St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice For the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on September 12, 2026

In Attendance: David Anderson, Dave Busch, Armand Carriere, Michael Drees, Jim Erven, Richard Fedler, Tom Jozwik, Tim Lanari, E. Michael McCann, and John Weber

Call to Order:
The meeting officially kicked off at 9:05 AM with all members praying together, the Opening Prayer for SVDP Society meetings.

Approval of the Minutes: Due to a brief hospital stay for the VFP Chairperson last week, the Minutes from our meeting held on August 8, 2026 were not available before this meeting. Those minutes will be sent along to the members as soon as possible and a vote for acceptance will be held at another date.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch updated us on We Energies application to raise electric rates and natural gas charges in 2027 and 2028.

- We Energies proposed a rate hike that could increase electrical bills up to 14% by 2028.
- Demonstrators and residents voiced heavy opposition during a Wisconsin Public Service Commission public input session.
- The state Public Service Commission will accept *written* public comments through September 18.

As We Energies eyes another rate increase that could cost electrical customers an extra 14% on their bill by 2028, a protest was held at Zeidler Union Square in downtown Milwaukee at the same time the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin was conducting the public input session for this rate hike proposal.
On Tuesday Sept. first, at Marquette University Alumni Memorial Union, the public was invited to weigh in on the increase. There were two public hearings, at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.
The public hearing showed heavy pushback against the proposed increased rate.
People who spoke at the public hearing were overwhelmingly against the rate increase. They pointed to rising costs of other necessities, health and anxiety issues that come with tighter budgets and continued reliability issues after past infrastructure improvements.
The open period for filing written public comments regarding this rate increase runs only until September 18. The public can offer testimony in writing on the Public Service Commission web site, here:
https://apps.psc.wi.gov/ERF/ERF/comment/filecomment.aspx?util=5&case=UR&num=112

NOTE: Public comments are currently being accepted *in lieu* of testimony at a public hearing pursuant to a Notice of Hearing in this docket. For written comments submitted in lieu of testifying, only one comment may be submitted per person per comment period. Only the first comment a person submits in lieu of testifying at a public hearing may be accepted as part of the official record for this docket.
Considering that, Vincentians should try to recruit a few neighbors in need to enter their story about problems they have experienced with their utility bills, online. The story of the disproportional nature of how these cost increases affect people with fixed or very low incomes, *needs to be heard.*

Criminal Justice - E. Michael McCann was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until next month.
As a reminder, McCann was following two important court cases that could affect changes to laws here in Wisconsin.
The first court case comes from California wherein the Supreme Court decided that the parents of children considering gender reidentification have a right to know.
The U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in March 2026 siding with parents in [*Mirabelli v. Bonta*], blocking California's policies and reinstating a lower court injunction that *prevents* public schools from hiding a student's social gender transition or gender expression from parents.
The second equally important case, also comes out of California, is surrounding abortion pill reversals (APR). The process of medication producing an abortion can be reversed if a pregnant person begins taking a hormone called progesterone after they've taken the abortion drug mifepristone. Medication abortion typically uses a combination of two drugs — mifepristone and misoprostol — taken within 24 to 48 hours of each other to terminate an early pregnancy. HBI and RealOptions claim that if a pregnant person takes high doses of the hormone progesterone after taking the first drug, mifepristone, it will safely and effectively cancel the effects of the mifepristone.
But in a bench trial in Alameda County Superior Court, the state of California says the claims by Heart Beat International and RealOptions Inc, who provide information and access to abortion pill reversal protocol and say that the treatment is safe and effective, are false and misleading.
California Attorney General Rob Bonta said no studies have shown abortion pill reversal to be safe and effective. However, there have been no public complaints filed from women who have taken the APR pill.
The presentation of the evidence in that trial concluded on Thursday July 30, and no decision could be found on this case, as of this writing.

