



First Annual Society Of St. Vincent De Paul Friends Of The Poor Walk A Massive Success

Almost 10,000 walkers, 112 communities and over \$800,000 for the poor

For Immediate Release

ST. LOUIS/EWORLDWIRE/Oct. 9, 2008 --- The first annual, national Society of St. Vincent de Paul Friends of the Poor (R) Walk, which occurred across the United States (and in Paris and Rome) on September 27, 2008- the Feast Day of St. Vincent de Paul - has been a massive success in raising over \$800,000 for the poor. Almost 10,000 walkers participated in the ground-breaking event. Walks were held in 112 cities and communities - ranging in size from over 1,000 students at St. John's University in New York City to 5 walkers in Vallejo, California.

Joe Flannigan, president of the Society's United States National Council, which is heading up the national fund-and-awareness-raiser, said, "We need to energize the Catholics in the pews to the plight of the poor. This is a great event that allows us to connect at the parish and conference level to people in the community."

Walks took place in interesting venues, including Churchill Downs in Louisville, Daytona Beach, Rosemont Raceway in Washington, D.C., Audubon Park in New Orleans, Manatee Sanctuary Park in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve in Chesterton, Ind., along Lake Michigan in Milwaukee, Wis., Lake Merced in San Francisco, and in many other state and local parks and rails-to-trails locations. Universities, colleges and high schools also held a Friends of the Poor Walk at such notable places as St. John's University in New York City, University of Arizona in Tucson, DePaul University in Chicago, and the University of Dallas.

In New York, 1,000 university members prepared for the Friends of the Poor Walk by convening at the University center to prepare peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, packing 180 lunches, then following their Bread & Life Mobile Soup Kitchen and all walkers across the Brooklyn Bridge on their walk route. After the walk, students split into separate groups to distribute the lunches they had packed throughout Manhattan.

Over 250 participants enjoyed perfect weather walking around the inside track at Louisville's Churchill Downs, 250 at Daytona Beach, over 780 in Sacramento, 313 in San Francisco, 561 in Orlando, 235 in Chicago, 267 in San Diego, and over 300 in St. Louis, to mention a few. Hearty but smaller groups walked in Jacksonville, Fla., where they had 17; 23 in Stuart, Fla., and 5 in Millville, Mass. It is anticipated that the 2009 Friends of the Poor Walk will easily double the 2008 numbers, both in dollars raised and in number of walkers.

The 2008 Friends of the Poor Walk impressed as truly a multi-generational event - including children in strollers, high school and university students and stalwart seniors. In Seattle, 91-year-old St. Vincent de Paul volunteer Tom Kobayashi - the longest serving Vincentian in the Western U.S. and possibly the nation at 71 years - walked a mile, and Bride Melissa Sanders and Groom Andrew Morrison of Seattle walked on their wedding day. In San Diego, a family who just had quintuplets walked. (The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been providing them with diapers and formula.) In St. Louis, seniors were given the opportunity to "ride around the track" on electric carts while other seniors happily used their walkers around the course, all smiles.

Younger adults eager to help the poor attended throughout the country at universities and high schools. One young leader and high school senior, Dan Tracy, in Superior, Wis., represented the spirit to serve the poor and chaired the local walk for his May Project. Called on his cell phone by SVDP National Council about an opportunity to be interviewed by the local TV station, Tracy answered his cell phone while riding on the Homecoming Float as it was in the parade. Tracy happily agreed, zipped off to the TV station for three live interviews after which he spirited off to be in his Senior Homecoming football game.

Roger Playwin, national executive director of the Society's U.S. Council, headquartered in St. Louis, remarked, "The extraordinary success of our first national, annual Walk is an indication of the generosity of many thousands of people to help those who live in poverty. These funds will go directly to help those in need by preventing foreclosure, eviction, utility shut-offs will provide food help with transportation and medical bills, and it will especially help the children of the affected families. The need is growing, and we are thankful for the support offered to help by so many people."

The media interest and community enthusiasm generated by the inaugural SVDP Friends of the Poor Walk has spurred interest in and potential growth for the Society across the country. In Leonardtown, Md., the enthusiasm for the Society prompted several Walk participants to announce that they intend to form SVDP Conferences in their local parishes.

Ascension Health is the National Corporate Sponsor of the SVDP Friends of the Poor Walk 2008. Ascension Health is the nation's largest Catholic and largest non-profit health system, serving patients through a network of hospitals and related health facilities providing acute care services, long-term care, community health services, psychiatric, rehabilitation and residential care.

The 2009 Friends of the Poor Walk is scheduled for Saturday, September 26, 2009 (Sunday, September 27, 2009 is the rain, and alternate, date).

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