

March 2011 Legislative Advocacy Workshop

30 SVDP members attended a Legislative Advocacy Workshop on March 26, 2011 at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Columbus. The gathering, sponsored by the Columbus Voice of the Poor Committee and the Diocesan Office of Social Concerns, educated attendees on advocacy, its roots in Catholic Social Teaching, and the issues impacting those we serve in our home visits that are currently in front of the Ohio legislature. Jerry Freewalt of the Diocesan Office of Social Concerns and Jim Tobin of the Ohio Catholic Conference were the main presenters of the above topics. At the end of the presentations, attendees caucused by conference to discuss arranging visits with their State representatives and Senators in April 2011. Captains of each caucus were selected to arrange the visits. Information about actual visits will be forthcoming in future issues of the Voice.

If anyone did not attend the workshop but would be interested in participating in legislative visits, please contact Warren Wright at joannwarrenwright@yahoo.com. Copies of the handouts from the day are available by e-mail.

Report of Voice of the Poor Workshops and Advocacy Efforts

2011 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, Washington, DC

The SVDP Columbus Voice of the Poor participated in the 2011 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering on February 13 to 16 in Washington, DC. The theme of the gathering was “Protecting Human Life and Dignity: Promoting a Just Economy”. The gathering, organized by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, educated hundreds of attendees on the justice issues requiring advocacy with our US representatives and Senators. Attendees visited Capitol Hill to lobby their representatives and Senators on two issues, budget priorities for the poor and vulnerable and health care reform. The message delivered on budget priorities was that spending cuts should not disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable, those who most need assistance in these troubled economic times. Attendees requested that both domestic safety net programs and international humanitarian assistance be spared disproportionate cuts. The health care message was “reform, don’t repeal” the health care legislation passed in 2010. Specifically, House and Senate bills are pending that would prohibit the use of federal funds for abortion and protect conscience rights for health care providers who refuse to perform abortions under the new health care law. Reps and Senators were requested to support these pieces of legislation. The Bishops conference supported the positive impacts of the legislation, especially the provision of affordable health care for many more of our citizens, including the poor and vulnerable.

Warren Wright of the Columbus VOP committee joined with six other Ohio attendees from Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, and Wooster to visit the offices of Rep. Steve Stivers, Rep. Jim Renacci, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. John Boehner, Senator Rob Portman, and Sen. Sherrod Brown. Nationally, attendees visited 80% of House members and 89% of Senate members.

The gathering included energetic liturgies to open and close the gathering, including participation by the Ghanaian Catholic community of DC in the opening liturgy. Bishop Steven Blaire, head of the USCCB Domestic Justice and Development Committee, presided over the opening liturgy. Bishop Howard Hubbard, head of the USCCB International Policy Committee, presided over the closing liturgy. Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, keynoted the gathering with his address, “The Legacy of Rerum Novarum: Current Challenges of Catholic Social Teaching.” All sessions of the gathering were recorded on an audio CD. Please contact Warren Wright at joannwarrenwright@yahoo.com if interested.

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