Housing - John Weber was unable to attend this meeting but did send in a report to the chairperson who read this into the record.
Weber reported that VIA Community Development Corp. (VIA CDC) formerly known as Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, has served Layton Park, Burnham Park, Silver City and Clarke Square in the areas of economic development.
As a certified Community Housing Development Organization, they have produced more than 50 affordable homes and leveraged more than $52 million in neighborhood investment to create opportunities for Milwaukee neighbors. In early August the group launched the first phase of its latest project. Major funding comes from organization like Zilber Family Foundation.
Public funding and grants administered by the City of Milwaukee (such as Community Development Block Grants) along with organizations like Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), founded by the Ford Foundation in 1979, plus HUD.

The county and others are working to expand housing for people returning from incarceration. "The Community" and Milwaukee County are connecting landlords, property managers and housing providers with reentry organizations and county housing resources.
The Community works to reduce the stigma associated with incarceration and build a better future for those with a criminal record.
The county and others are working to expand housing for people returning from incarceration.
Latonya Baker, founder and CEO of the Milwaukee Reentry Housing Hub, said housing alone is often not enough. Baker said people returning from incarceration can benefit from a range of services, including life- skills training and connection to health care.
Weber also reported on a new online tool to help tenants do a background check on landlords. the free tool, MKEPropertyOwnership.com, allows users to search rental properties in the city, identify a landlords network of related LLCs and view information including code violations and eviction filings.

Human Trafficking – The VFP Committee is hoping to find a Vincentian that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and is willing to report on this topic in future meetings. Armond Carriere reported that St. Bakhita House formally dedicated their contemplative garden on Saturday, August 29, in front of a large crowd. Bishop Jeffrey Haines blessed the garden, and Anne Haines then spoke and thanked many members of the community that helped to make the contemplative space a reality. She included a special thank you to our committee member Mike McCann for his help with legal issues in getting the house next door condemned and got the property turned over to St. Bakhita House. The garden also continues the emphasis of sustainable agriculture established by Catholic Worker House founder, Dorothy Day.
St Bakhita Catholic Worker House has officially become part of the Thrive for Life Network, joining Joseph House as part of the Milwaukee Thrive for Life community. Anne Haines, Director of St. Bakhita House, will join the Thrive for Life National Leadership Team, while continuing to live among the women at St. Bakhita House.
Thrive for Life is a Jesuit sponsored program that seeks to provide purpose, education, employment, and housing for individuals recently released from incarceration. St. Bakhita House will be the first Thrive for Life residence addressing the needs of women.
You can give support to this effort by donating online, here: https://thriveforlife.org/donate
Ed Ritger added that the Sheboygan County Council is very much interested in starting up a similar support house in their area.
Armand also reported that Anne will be taking a new position with the Thrive For Life network and will be moving to New York for a short time, to establish her position at their Jesuit headquarters. She will be back to Milwaukee sometime in December.

Hunger/FoodShare: Tom Jozwik opened his report with a little positive news…
Millions of SNAP recipients can expect to see an increase in the maximum benefits available, come October. The USDA has published its fiscal year 2027 SNAP cost-of-living adjustments, to take effect October 1.
Maximum benefits will go up throughout the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia, and income eligibility limits will increase as well. The maximum for one person will go up $8 to $306 a month, while a family of four will be eligible for $1,023 a month (up from $994) and an eight-person household will be eligible for $1,841 (up from $1,789).
These figures are maximums, however; what many SNAP recipients receive will actually be less. The USDA calculates actual allotment based partly on net income. USDA records show that in May, the last month for which figures are available, the average SNAP recipient got about $187, while the average household got about $344.

The maximum benefit is connected with the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, an estimate of the cost of a market basket capable of providing nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. The department each June calculates the cost for a four-person family and uses that figure to determine maximum allotments for various household sizes. The minimum benefit for one- and two-person qualifying households will increase just $1, from $24 to $25 a month.

