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Organization battles increasing poverty

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Cincinnati is now the third poorest city in the country (among cities with populations more than 250,000).

While there has been some debate recently as to the accuracy of Cincinnati's ranking, one thing is certain; our neighbors are in need. This fact is illustrated by Cincinnati's alarming 27.8 percent poverty rate, up from 25 percent in 2005 and 19.6 percent in 2004. Poverty in Cincinnati is affecting more people than ever; indiscriminate of the neighborhood we live in, our race, age, gender or creed. As a community, we must rally to eliminate the staggering amount of poverty in our city.

As executive director of St. Vincent de Paul, I see the effect that poverty has on Cincinnati's residents every day, whether it's Kathy, the owner of a successful bakery/café in Pleasant Ridge who found herself unable to afford her medication and pay her bills after suffering a massive heart attack and losing her son to cancer, or Deborah, who came to Cincinnati with nothing other than her personal identification after losing everything in Hurricane Katrina.

Often, a little practical help at the right moment is all it takes to turn a family around. St. Vincent de Paul was able to assist Kathy with her bills and provide her medication through our Charitable Pharmacy program. Deborah was given clothing, bedding, rent and assistance paying her utility bills to get her back on her feet.

Unfortunately, thousands of our neighbors are still doing without the basic necessities that many of us take for granted, and the upcoming months may be the most difficult yet. St. Vincent de Paul always sees a significant increase in requests for help during the winter and holiday seasons, and while need is continuing to increase this year, donations are regrettably down.

It is during these times, when the local economy is in a downturn and funding for social service organizations is being cut, that your support is most important. St. Vincent de Paul helped more than 80,000 people last year. We are not funded by the United Way or the Archdiocese, but rather rely on the support of individuals, foundations and businesses. We are neighbors helping neighbors - caring individuals who give generously of their time and resources to ease the pain of fellow Cincinnatians in need.

If you would like to help a neighbor in need, please consider:

* Donating gently-used clothing, household items and furniture at one of five St. Vincent de Paul thrift stores.

* Donating a car or other vehicle, which may offer the benefit of a tax deduction while the proceeds help a neighbor in need.

* Making a financial contribution to provide emergency assistance with food, rent, utilities, transportation, clothing and furniture to help a neighbor in need get through a


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rough time.

* Volunteering time and expertise.

With your support, we can continue to help our neighbors during these difficult times and together we can work to reverse poverty in our community. To get involved, call 562-8841, ext. No. 225 or visit online at www.SVDPcincinnati.org.

Liz Carter is executive director of the St. Vincent de Paul.