

St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice Of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on March 9, 2024

In Attendance: Randy Bedore, Dave Busch, Armand Carriere, Jim Erven, Richard Fedler, Tom Jozwik, Sister Julie Krahl, and John Weber

Call to Order: As the March Zoom meeting began, the Chairperson mentioned that David Anderson, and Mike McCann would not be available for this meeting as they are both attending a [Men of Christ Rally](#) in Milwaukee.

The VOP meeting was formally called to order at 9:06 AM with all members praying together, the short version of the opening prayer for St. Vincent de Paul Society meetings.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on February 10, 2024 were sent to the VOP members in advance of this meeting, and the chairperson asked that any changes be sent directly to him. No errors or omissions were received by the chair, and no questions were raised by the VOP members, so the February VOP minutes were passed by general consent.

Subcommittee Updates:

Jim Erven had some important and timely information on a local angle to the continuing crisis on the US southern border. The VOP chairperson decided to deviate slightly from our agenda. Erven reported that resources in the Chicago area are being overwhelmed by the recent influx of immigrants being shipped to the city from our southern border. Thereby creating the need to move busloads of immigrants out of Chicago to nearby cities that are large enough to have emergency preparedness resources available (which includes *all* of southeastern Wisconsin). Erven reported that the Racine County Department of Emergency Management has reached out to the [Racine Interfaith Coalition](#) for advice on how they can best prepare for a rapid increase in the number of immigrants in Racine. In response, the Racine Interfaith Coalition has agreed to devote their entire agenda of their two hour March meeting, in search of long term and immediate solutions to this problem. The Racine SVDP Council President was invited to participate in this important discussion, which will be held on Tuesday March 12, and Jim Erven has extended the meeting invite out to Armand Carriere who covers immigration for the VOP. Armand has extended the invitation out to Catholic Charities in Milwaukee. The meeting agenda has only one question on it; "How Can We Get Prepared?", with "we" meaning, southeastern Wisconsin. The group will try to identify all of the resources they have in their own area and identify any groups with ties to immigrants. The purpose is to minimize duplication of efforts and resources. The coalition also hopes to identify large structures that might be capable of housing groups of immigrants. Erven also pointed out that there are some state and national entities that are working on this problem as well.

[Wisdom](#) is a Wisconsin nonprofit dedicated to bringing diverse communities together to advocate for justice through community organizing. They are on the agenda for the coalition meeting and will give the opening address. WISDOM is a proud member of the national [Gamaliel Network](#). Gamaliel's Civil Rights of Immigrants Campaign (CRI) is committed to working for equal opportunity and fair treatment of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Immigration - Armand Carriere reported that he and Jim Erven are planning to sit in on the Racine Interfaith Coalition Zoom meeting. Armand passed Jim's information on this planning meeting on to the Immigration and Refugee Office at [Catholic Charities](#) in Milwaukee. They were not aware of the issue in Racine. It seems logical that the influx of immigrants will sooner rather than later impact Milwaukee.

Armand also reported that Catholic Charities Immigrant Office has added two new staff positions to deal with immigration issues. The first position will coordinate refugee sponsorship groups led by refugees who are applying to sponsor their friends and family members overseas.

The second position will be opened to coordinate a new pro bono asylum project.

There are many people coming up through the southern border who want to apply for asylum but lack the resources for a private attorney. This new program will have a Catholic Charities attorney comb through legal cases of immigrants here and those that they think will qualify for asylum, will be matched with a volunteer that is trained to fill out the asylum paperwork. After they've applied, Catholic Charities attorneys will help them apply for a work permit. With a work permit, the idea is that the asylum seeker will then be able to work and save for a private attorney.

Catholic Charities Milwaukee has created a website dedicated to answering immigration questions. The goal of the website is to provide accurate information, dispel rumors, and help you understand your legal options in the United States. Find them online here: <https://risccmke.org/en/>

On a lighter note, Armand reported that his home parish, [Holy Family in Whitefish Bay](#), is now hosting a Sunday mass in French. The mass is intended to serve a primarily French speaking African immigrant community. The mass had been previously hosted at St Rose Lima parish which started about 10 years ago with a group of about 10 people. The congregation has grown to about 50 people and the move to Holy Family will enable them to grow further.

Energy – Dave Busch stated that Wisconsin utilities are urging customers who may have gotten behind on their energy bills to apply for energy assistance or inquire about payment plans ahead of the state's utility disconnection moratorium ending on April 15.