It was reported on Tuesday that the Touchdowns for Hunger joint program of Sargento Cheese and the Green Bay Packers will be in effect for a 24th season this year. Sargento will donate $2,000 toward hunger relief for each touchdown the Packers score during the regular season. The proceeds are to be shared by Hunger Task Force in Milwaukee and Paul's Pantry in Green Bay. Last year, $96,000 was donated. To date, Touchdowns for Hunger has raised nearly $2 million toward hunger relief in Wisconsin and has provided more than a million meals for families in need.

The Wisconsin Joint Legislative Audit Committee voted 6–4 along party lines to authorize a full audit of the FoodShare program, along with a look at the oversight of anti-poverty nonprofits. The vote was along party lines. "I think the timing … is appropriate," said Joint Legislative Audit committee co-chair Robert Wittke, a Republican Representative from Caledonia. He added, "The biggest thing I'd look at is that the federal requirements have changed and the state is in a position where there's close to a $300 million risk if we don't look at and have in place the things we need to do to comply … "

The fact is that Wisconsin has consistently had one of the lowest payment error rates nationwide. For fiscal year 2025, Wisconsin achieved a payment error rate of 5.72%, the national average was 10.62%.

The Associated Press and Al Jazeera reported last week that the UN's World Food Programme Agency (WFP) has said financing constraints compel it to reduce its support in the occupied West Bank from 400,000 to 200,000 people. International aid organizations around the world have been struggling for money as the U.S. has led a sharp cut in support, with other Western countries reducing donations as well. The WFP estimates 900,000 people are food-insecure in the West Bank. In Gaza, 1.5 million are supported by the WFP; a spokesperson told the AP that the WFP has begun reducing cash assistance to about 75,000 families in Gaza.

In Somalia, it was reported last month, thousands of hunger-stricken families have lost their farms and livestock because of a multi-year drought.

New research from United Kingdom-based Save the Children indicates one in ten small Afghan children suffers from acute malnourishment (aka wasting), a life-threatening condition wherein a child is dangerously underweight for his or her height. Save the Children said that, over the past four years, acute malnutrition in children under age 5 has increased by 14 percent, affecting 3.7 million in 2026.

Immigration - Armand Carriere reported that according to the latest data available, more than 250 people in Wisconsin were detained and arrested by ICE in June alone, an 82% increase compared to the previous month. Only one/fifth of the people arrested in Milwaukee had convictions or criminal charges. Of those identified by ICE as "convicted criminals", the vast majority are classified as nonviolent crimes, with traffic offenses being the most common charge.

The absence of state and/or federal support has severely impacted organizations serving immigrant and refugee communities. Fewer clients can be served and staff reductions have taken place. Organizations like Hanan Relief Group, Lutheran Social Services, and the Somali Resource Center have all felt the impact of the absence of state and federal support.

Even Catholic Charities Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services, while not having been dependent on government support, is being challenged to mee the needs of their immigrant clients as well as referrals from these other immigrant support groups.

People interested in helping the above named organizations can contact them at the following addresses:

Somali Resource Center - www.Somaliresourcesofmke.org
Lutheran Social Services - https://www.lsswis.org
Hanan Relief Group - www.hananrrg.org
Catholic Charities - www.ccmke.org/Catholic-Charities/Give-Today.htm

Mental Health Care – Sister Julie Krahl was unable to attend this meeting and discussion on this topic was tabled until our next meeting.

Minimum Wage/Labor – Dave Busch reported that the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) MADISON announced the following information for Wisconsin's labor market, reflecting July 2026 preliminary estimates from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Unemployment – The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate held steady at 3.3% (April unemployment was 3.5%, May was 3.4%, June was 3.3%), which is 0.8 percentage points below the national unemployment rate of 4.1%

Unfortunately, the non-seasonally adjusted data for Wisconsin continues to show southeastern Wisconsin with unemployment rates higher than the state average, with Milwaukee at 3.5%.

	NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED				
CITY	RATE Jul-26	RATE Jun-26	RATE Jul-25	RANK Jul-26	RANK Jun-26
Appleton	3.5	3.3	3.4	21	11
Beloit	4.4	4.2	4.4	33	32
Brookfield	3.5	3.5	3.2	21	21
Caledonia	3.9	3.9	3.5	31	30
De Pere	3.0	3.1	3.0	5	5
Eau Claire	3.2	3.3	3.2	8	11
Fitchburg	2.6	2.8	2.4	1	1
Fond du Lac	3.7	3.6	3.8	28	23
Franklin	3.3	3.4	3.1	11	19
Green Bay	3.3	3.3	3.1	11	11
Greenfield	3.5	3.7	3.4	21	25
Janesville	3.5	3.7	3.3	21	25
Kenosha	3.6	3.8	3.5	27	28
La Crosse	3.5	3.7	3.4	21	25
Madison	2.9	3.0	2.7	3	2
Manitowoc	3.5	3.3	3.1	21	11
Menomonee Falls	3.3	3.4	3.2	11	19
Mequon	3.3	3.3	3.4	11	11
Milwaukee	4.9	4.8	4.9	35	35
Mount Pleasant	3.8	3.9	3.3	30	30
Muskego	3.3	3.0	2.8	11	2
Neenah	3.3	3.1	3.1	11	5
New Berlin	3.4	3.3	3.1	19	11
Oak Creek	3.3	3.3	3.0	11	11
Oshkosh	3.4	3.6	3.2	19	23
Racine	4.6	4.5	4.7	34	34
Sheboygan	3.1	3.2	3.0	7	9
Stevens Point	2.9	3.2	2.9	3	9
Sun Prairie	2.8	3.0	2.7	2	2
Superior	4.1	4.3	3.9	32	33
Waukesha	3.2	3.1	3.0	8	5
Wausau	3.3	3.3	3.1	11	11
Wauwatosa	3.2	3.5	2.9	8	21
West Allis	3.7	3.8	4.0	28	28
West Bend	3.0	3.1	2.9	5	5

Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

Next, Busch reported that service workers and labor organizers are calling on state lawmakers to raise Wisconsin's minimum wage from $7.25 to $20 an hour.

Wisconsin is one of 20 states that haven't raised their minimum wages higher than the federal rate set in 2009. The push for a higher minimum wage comes as 25 states raised their minimum wages last year.

"A $7.25 minimum wage is absurd in this day and age," said Troy Brewer, a cook at Fiserv Forum. "Let's stop playing politics. Let's stop playing Republicans versus Democrats. Let's do what's right by people."

The average single person in Wisconsin needs to make $20.96 to support themselves, according to MIT's Living Wage Calculator.

Previous proposals from Democrats to raise the minimum wage in Wisconsin have gone nowhere in the Republican-controlled Legislature.
Kurt Bauer, president of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, which is the state's largest business lobbying group, said raising the minimum wage will hurt employers.
"A government-mandated minimum wage is nothing more than a tax on hiring.
Busch noted that approximately 900 thousand workers in Wisconsin earn less than a living wage.
Ed Ritger noted that as our legislators struggle with ways to make cuts to SNAP Benefits, one sure way to reduce the need for those benefits would be to raise the minimum wage so that fewer people will be in need of food support programs.

