



Sept. 14, 2016

## **Society of St. Vincent de Paul® Statement on National Poverty Statistics**

Upon the release of the U.S. Census Bureau's annual report on poverty and income in America, Sheila Gilbert, president of the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization serving those in need in over 4,440 communities throughout the country, released the following statement:

“Poverty deeply wounds human dignity. Today’s news that the rates of people, children, and families living in poverty all declined last year is cause for celebration. Millions of people have improved their economic security. It is also heartening that over 2.4 million more people worked full-time, and that median household income (\$56,500) grew substantially.

“This is wonderful news, but it is not a time for us to rest on our laurels. We have a moral duty to assist our brothers and sisters struggling to live in dignity, as well as develop ways to create more just and equitable communities. These gains cannot blind us to the 43 million people, over 14 million of them children, still living in poverty. We must not ignore nor accept the reality that poverty rates for communities of color continue to be substantially higher than the overall rates.

“Our volunteers see the struggles of families in poverty when a health emergency strikes. I have encountered too many health emergencies on home visits. Access to affordable health care can provide profound benefits and peace-of-mind, which is why I am pleased that the rate of households living in poverty without health insurance continued to decline. Again, there is still much work to be done, as the percentage of poor uninsured households remains much higher than the national average. Access to health care for low-income families must continue to be pursued.

Gilbert continued, “Pope Francis continuously calls us to go to the margins and build an authentic culture of encounter, beginning with those who have been excluded and marginalized. Vincentians do this important work every day, encountering those we serve in home visits, where they feel safest.

“Vincentians also recognize that everyone--individuals, churches and nonprofits, private businesses, and the government--should have a voice and a role to play in alleviating poverty and advancing the common good. We can do more as communities and as a country, and as today’s report makes clear, we must do more.

“Too many people continue to be excluded and marginalized, and the relative silence on poverty has been deafening. Who will stand for the poor and vulnerable in our debates, campaigns, and commentary? I call on all public officials and those seeking office, at every level, to make fighting poverty and building equitable communities a priority.”

One of the largest charitable organizations in the world, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul ([www.svdpusa.org](http://www.svdpusa.org)) is an international, nonprofit, Catholic lay organization of about 800,000 men and women who voluntarily join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to the needy and suffering in 150 countries on five continents. With the U.S. headquarters in St. Louis, Mo., membership in the United States totals nearly 100,000 in 4,400 communities.

SVdP offers a variety of programs and services, including home visits, housing assistance, disaster relief, education and mentoring, food pantries, dining halls, clothing, assistance with transportation, prescription medication, and rent and utility costs. The Society also works to provide care for the sick, the incarcerated and the elderly. Over the past year, SVdP provided over \$1.2 billion in tangible and in-kind services to those in need, made more than 1.8 million personal visits (homes, hospitals, prisons and eldercare facilities) and helped more than 23.8 million people regardless of race, religion or national origin.

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