill sometime before the end on April.

POST MEETING NOTE: Governor Evers [vetoed AB 935](#) on April 15, 2022.

McCann also reported that the current session of the legislature has closed. With the exception of a couple of the police reforms bills, none of the other bills we were supporting were passed into law. None the less, McCann expressed that he thought that we had a pretty good year and cited our progress in getting use of the VoterVoice network for our support of the bipartisan Expungement of Records Bill.

Health Care - Marian Lamoureux opened by telling us about the Waukesha SVDP [Community Voice for Change](#) program (CVC), CVC sponsors monthly meetings to collect the community voice and their experiences in order to create and distribute reports. The monthly meetings focus in on one topic affecting the community, such as mental health, housing, employment, transportation and the like. The CVC uses the collected opinions and experiences of the community to collaborate with individuals and community partners in an attempt to remove barriers and help the community thrive. The CVC is run by Jodie LaChapelle who is the Director Of Waukesha SVDP’s Getting Ahead program.

Next Marian reported on a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin.

According to the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#), as of April 7, 2022, 1,517 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were added to the system, bringing the 7-day average up to 561 cases per day, compared to 436 cases per day one month ago.

The majority of new COVID-19 cases, 33 percent, occur in the 20 to 40 years old age group, but over 70 percent of the cases requiring hospitalization for COVID, fall into the 70 and older age group.

Marian then told us about a study recently released by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), titled the [2021 Wisconsin Population Health and Equity Report Card](#). The first *Report Card* was released in 2007 and was updated in 2010, 2013, and 2016, and reports on quantitative data on how long and well people live in Wisconsin and disparities among specific groups and places. This year’s Report Card gave Wisconsin surprising low marks for quality of life and longevity.

The table below shows the overall health grade and markdown due to disparities in living long and well among population groups in Wisconsin. The size of the gaps among groups in length and quality of life for Wisconsin compared to other states determines the degree to which the overall grade is marked down. For example, the large gaps in health among Wisconsinites with different education levels means that our overall health grade of C is marked down to an F in length and quality of life when compared to other states.

	Mortality	Fair or Poor Health
Wisconsin's Health Grades	C	C
Adjusted for: Rural/Urban Disparities	D	C
Adjusted for: Racial/Ethnic Disparities	D	D
Adjusted for: Educational Disparities	F	F

Read more about the surprisingly low marks that Wisconsin received, on page 8 of the report.

Housing: John Weber continues to report on Housing issues in the absence of Rose Lue-Hing. Weber was not able to attend this meeting, so discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting. Weber did supply some information on the current trend of the rising cost of rent. From USA Today of March 18, 2022: Nationwide rent prices have significantly increased year over year. In February one and two bedroom rents were up 24% and 22% respectively. The top three most expensive cities to live in were New York, Santa Monica, California, and Jersey City, New Jersey. In New York, studio apartments run an average of \$4,179 per month, a one bedroom lease runs for \$5,347 per month, and a two bedroom rents for \$7,384 a month according to Rent.com. "Overall, rent prices are going up everywhere, and some of the cheap cities are seeing rent price increases as well," says Brian Carberry, senior managing editor at Rent.com. Thanks to a variety of remote work options that emerged during the pandemic, living far from the office and spending on expensive housing is now becoming a choice for many Americans. With many more companies offering employees the choice to go fully remote, the decision of where to live is now in the hands of the employees. There are still affordable places to live around the country. Carberry and his team from Rent.com studied every large city in the US with a population of more than 50,000 for the average rental rates and sufficient rental inventory for all common apartment layouts - studios, one-bedrooms, and two-bedrooms. Find the list of cities with the most affordable rents here: <https://www.rent.com/research/cheapest-rent-in-the-us/>
SPOILER: The top two cities with the cheapest rent are both in North Dakota.

On a related note: Michael Howden reported that things are about to get tougher for Milwaukee's homeless, poor and most vulnerable. The State is planning on moving the Human Services office to the edge of town - nearly an hour-long bus ride away from its current location. This is where Milwaukee's homeless are supposed to get their mail - or where hungry families are *supposed* to receive critical services, where the poor manage their Badger Care account. Sherrie Tussler, Executive Director of Hunger Task Force in Milwaukee prepared a video message on this development and urges people to contact their state representative and let them know what they think about this move. You can view the video here and decide for yourself: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtsYj4iVopI>

Food/hunger: Tom Jozwik opened by following up on a question raised at last month's meeting regarding the Postal Service's food drive. The [Stamp Out Hunger](#) food drive returns this spring on Saturday, May 14, 2022. The Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, the country's largest one-day food drive, provides residents with an easy way to donate food to those in need. Customers simply leave their donation of non-perishable food items next to their mailbox before the delivery of the mail on Saturday, May 14.