Advocates argue recent [rate increases](#) have made it more difficult for elderly and low-income consumers to afford rising energy bills, along with other [inflationary price increases](#). They also said the end of the disconnection moratorium disproportionately affects people of color and low-income households.

Keveia Guiden, an energy burden organizer with the North Side Rising-Citizen Action advocacy group, said the end of the moratorium is especially difficult for Milwaukee's majority Black and Latino neighborhoods. She said people in those neighborhoods often make less money than their white neighbors and often rent poorly insulated old homes that leak warm air in the winter and cold air in the summer.

The main forms of energy assistance available to Wisconsinites are the [Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program](#) through the state, or an assistance program through the nonprofit [Keep Wisconsin Warm/Cool Fund](#). Those programs are available to people making 60 percent or less of the state's median household income.

Criminal Justice - E. Michael McCann was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until our next meeting.

Housing: John Weber reported that an affordable apartment development, with half its units set aside as emergency housing, is coming to Milwaukee's central city.

[KG Development Group LLC](#) is developing the 41-unit affordable housing community at 2436 N. 50th St., the site of a former Jewish housing project built in 1929. The project will include 20 units dedicated for people experiencing *emergency* housing situations and dealing with trauma.

The remaining 21 units will be rented to people with lower income, at below market rates, with eight of them receiving housing vouchers, subsidizing the cost of the rental, from the Milwaukee County Housing Division. The project is being financed in part with \$1 million in county funds provided through the federal American Rescue Plan Act. It will be [the first Wisconsin project](#) to merge crisis beds and supportive services with affordable apartments.

Weber also reported that if you are thinking about purchasing a home for the first time, contact Housing Resources Inc. Their homeownership program can answer common questions and provide you with the knowledge you need to navigate your way through the home buying process. In Milwaukee, call 414-461-6330

In Racine call 262-636-8271

In Waukesha call 262-522-1230

More information can be found on their web site, here: <https://hri-wi.org>

Related to the Interfaith Coalition preparedness meeting, Jim Erven asked Weber if he was aware of any housing resources in Milwaukee that might be able to accommodate large groups of immigrants. Weber mentioned that Urban Milwaukee might have information on this. Dave Busch offered that there is an old Army Reserve base on Silver Spring Drive in Milwaukee that used to have barracks for reserve units.

Hunger/FoodShare: Tom Jozwik reported that in conjunction with its 70th anniversary, WISN TV (Channel 12 in Milwaukee) is expanding its community service and its commitment to Hunger Task Force ([HTF](#)) which they have promoted for years.

Jozwik told us about a report from WISN TV on a rather unique Milwaukee food pantry—one of 44 pantries that HTF supports and from which in excess of 22,000 individuals benefit. The pantry is near the Fiserv Forum, at the corner of 6th and McKinley. It's in the Vivent Health structure and has been purposely set up to resemble a grocery store in order to counteract the stigma attached to patronizing a food pantry. [Vivent Health](#) at that location also provides medical and dental care and legal assistance. Additionally, a dietician is on hand to offer food choice assistance. Vivent nutrition director Kelli Hirt told WISN, "We believe food is an essential part of health care, and having a pantry is the first step in making that happen." This pantry has not only staples, but also so-called "indulgent items" like condiments, coffee and tea.

Next Jozwik told us that CNN reported that the war in Sudan is "triggering the world's largest hunger crisis." Over 25 million people are "trapped in a spiral of food insecurity," according to the United Nations World Food Program ([WFP](#)). The war has left 18 million "acutely food insecure" in Sudan, in addition to millions more in neighboring Chad and South Sudan. WFP director Cindy McLain observed that Darfur 20 years ago experienced the world's largest food crisis and the world rallied in response. Today, though, "the people of Sudan have been forgotten. Millions of lives and the peace and stability of an entire region are at stake."

Lastly, Jozwik reported that in his State of the Union address, [President Biden announced](#) that the United States is coordinating with Israel in launching an emergency mission to set up a temporary port on the Gaza coast able to receive large shipments of humanitarian aid—food, medicine, other essentials. It is expected to take weeks to execute the plan.

Human Trafficking – The VOP Committee is looking for 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.

Jim Erven reported on a bill currently in the US Senate. [HR5856](#) was passed by the House in February and sent on to the Senate where it is currently in committee.

The Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2023, will restore funding to programs that support victims of human trafficking, and further fund US efforts abroad to fight human trafficking. The US Catholic Bishops issued a [VoterVoice Action Alert](#) urging people to contact their legislators to support this bill.

Mental Health Care – Julie Krahl reported that she has some concerns over the discussion large housing projects for the sudden influx of immigrants. She reminded us that this is how we first thought about the problem of homeless people in this country. Now we have a bill in Wisconsin that would create urban encampment sites for the homeless. [AB689/SB669](#), a bill that will allow municipalities to establish structured camping facilities for those unhoused.

This bill authorizes the Department of Administration ([DOA](#)) and, cities, villages, towns, and counties (political subdivisions) to designate public property, other than county fairgrounds and public parks, for use as a “structured camping facility” at which DOA may assign a homeless individual or family to a specific location, for the purpose of allowing the individual or family to set up temporary residence at that facility. Julie warned us that this model may get applied to the immigration problem and pointed out that the encampment solution also has a criminal penalty for living on the street, outside of the legal encampment. Further, that these camping facilities can have the effect of putting these people in need “out of sight, out of mind”.

A short discussion ensued when the chairperson asked why the mini, temporary homes idea has not caught on in our area. Busch felt that this could effectively create an area where people would want to move into, rather than an unattractive encampment they would be forced to move into.

Lange Brothers Woodworking in Milwaukee has developed a system for constructing tiny affordable housing designed to provide a temporary residence for the unhoused. The Lange Brothers system is ingenious in that, their small homes go up without any nails or screws!

You can learn more about Lange minihomes here: <https://www.langebros.com/services/lush/>.

Jim Erven mentioned that Racine has a minihome project run by the Veterans Administration, for veterans. He believes the project works because it was designed as a community and has a community building in the center of the site.

Julie Krahl recounted her experience in visiting a housing project in Indiana that rehabs older houses in rundown neighborhoods with the idea of making permanent housing for the homeless. She felt that idea though more costly, was a complete success.

Julie brought the conversation back to the mental health topic by reminding us that studies show that more than 20 percent of unhoused people suffer from serious mental health problems.

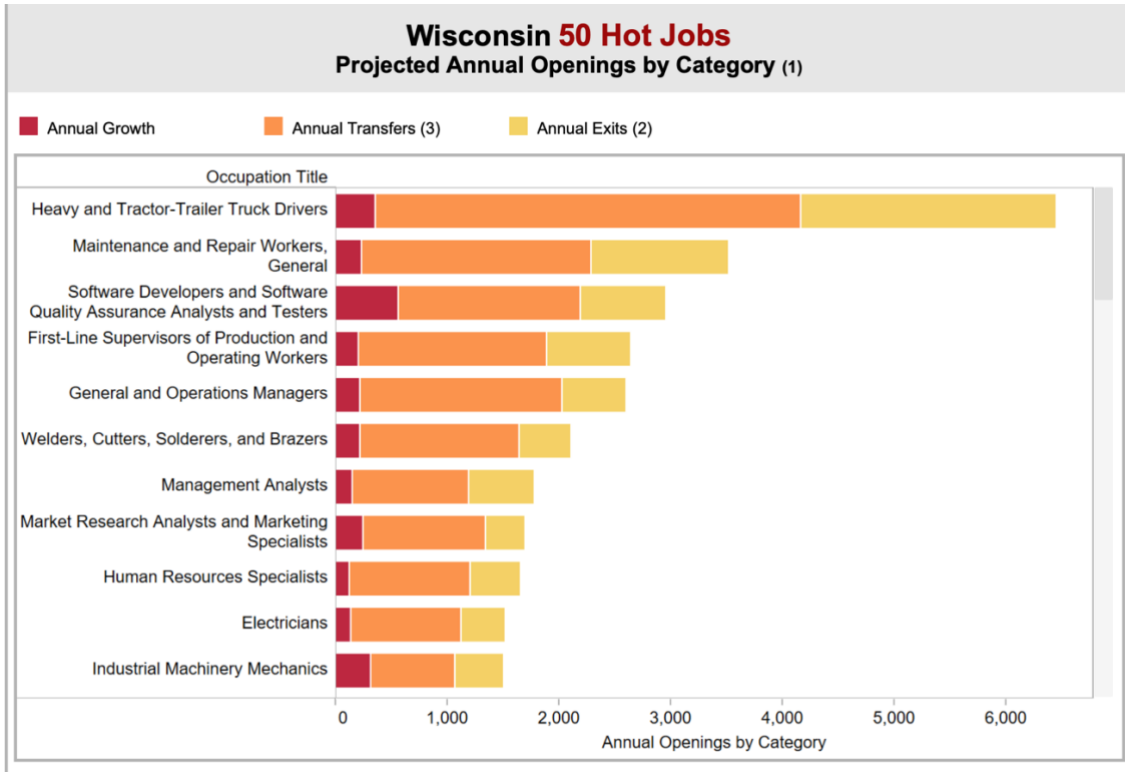
Julie mentioned a bill in the legislature now that will bring some relief to the Winnebago County mental health institute. [Senate Bill 462](#) will require the Department of Health Services to establish a certification process for crisis urgent care and observation facilities and create a program to award grants to develop and support these facilities. This bill would ease the load on the states only mental health institution in Winnebago, which received 3,000 patients last year alone. Often times people are brought to the Winnebago mental health facility by law enforcement, in handcuffs. Julie warned us that it is difficult when dealing with mental health issues to not criminalize mental health problems in the same manner that homelessness may become criminal. Julie closed by asking the question about where we stand on gender conversion therapy. The assumption is that the Wisconsin bishops would not support this type of therapy, but this is a mental health issue that affects the poor and marginalized people that Vincentians serve.

