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Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
National Social Justice Committee

Changing Times

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Chair Report

Dear fellow Vincentians:

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Changing Times*, our national social justice newsletter. Please share with other members and friends. You can subscribe to *Changing Times* by contacting me at jpsvvp@hotmail.ca, or accessing our national website. We welcome your comments and questions about social justice issues and encourage all Councils/Conferences to appoint a social justice rep and to place social justice on all meeting agendas. If you have a rep please submit contact information to us for future correspondence.

Seeds of Hope resource material is now available on the website www.ssvp.ca. Please consider using this material to promote the “FREE” money that the Canada Learning Bond program offers to all families. A good education is the key to escaping poverty.

Our Society’s history with social justice can easily be traced to the work of Frederic Ozanam as he was a champion of issues such as;

- having a democratic vote
- better education for workers, as well the right to organize unions
- worker pensions and reduced working hours
- protection from exploitation of children
- savings plans and profit sharing

The Catholic Church’s 1891 Rerum Novarum certainly contained many of Ozanam’s ideas.

There is no doubt about our Society’s charitable efforts, but there is real need in today’s world to go further and address the root causes of poverty. The cry for social justice will be better heard if we are one of its voices.

Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee

For more information, or to subscribe to this newsletter, please contact Jim Paddon: jpsvvp@hotmail.ca

Join our group on Facebook:
SSVP Canada Social Justice Sociale



Basic Income Pilot project

The Ontario government is now conducting consultation sessions across the province regarding their plan to begin a pilot project for a Basic Income program with the goal being to conduct this pilot in several Ontario cities. There are several models of the basic income program which will still have to be decided before implementation. If you would like further information, please contact Jim Paddon at jpsvp@hotmail.ca.

CCCCB

The Conference of Canadian Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) invited me as social justice chair to be part of a Catholic coalition whose goal will be to develop a response and action plan regarding the recommendations of the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they apply to the Catholic Church and larger Catholic faith community. There have been two group meetings so far which include members of the indigenous community. One area that certainly needs to be addressed is the current criminal justice system and a restorative justice component as it relates to indigenous people. There will be further updates as the groups work continues. The name we have chosen for this group is Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle.

Environmental Stewardship

Members of our national social justice committees have been working with our counterparts in the USA and Mexico in an effort to develop a document that addresses our changing environment or what we frequently call climate change. We now have the final version of this document with added resource material related to frequently asked questions. We shall proceed to obtain approval of the documents from our national boards followed by member approval at our 2017 AGA. There is no doubt that as our environment changes there can be some very negative effects on all of us, both health wise and financially. Additionally, such adverse changes will certainly have an even greater effect on the more vulnerable citizens.

Finally, if you have any news, questions or comments that you would like to share in Changing Times please submit to jpsvp@hotmail.ca.

Sincerely,

*Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee*

The Christian Mentor as Agent for Systemic Change

A more contemporary expression of the so-called Spiritual Works of Mercy (teaching the ignorant and counselling the doubtful) can be **Christian Mentoring**.

Many people suffer from mental paralysis. Life's problems and difficulties have convinced them that they are powerless. This is where the art of understanding comes into play. The more we know about the person in need, the better we will comprehend where his or her strengths are. Only then can **Christian Mentoring** begin.

Such Mentoring is a complex undertaking. It consists of encouragement and active involvement that goes as far as putting water in the pump. Celebrating success and carefully reviewing failures are on-going mentoring endeavours.

Patience and persistence are qualities the Mentor must have in abundance because human change takes time. The image of a mountain that must be climbed may help. Think of the person in need at the bottom of the mountain in complete confusion. The mentor is the expert alpinist ready not only to teach the necessary skills but also to provide the required equipment.

Something that has been proven time after time, to see such a person climb the mountain with regained courage and enthusiasm is one of the best pictures we will ever see.

Good systemic change happens when better policies and structure are in place; however, it also is important that the people involved realize their potential to grow and change.

Msgr Peter Schonenbach, National Spiritual Advisor



“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.”

Pope Francis, Address to the Food and Agricultural Organization, 6/20/13

Sometimes, people say “It’s too bad that some people have to live his way.” It is too bad and furthermore, it is unjust and unnecessary. Canada is a country where it is possible for everyone to live in dignity and to have good health. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul recognizes that advocating for justice so that our neighbours in need can have a better quality of life is an essential part of our Vincentian spirituality.

