

Notes from the Faith Subcommittee of the VSSTF Meeting of October 24, 2012

In attendance: Neal Andrews, Kent Brinkmeyer, Susan Brinkmeyer, Cindy Cattle, Pamela Castro, Jim Duran, Lynn Geller, Matthew Jensen, John Sanders Jones, Jerome Kahler, Myda Merrill, Ernie Ortega, Cecilia Perez, David Pyle, Marc Sandoval, Sid Ward, Bonnie Weigel.

1. Jim Duran reported that One City, One Meal will again be held at the Ventura Fairgrounds on Thanksgiving Day, November 22. Gates will open at 10 a.m. with coffee, pastries, and jolly jumper for all to enjoy. Doors to the dining hall will open at 11:30 and at noon everyone will eat together, including all volunteers. Plans are being made for about 1,000 participants, and volunteers will be able to sign up for specific tasks and specific shifts on a website, which will soon be announced.
2. Bonnie Weigel of FOOD Share introduced Pamela Castro and Cecilia Perez, who will be working directly with food pantries and attending the Faith Subcommittee meetings as the pantries decide how they can best work together in partnership with FOOD Share to provide the best service to all Ventura residents. Bonnie indicated, for example, that not all food pantries need to comply with USDA requirements and that deciding to do so is a choice that Pam and Cecilia can help pantries make. Pam and Cecilia are visiting pantries to learn more about their needs.
3. Pamela Castro provided a copy of the latest list FOOD Share has regarding food pantry locations and hours (updated September 26, 2012), and Bonnie Weigel indicated that we might want to invite Tanya from 211 to explain to us how we can always get the most up-to-date information about food pantries (and presumably other services).
4. Ernie Ortega indicated that Candelaria had ended food pantry services 1-2 years ago due to a lack of space. Pamela Castro indicated that some food pantries dealt with their space limitations by becoming mobile or drive-thru pantries, which also helped them provide even better service to their clients.
5. Jim Duran indicated that he and Pat Esseff had been meeting to discuss how their food pantries might cooperate to better serve those on the Avenue.
6. Jerome Kahler noted that the city is divided into neighborhood councils and suggested that it might make sense to bring together all of the pantries in each neighborhood council area to discuss how they might cooperate to best meet the needs of that area. Neal Andrews advised that there are currently seven neighborhood councils: Westside, Downtown, Midtown, Harbor, Pierpont, Eastside, and the College District (Mills to Victoria). Neal added that an eighth neighborhood council is being discussed in connection with the Montalvo annexation area. There is also a neighborhood council for all mobile-home parks; however, the proposal appeared to be related to coordinating pantry services within geographic areas; no consensus was reached as to the role of the mobile-home-parks community council with regard to neighborhood-coordination of food pantry services.
7. It was agreed that the neighborhood councils would be excellent avenues for communication, with food pantries sharing information about the services they offered and neighborhood councils and residents sharing information about unmet needs or service providers unknown to us, and so forth. Bonnie Weigel mentioned the community meetings held by Ventura County Together as possible role models for this communication effort.

8. Jim Duran agreed that he and Pat Esseff would discuss how best to meet the food pantry needs of the Westside Community (Main Street to the Avenue) and report back to the Subcommittee at our November 28 meeting.
9. Myda Merrill shared with us information regarding the outreach efforts Community Action makes to meet people where they are and help them sign up for Cal Fresh or other services, such as help with legal problems, reduced utility bills, or weatherization. Any food pantry or other service provider can contact Myda (or any of the other eleven Outreach Assistants) to ask that one of them be available to meet with clients at the service provider's location at a specific date and time. Myda can be reached at 805-436-4000 or mmerrill@ca-vc.org
10. It was noted that food pantries are experiencing heightened demand (20-25% more at Harbor Church and 15% more at Salvation Army) since the dislocations of the homeless from the Stanley area of the river bottom, which David Pyle theorized had sent shock waves throughout the homeless community in ways that had not been foreseen. It was agreed that we would follow-up on this issue at our November 28 meeting and that Sue Brinkmeyer would invite to that meeting Peter Brown from the City, Neal Andrews would invite Quinn Fenwick from the Police Department, and Cindy Cattle would invite Karol Schulkin from County Human Services.
11. Cindy Cattle shared with us that 22 individuals were accepted into the motel voucher program associated with the dislocations from the Stanley area of the river bottom, and that 20 of them were still in the program and making progress. There were lots of health issues and paperwork to be dealt with, but that the goal is permanent housing.
12. Information and flyers regarding upcoming events were shared including
 - Fundraiser for the Homelessness Prevention Fund: "Voices of the Homeless," Nov. 17, 7 p.m. Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura. Call 818-281-6249 for information
 - City Council hearing on the Cabrillo affordable housing project, November 19, 6 p.m. All who want to be sure we have more affordable housing in Ventura are urged to attend.
 - Ventura Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, November 20, 7 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura
 - Homelessness Prevention Project for Veterans is being put together by Candelaria; Ernie Ortega promised more information on this at our next meeting.

* Our next meeting is November 28, at 3 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura, 5654 Ralston, Ventura.