Fond du Lac Update: Michael Drees reported that the Fond du Lac Council will hold their annual Servants of the Poor Banquet on September 22nd at the KC Hall. Menu selection is complete, booklets are prepared. The Patricia O'Hearn honorees will be Duane and Elaine Rebeck, Special Persons Program. Our speaker will be Jeanne Harper, St. Vincent de Paul North Central Region Spiritual Advisor. Paul and Ginny Ditter will be recognized for their work within the Holyland Conference.
The FY 2025 financial audit is complete. Recommendations are routine and similar to prior years. The audit results will be presented at the September 30, 2026 District Council Board Meeting.
Due to information technology inflation, the planned replacement of computers in 2026 is significantly over budget. Additional computers will need to be replaced at the SKDS in FY 2027.
To assist the Menasha SVDP with disaster response in their district, Fond du Lac District Council send a $5,000 donation and offered ongoing assistance as needed to the Council in Menasha.
St. Katharine Drexel Shelter (SKDS). - Hope on the Fairway fundraiser was held August 31, 2026 at the South Hill's Country Club for the benefit of SKDS. This was the first year of what may become an annual fundraising event. Sponsorship support was excellent; 19 four-person golf teams participated in the event. Financial results of the fundraiser are being tabulated.
SKDS is in need of kitchen replacement/upgrades on both the family side and single side. Estimates for the work range from $90 – $160k. We will seek grant funding to assist with the kitchen replacement/upgrades.
Lastly, the shelter has hired a new half-time Volunteer Coordinator, Bonnie Lueck.
Fond du Lac VFP Committee – The Committee met August 17, 2026 with Marty Ryan, Fond du Lac County Board member, prior Fond du Lac City Council President, and current candidate for Wisconsin's 60th Assembly District. The discussion focused on homelessness and housing affordability. Political discussions about housing affordability may not address the population typically served by SVDP; they tend to focus on housing development for individuals that want to purchase homes. The population served by SVDP tends to be people with limited incomes, renters, people with prior evictions, prior incarceration, disabled and elderly on fixed income, and may or may not be eligible for section 8 housing. Issues discussed included: poor conditions of rental properties, inadequate inspections and code enforcement, rent inflation, absent landlords/investors, insufficient section 8 housing, high up-front costs for renters, and reliance on limited state and federal funding. Suggestions discussed included: engaging the Fond du Lac City management and planning department to discuss rental housing conditions, explore opportunities for federal (i.e. HUD) grants, develop a coalition to respond to funding opportunities and advocate for stable housing for the population served by SVDP.
Fondy Food Pantry - Mr. Diaz, Food Pantry Director has requested permission to replace and add outdoor lighting to the parking area at the Food Pantry. SVDP has given approval to Mr. Diaz to proceed with lighting improvements. Mr. Diaz has also asked if SVDP would share in the cost of the upgrades? New lighting may be more efficient and save on energy bills that SVDP pays. SVDP will consider sharing in the cost once estimates for the lighting project are available.

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

Racine Update: Jim Erven opened his Racine Council update by congratulating Racine Council President Jim Corona on his election as President of the Archdiocesan Executive Board. Corona will be taking over from Zoltan Eszes as his term expires at the end of September. The Racine Council is actively looking for someone to take over duties of Council President. They have someone that volunteered to temporarily cover the position until a full time replacement can be found.
Next, Erven reported Racine is sponsoring the annual "Party on the Pavement" on September 19th. The annual 12-block street festival in downtown Racine features food and music , and the Council plans to have a presence at the street festival and will use the opportunity to recruit new members.
Racine Council's new, larger Thrift Store in Rochester, is planning on a grand opening sometime in October, this year. The Rochester location has a Waterford address, and has a much larger footprint than their old store.

Old Business:

SVDP Society Awareness – VFP Chairperson Dave Busch reported at our August meeting that the SVDP Archdiocese Executive Board is exploring ways to increase awareness of our work and how we operate, to the entire archdiocese. The Board has now launched a broad based, shared web site for the nine separate Council's located throughout the Milwaukee Archdiocese. View here: https://svdpconnect.org
At the same time, the Milwaukee Council has decided that they will continue the SVDP Society Awareness Month this October. All conference presidents in Milwaukee will receive an Awareness Month booklet again this year. The booklet that our committee sponsored, and helped to produce annually to raise awareness of how our Society operates throughout the archdiocese, will be put together and distributed by the SVDP Milwaukee paid staff.
The booklet contains suggested activities, bulletin announcements, prayers, a rededication service, and facts about the society that each conference is free to use as they like, in raising awareness of our society in their own parish.
VFP Chairperson Dave Busch thanked Tom Jozwik for his help in producing this booklet annually, while noting that our committee will no longer take the lead on SVDP Awareness Month.
Busch also passed along this committee's thanks to Milwaukee Council leaders Debbie Duskey and Maria Welz for their efforts in continuing the SVDP Awareness Month campaign.
SVDP Awareness Month begins at the end of September with the feast day of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27), and continues through the end of October.