The Society needs to raise awareness among our membership as to why there is so much systemic poverty which makes it impossible for people to take control of their lives and get out of poverty.

- Low social assistance rates erode people’s physical and mental health so that they cannot regain an active life in the community.
- Low minimum wages and exploitive labour practices make it impossible for workers to earn enough to meet their most basic needs.
- Post secondary education which is so essential for secure employment is out of reach for many.

These are the facts of life for many of our neighbours and our social systems are failing those who are suffering.

Vincentians who understand the issues of systemic poverty will be able to advocate for improved social programs.

In Ontario, the Voice of the Poor/Advocacy committee is working to help Vincentians understand the causes and implications of severe poverty on our communities.

The committee is encouraging every Conference to appoint a social justice representative who will lead a short discussion on an issue that is trapping their neighbours in need. The social justice committee has recruited and trained some regional reps to facilitate developing this aspect of Vincentian spirituality and work. The advocacy committee has produced some pamphlets and position papers to help start discussions at Conference meetings. These resources address issues such as inadequate social assistance rates, housing affordability and precarious employment. They are available at regional meetings and on the provincial website. We also offer a newsletter which is emailed every three months or so to update social justice reps on progress towards better support for people living in poverty or on emerging issues such as making public transit accessible to low income people.

The Voice of the Poor committee also speaks on behalf of our neighbours in need when governments at any level request input from the public on issues such as revising the labour code in Ontario or a federal housing strategy. By participating in these consultations, we are making our concerns known and we are learning more about how our governments work.

Making all Vincentians aware of the systemic issues of poverty and mobilising them to become advocates will take a long time. Every journey starts with a first step.

Corry Wink

Systemic Change and helping in all possible ways

The rule of the SSVP lists as one of its values that Vincentians are called to help in all possible ways. Vincentians are very good at bringing love and compassion, food, clothing and household needs to our neighbours who live in poverty. **These are the core activities of the Society.**

Often, we wish that we could do more for our neighbours-in-need. Now, we have the concept of systemic change which moves us to identify the root causes of the poverty and then to address them. Sometimes, the neighbours have the resources within themselves to remove the barriers to escaping poverty if they get support which Vincentians can give. Sometimes, there are resources in the community that can help the person out of poverty or at least to cope better with their situation and Vincentians can help the neighbours to access them. The investment of our time to know our neighbours better and to learn about the community resources that can provide support will pay off in a better community for everyone.

There are many organizations which can help people who live in poverty. The United Way of Canada has adopted the slogan “From Poverty to Possibility” and in every community where there are local organizations, the United Way funds agencies that address the needs of people who live in poverty. Community Legal Centres help people with problems such as disability applications and landlord tenant issues. Municipal Health Units (sometimes city or county or combined city/county) often have innovative programs on health issues and parenting support such as drop in centres. Many municipalities have a 211 line that we can call to ask about programs and supports. Check out the websites in your community to find out exactly what is available.