No clear answer was put forward on this potential dichotomy, but the chairperson thanked Sister Julie for putting this topic on our radar.

Minimum Wage/Labor – Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development (DWD) reported that Wisconsin's unemployment rate was 3.2% in January. The number of unemployed people decreased 5,200 over the month and the labor force decreased by 2,300 workers over the month. However, the number of people employed *increased* by 2,900 over the month for a total of 3,047,500 employed.

That compares to the national unemployment rate of 3.7 percent in January, unchanged for the third month in a row. The national rate has been within the range of 3.4 percent and 3.8 percent since February 2022.

More good news, the state's list of the top hot jobs still shows the projected highest number of job openings in areas that do not require an advanced education.



Waukesha Update: David Anderson was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until our next meeting.

Racine Update: Jim Erven reported that the Racine Council has nearly completed implementing and complying with all of the requirements of the new Safeguarding program of the SVDP Society. Racine expects to be in full compliance of the program before the March deadline. This prompted a brief discussion on some of the impediments to completing Safeguarding training. Erven mentioned that some folks have been running into technological problems. This reminded Busch to report that some individuals may have gone through Safeguarding training if they have been working with the Catholic schools in their parish. They may be getting hung up when they first try to set up an account for themselves, due to having previously registered their email address when they did Safeguarding training for the school. The workaround for Vincenzians is to leave out the email address, or use a different email address from the one they had previously used.

Erven next reported that they have had success in recruiting new members into the Racine Conferences. Jim also reported on several bills that he thinks have statewide appeal. First, he mentioned the national Child Tax Credit bill. The new bill to enhance those tax credits came up in the US House as [H.R.7024](#) - Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024. This bill modifies the calculation of the refundable portion of the child tax credit to require the multiplication of the credit amount in calendar years 2023-2025 by the number of qualifying children. The maximum refundable amount per child of such credit is increased to \$1,800 in 2023, \$1,900 in 2024, and \$2,000 in 2025. The bill has passed the House and has been sent to the Senate.

At the state level, Jim is watching [AB1003/SB913](#). This bill establishes a Department of Health Services certification process for psychiatric residential treatment facilities. The bill defines a psychiatric residential treatment facility as a non-hospital facility that provides inpatient comprehensive mental health treatment services to individuals under the age of 21 who, due to mental illness, substance use, or severe emotional disturbance, need treatment that can most effectively be provided in a residential treatment facility. Erven also told us about [AB467/SB462](#) which would require the Department of Health Services to establish a certification process for crisis urgent care and observation facilities and create a grant program to award grants to develop and support these facilities. Dovetailing on this information, Julie Krahl cautioned us to watch how often politicians group mental health and substance abuse together. The two problems are not the same.

She also mentioned that just this past week, she had visited a “walk-in” behavioral health care facility. This particular location offered telehealth psychiatry, which could even make changes to prescribed medications, visits with a doctor and psychiatric nurses were also available in person by appointment. This model for walk-in services is also a lower cost option for help, especially when compared to walking into a hospital emergency room. More information on this model of care can be found here: <https://go.americanbehavioralclinics.com/psychiatry>

Lastly, Jim reported that there is a bill in the legislature that would increase funding for the replacement of lead water service lines. [AB887/SB860](#) would offer more help to the poor in rural areas who may not be able to afford these expensive replacements.