Letter carriers will collect these food donations on that day as they deliver mail along their postal routes, and distribute them to local food banks, pantries, shelters and churches.

In the 30 years since it began, the food drive has collected about 1.82 billion pounds of food for struggling residents. David Anderson noted that in previous years, the Muskego Food Pantry received about 6,000 pounds of food from the Postal Carriers efforts. These donations are tax-deductible, but you must list the name of the agency where your post office is delivering the food. Jozwik also reported that the [Hunger and Health Summit](#) being held at Chula Vista Resort on April 24th thru April 26th, will be held in-person. Hosted by [Feeding Wisconsin](#), the state network of food banks, the Summit expects to bring together more than 300 stakeholders to discuss feeding people in need.

Jozwik also reported that there has been no action in Congress on [H.R. 6934](#) the Food For Thought Act of 2022, introduced by Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA) and fellow Rep. from California, Nanette Diaz Barraga. The bill would authorize the Secretary of Education to make grants to institutions of higher education to provide free meals to low-income students through existing on-campus meal programs, with particular focus on community colleges. The bill has 20 co-sponsors; all are Democrats.

Immigration: Armand Carriere was not able to attend this meeting, so discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting. He did send along an encouraging statement to the VOP. Armand stated in an email to the chairperson, "it's rewarding to know that there are employers in the Milwaukee area who are willing to hire immigrants, even with their limited English (language) ability. I've personally seen this in action over the past few weeks."

Michael Howden reminded us that Trump Administration enforcement of Title 42, preventing immigrants from seeking asylum in the US, is set to expire at the end of May, but there is some discussion about extending the ruling.

[Title 42](#) comes from a federal law that dates back to 1944 meant to help prevent the spread of communicable disease. It's what essentially gave Trump authority to direct the CDC to take emergency action in March 2020, allowing immigration authorities to quickly expel migrants and denying entry to asylum seekers. Since it was invoked under Trump, Customs and Border Protection has counted more than 1.7 million expulsions of migrants at the border. Theresa Cardinal Brown from the Bipartisan Policy Center calls Title 42 the "primary tool" of managing migration at the border under both the Trump and Biden administrations.

Government officials are bracing for a surge of migrants at the border once the order lifts. It "will likely cause a significant increase in arrivals" at the southwest border, according to a strategic plan released last month by the Department of Homeland Security. And some agency estimates say they'll see [18,000 border apprehensions](#) per day, which is more than twice the average number of daily apprehensions last summer. Many more Democrats and Democratic congressional candidates have been expressing some [apprehension about lifting Title 42](#) next month.

Human Trafficking – The VOP Committee is looking for another member that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and willing to report on this topic in future meetings. Discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

Labor/Minimum Wage – Dave Busch reported that the bills to raise the Minimum Wage in Wisconsin, [AB477](#) and its companion bill in the Senate [SB452](#), were never moved out of committee before the legislature recessed. It is expected that another Minimum Wage bill will likely be introduced in the next session of the legislature in January 2023. Busch joked that by the time Wisconsin passes a bill to increase the minimum wage, it will probably need to be for \$27 bucks an hour.

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) released the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) preliminary employment estimates for the month of March 2022. The data shows that Wisconsin unemployment rate held steady at 2.9 percent in March, the same as the month before. Wisconsin's 2.9 percent unemployment rate ties the previous pre-pandemic record low set in January, February, and March of 2018.

This compares to the US unemployment rate which declined to 3.6 percent in March from 3.8 percent in the previous month, and the national rate is now lower than the unemployment rate for the last eight years before the start of the pandemic.

Waukesha Update: David Anderson reminded us that the deadline for 2022 Ozanam Medallion nominations is April 20. The medallion will be awarded at the Archdiocesan Council General Meeting to be held on Sunday, May 15 at St. John Vianney Parish, 1755 N Calhoun Rd, in Brookfield, after the 11am Mass.

Waukesha is offering virtual Ozanam Orientation training this year over three sessions to be held from 6 to 8PM on May 17, 19 and 24. You must attend all three sessions to complete your training.

Carol Maurer is running for Waukesha Council President this fall. Carol formerly headed the Getting Ahead program in Waukesha.

Anderson also noted that a question in the recent monthly Vincentian Newsletter alerted him to the fact that if a Conference cannot elect a new president, that Conference must close or merge with another Conference.

Lastly, Anderson reminded us that annual [North Central Region](#) meeting will be held in Waukesha this year on June 23 thru June 25. They are looking for volunteer Vincentians to help with registration sign-in and work as hospitality greeters, and assist on other committees for this event. If you or members of your conference are interested in volunteering for this event, contact the [Waukesha SVDP online](#) or call 262-544-1850.