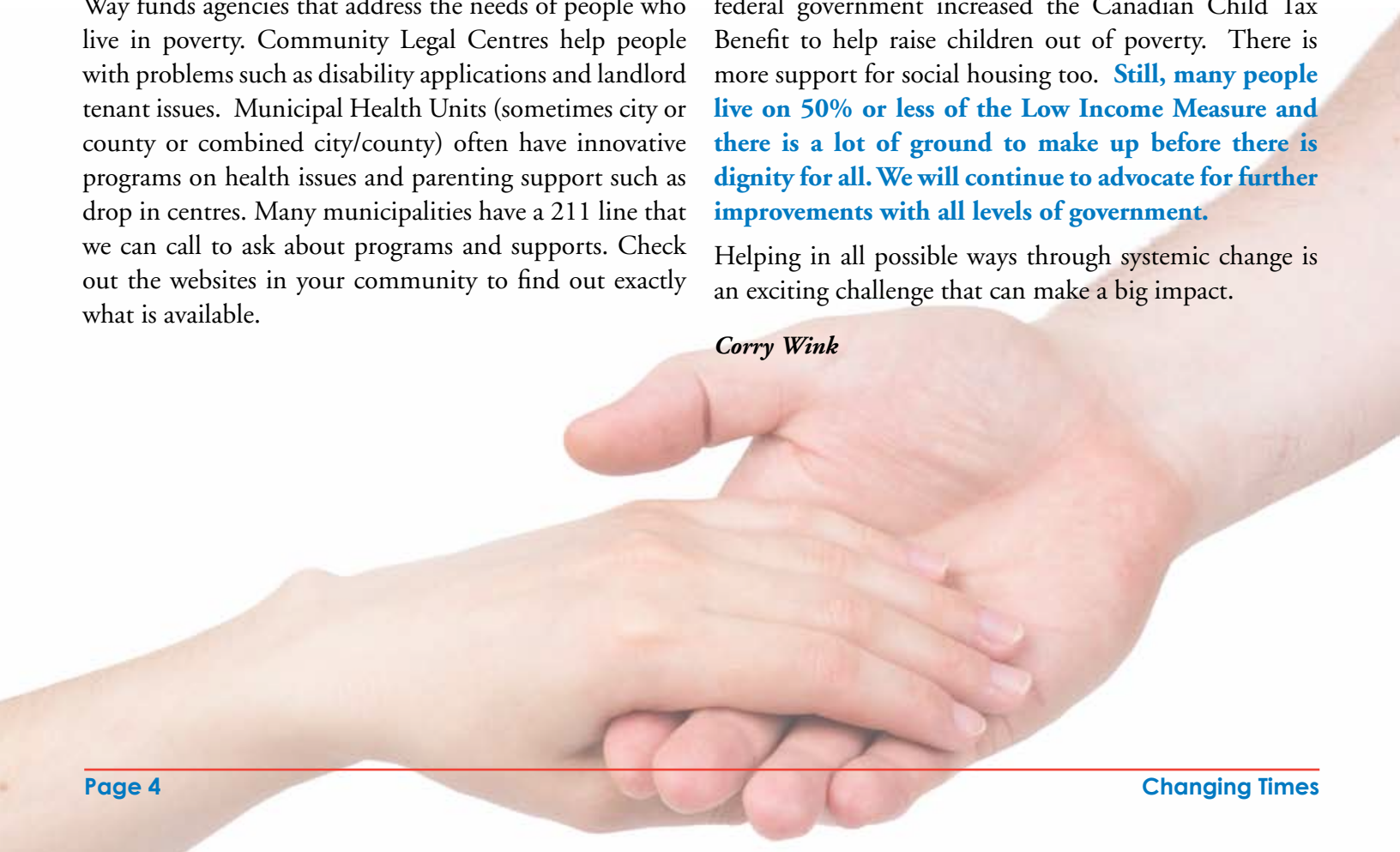
Our parishes can also become partners in helping our neighbours-in-need. The Catholic Women’s League and the Knights of Columbus can help us with Christmas, summer recreation projects or back to school projects. Other churches can also be partners helping to reduce the effects of living in poverty.

In Ontario, the Society itself has supports beyond the Conference level that can be very beneficial to our neighbours-in-need. The Ozanam Fund provides funds to people wishing to participate in higher education. The Seeds of Hope Project helps families to access federal funds in the Registered Educational Savings Program to help families prepare for their children’s education. Vinnie’s Wallet makes small loans available to people. The Prison Apostolate supports people who have been in prison and their families. Other provinces may have initiatives at the regional level which can help make life better for our neighbours-in-need.

Although there are some improvements in the social safety net, substantial progress is far in the future. Ontario will increase Social Assistance payments in 2016 by 1.5% as opposed to 1% which was the norm for many years. The federal government increased the Canadian Child Tax Benefit to help raise children out of poverty. There is more support for social housing too. **Still, many people live on 50% or less of the Low Income Measure and there is a lot of ground to make up before there is dignity for all. We will continue to advocate for further improvements with all levels of government.**

Helping in all possible ways through systemic change is an exciting challenge that can make a big impact.

Corry Wink



Three Areas Under Social Justice

Advocacy

In today's world, the voice of the poor is seldom heard. Our friends and neighbours in need are often faced with various levels of bureaucracy in their daily lives as they strive to better themselves and their families. The tendency of governments is to listen to those that are well educated and financially stable. While we certainly encourage the more vulnerable to voice their needs and concerns, there are times where an organization such as our Society can act as their voice.