Regional VFP Committee Update: – Jim Erven reported that the Regional VFP Committee will be meeting again next month. At this time, much of the regional business is focused on the National Assembly being held in Salt Lake City this month.
There is significant initiative underway at the Assembly on rebranding the SVDP society. The rebranding will include the Voice For the Poor Committees, and affect changes down to the conference level. Details on the rebranding are scarce at this time, because discussions on the rebranding are taking place right now at the National Assembly. Erven noted that he had received an email from his conference president that contained a photograph of a t-shirt bearing the new name for the VFP Committee. The rebranding will incorporate more of a team approach to the missions of the society, and the new name for the VFP will be the "Justice and Charity Team".

The rebranding comes out of the surveys and investigations from the year of synod that the Society completed last year.
Busch mentioned that he appreciated the concept of placing the word Justice first, and felt that this rebranding is probably more descriptive of the work of this committee.
Erven mentioned that he thought the work of advocacy will be getting more emphasis down at the conference level.
Armand asked how the rebrand of our committee will avoid getting us into the issue of "politics". He stated that in his parish (and at almost all conferences) anytime we advocate for justice, it causes people to pull back and state "this is too political". Erven stated that we need to remind others that this work is "people based" and non-partisan. He speculated that if the work of advocacy will be filtered down to each conference that there will need to be some training involved. Perhaps that training will help make other more aware of our mission.
Busch added that we need to make certain that we own up to the politics of poverty in our rebranding.
Ed Ritger stated that there is another side to owning up to the politics, and that is getting involvement from our local pastors. Ed mentioned that Bishop Don Hying gave a workshop at the North Central Region meeting in Green Bay last month. In his presentation Bishop Hying mentioned the importance of getting your pastors to take some ownership in the work that we are doing. Start by getting seminarians that are assigned to work in your parish to go along on a home visit. We will need to wait and see how this all filters down to us, after the National Assembly ends.
Lastly, Erven reported that as a result of recent legislation, several cities are opening new local housing offices. Jim stated that we should plan to get involved in a relationship with these offices at a local and/or regional level.

New Business:

SVDP National Assembly – Busch reminded the committee that the National Assembly was taking place right now, in Salt Lake City Utah. As we are meeting, the Assembly is holding a mass and closing the event today. He suggested that we covered this topic in the previous discussion on the Regional VFP.

Next Meeting – October 10, 2026
The next Voice For the Poor committee will be held online, on the second Saturday in October from 9:00 to 11:00 AM, via a Zoom meeting. All Vincentians are welcome to attend.
The login information can be found at the bottom of the last page of these minutes.

Adjournment:
The May meeting officially adjourned at 10:50 AM with the committee members praying together for the victims and families of the 9/11 attacks:

"May we learn to depend on the security You offer.
We pray for your peace as we remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11"

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE FOR THE POOR COMMITTEE

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Here is the information for logging into the VFP ZOOM Meeting:

St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Milwaukee Archdiocese is inviting you to the next scheduled meeting of the Voice For the Poor Committee, online via ZOOM.

Click Here to Join Zoom Meeting:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89896784028?pwd=KzZhR0xyWWY0QXlqNUNEYkttaElXZz09

Or call in (audio only)**: 312-626-6799**
(Dial by your location. 312 626 6799 is Chicago)
Meeting ID: 898 9678 4028
Passcode: 732237