Old Business:

VoterVoice Action Alert – Dave Busch reported that Barb Sella at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference ([WCC](#)) confirmed that the Expungement of Records Bill, [AB37/SB38](#), will not be brought to the floor for a vote before the current session goes out for recess at the end of this month. The bill will need to be reintroduced in the next session. Busch suggested that we should revise our VoterVoice Action Alert to encourage voters to ask that their representatives get this bipartisan bill to the floor for a vote.

Busch again mentioned that there is also bill in the Wisconsin legislature now that could make mental health care more widely available in Wisconsin. [AB500/SB476](#) would remove the requirement for mental health care providers to maintain a physical address in Wisconsin and be licensed in Wisconsin in order to provide telehealth services, provided that they are licensed, certified, registered, or otherwise authorized to provide health care services in another state. Busch suggested that this would be a good bill for us to support by issuing our next statewide VoterVoice Action Alert.

New Business:

Guest Speaker from NAMI – Dave Busch reported that one of our guest speakers from our February VOP meeting, Robert Hagen Crisis training Supervisor for [NAMI](#) Southeastern WI, has offered to speak to our group again on how to spot the signs of mental illness or distress. Mr. Hagen joined NAMI after serving 23 years as a police officer, retiring as a Lieutenant in the Delafield police department in Waukesha County. With his background in law enforcement, Bob had plenty of experience with crisis, and became the Crisis Training Supervisor for NAMI. He trains police officers in [Crisis Intervention Team](#) procedures (CIT) and also offers a shorter course for anyone working with individuals with a mental illness, [Crisis Intervention Partner](#) (CIP). Bob stated that he offers a number of presentations for education and offered to come back and speak to us on other related topics. Busch asked the members if they would be interested in hearing Hagen on this subject and all agreed it would be well worth our time. Busch agreed to solicit available dates from Mr. Hagen.

Next Meeting: The next VOP meeting will be held online on the second Saturday in April. Please plan to join us via ZOOM on Saturday April 13, 2024 at 9 AM. The login information can be found at the bottom of the last page of these minutes.

Adjournment: The meeting ended with a brief discussion on the subject of recruiting new members to the Voice Of the Poor Committee. Jim Erven mentioned that there is a push from the new National Society President John Berry to launch a year of exploring ways to revitalize the Society, titled Vision SVDP. Erven reminded us that the mid-year business meeting will be held in March and after this meeting they will begin to hold Vision SVDP Listening Sessions to get our views on the Society and how we need to adapt to a changing world. More information on this can be found here: <https://ssvpusa.org/vincentians/04-03-24-visionsvdp-update/> The process will place some focus on the work of the Voice Of the Poor. The thought is that the VOP could and should be doing more for the Society. Julie Krahl mentioned that the Society is calling for a [Synodal Process](#) in examining our work. Julie stated that this is a good thing, but we are likely not familiar with this method in our Archdiocesan Council. Erven added that he felt the work of the VOP needs to be more transparent to our own members. The chairperson agreed and added that the VOP is still perceived as being “too political” so perhaps we need to do a better job of stressing the advocacy part of our mission. On that comment, the meeting officially adjourned at 11:05 AM with all VOP members saying a Lenten prayer about fasting...

*“Fast from pessimism; Feast on hope.
Fast from negatives; Feast on encouragement.
Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness.”*

#

#

#

MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF THE POOR COMMITTEE

Armand Carriere	ae2425@gmail.com
David Anderson	ajand1339@gmail.com
David Busch	dabusch99@yahoo.com
E. Michael McCann	emichaelmccann@yahoo.com
Jim Erven	erven.jm@gmail.com
John Weber	jjweber46@sbcglobal.net
Sister Julie Krahl, CSA	julieann5202@charter.net
Michael Howden	mjhowden@att.net
Randy Bedore	ranshorewood@yahoo.com
Richard Fedler	rfedler@aol.com
Rose Lue-Hing	414-445-9224
Tom Jozwik	mjozwik@hotmail.com

Here is the information for logging into the ZOOM Meeting:

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

Click Here to Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84435969715?pwd=WFN2NlhkV1c1SVpqd2I1RG5oVklyUT09>

Or call in (audio only): 312-626-6799

(Dial by your location. 312 626 6799 is Chicago)

Meeting ID: 844 3596 9715