We have the resources and ability to access information, make the appropriate contacts and develop possible solutions and programs which can alleviate some of the challenges that face those living in poverty.

Systemic Change

This topic concerns the need to either revise existing programs or develop new ones which can make a real difference in the lives of those living in poverty. I believe the best way to explain systemic change is to provide some examples of such efforts. Our national Seeds of Hope program

is now available on our national website. Seeds of Hope's main focus is on the Canada Learning Bond which provides free money for participants who enroll their children in this education savings plan. In addition we have plans to include a number of other suggestions which you may use to help families.

We would also like to hear from our members about any projects they currently have or are planning related to this topic. We can then add these to a proposed Best Practices section on the national website.

Prison Ministry

We include this topic under the social justice heading as it is likely the one that is in need of further education and awareness. While we do have some members who are currently part of a prison visitation program, this can be a difficult area for many Vincentians to join. The work that we are already very good at involves simply befriending former inmates, or as we prefer to call them, returning citizens.

Restorative Justice is an area in which we encourage your involvement.

Collaboration with other groups is a good idea and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an active partner with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) in the Catholic Connection in Restorative Justice (CCinRJ).

Advocacy is also a big part of this ministry as there is a need to address many important topics related to our criminal justice system and how it can affect inmates, victims of crimes and those families who have loved ones in the prison system.

Systemic change also has a role as we develop new strategies that can improve current services. One such program is the Dismas Compassionate team program which we are now starting in Hamilton, Ontario. This program will involve two of our members working in an on-going friendship with a returning citizen as they attempt to return to a normal life that we hope will lead to becoming a person who can provide hope to others as an example of what love and support can accomplish. There will be further information on this program as it continues. Please let us know if you currently offer any type of prison visitations in your community or are interested in starting a program such as the Hamilton Dismas effort.

*Jim Paddon , Chair
National Social Justice Committee*



The case for SSVP Social Justice Education

Catholic Social Teaching's (CST) purpose is to contribute to the formation of conscience as a basis for specific action. Unfortunately, many of the source documents of CST are in many ways inaccessible to ordinary Catholics, but this can be addressed by formulating education programs showing how CST can be applied and then taking specific actions where people make a difference by achieving some justice. This is already done by Development and Peace for issues outside Canada but are there any Catholic agencies applying CST principles to the analysis of Canadian domestic social justice issues? Development and Peace is the official international development organization of the Catholic Church in Canada and the Canadian member of Caritas Internationalis.

SSVP can take a cue from Development and Peace (D&P) which also deals with CST and specific actions. D&P has a well-funded and capable education department that concentrates on international social justice issues mainly in the Global South. Occasionally, D&P will take on an issue of Canadian concern but it is usually linked to broader global issues; e.g. Canadian mining practices at home and abroad, climate change and water resources. D&P does not directly address domestic issues such as Canadians living in poverty or homelessness.

There is a gap in the education of Catholics that can be filled by SSVP by mimicking D&P's education department. Specifically, Canadian domestic social justice issues could be given a voice by a SSVP education department. There are many issues of local, provincial and national social justice that can be analyzed relative to CST and become a basis for specific action. For example,

livable wage, poverty, homelessness, social isolation etc. Currently most social justice analysis in Canada is by secular agencies such as The Fraser Institute or The Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, but these don't necessarily conform to CST.

D&P has annual national campaigns such as Share Lent and the Fall Action that are sanctioned by the Canadian Catholic Bishops. One possibility is to have an activity like the D&P Fall Action where an issue is selected, analysis conducted, actions determined, resource materials developed and educational events staged. To complete any educational initiative we also need to put this new knowledge into action.

D&P has a well-developed education site at www.devp.org/en/education/fall2016 where the following categories can be found:

- Take Action containing a letter to the Prime Minister regarding taking action for small family farms;
- News about D&P campaigns and climate change;
- Resources with categories Materials, Youth, Videos, Prayer and Reflection, Devotion.

Focusing on Resources, the Materials section has posters, action sheets, membership postcards, small farms campaign guide, youth activity guide and a prayer card.

The D&P site applies CST to the issues arising in the international social justice realm. How could SSVP do the same for domestic social justice issues? Let's start a conversation about this!

Gordon Stuart, BC/Yukon SSVP