You can find more information on the meeting agenda here:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/f429f977701/71dcb1e4-fadc-49a8-9634-c3467f5e517b.pdf>

Racine Update: Jim Erven reported that the Racine Council is planning to actively participate in the upcoming North Central Region meeting this June. Racine Council is planning a basket raffle during the event. They have also planned a poster campaign to support several of their local efforts, including their food collection efforts, the very successful Waterford store operation, the opening of their new Thrift Store in Racine, and their Afghani refugee resettlement efforts.

Erven also reported that all Conferences in Racine are in the process of reviewing and updating their by-laws/rules for governance. Jim reminded us that this is also a good way of letting each Conference know who is who in Conference leadership.

Remodeling of the new Racine Thrift Store site is finally moving along well. The Council is now hoping to hold a grand opening ceremony before or during the North Central Region meeting in June. Jim also reported that the Thrift Stores are looking into a new mattress program in cooperation with Chicago Mattress Company Stores, through the use of vouchers for beds that can be used at the Chicago Mattress stores.

Racine Council's Spiritual Development Committee is planning a bus trip for mid-May.

All Racine Conferences are invited to participate in a visit by bus to the Marian Shrine near Green Bay. The [National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help](#) at Champion covers the peace-filled holy ground deemed 'worthy of belief' by authority of the Catholic Church, that Mary, the mother of Jesus, made her only appearance in North America. Identifying herself as 'The Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners,' Mary appeared in October 1859 to a Belgian immigrant woman, Adele Brise, on the grounds of the Champion Shrine, when the town was known as Robinsonville.

Old Business:

Group Reading Project for 2022 – The VOP members agreed to drop the summer group reading project, The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein.

In-person VOP Meeting – John Weber has graciously offered to host a VOP meeting as a picnic in his backyard. Weber lives in New Berlin not too far from the freeway and he has some experience hosting backyard cook-outs. We had agreed on the second Saturday in August as our target date, August 13th, but no further discussion was made, as Weber was unable to attend this meeting, so discussion was tabled until the May meeting.

New Business:

VoterVoice Registration Drive – At our March meeting, State SVDP Coordinator Jim Penczykowski stated that his goal this year will be to double the ranks of people signed up to receive SVDP VoterVoice Alerts. This month, we discussed ways we could help to make that happen. We learned from our campaign to support the expansion of the Expungement of Records laws, that there are approximately 400 people in Wisconsin currently registered at VoterVoice. Jim Erven suggested that we should start by each of us talking about VoterVoice to our Conferences. Dave Busch agreed and added that an announcement in all of the parish bulletins could reach an even wider audience. Marian Lamoureux suggested that it would be best if we had a consistent message on this, going out to everyone. Marian stated that it could potentially be *more* confusing, if people read two differing articles, published in different locations. VOP members agreed, and Marian volunteered to write a sample bulletin announcement that we could consider again at our May meeting.

Reminder: You can register to receive VoterVoice Action Alerts from the SVDP Society here: <https://votervoice.net/SVDPUSA/home>

Revising the VOP Message – Near the end of our March meeting we had discussed getting more people to join the VOP committee. We also discussed the need to hear more about activity taking place in the outlying Councils such as Kenosha, Washington, Ozaukee and Walworth. We also discussed Setting a goal to double the number of people in Wisconsin that are registered to receive SVDP updates from VoterVoice. VOP Chair Dave Busch, suggested that we could do more presentations for church groups, on the mission of the VOP. Busch stated that he has given the updated presentation to a few Conferences, but that the feedback he was receiving was largely the same as it had been in the past; “You’re too political”. It occurred to Busch that many people are confusing policy as “politics”, and suggested that we need to better define “policy” in our presentation. Members agreed and Busch said that he would re-work the presentation in an effort to separate, or better identify, policy from politics.

Next Meeting: Our next meeting will be held online, on the second Saturday in May, using your phone or computer, on **May 14, 2022 at 9:00 AM**. The link to the next Zoom Meeting is found at the bottom of this document.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned at 10:44 AM, with all members praying together a prayer for people in distress.

“Lord, we pray for those who have been devastated by war, recent disasters, and the pandemic.”

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF POOR COMMITTEE

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[Link to our next Virtual Zoom Meeting](#)

The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Milwaukee is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom teleconference meeting for the Archdiocesan Council Voice of the Poor Committee, on the second Saturday of each month, at 9 am.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84435969715?pwd=WFN2NIhkV1c1SVpqd2l1RG5oVklyUT09>

Meeting ID: 844 3596 9715

Passcode: 1234

Or call in: 312-626-6799