



Changing Times!

Fellow Vincentians:

As we continue to grow our Social Justice network across Canada, I invite your support by subscribing to our national newsletter, CHANGING TIMES, by contacting myself at jpssvp@hotmail.ca.

In addition, we recommend every council and conference appoint a member to act as your social justice rep. and

join our network by submitting your name and email to the same address for Changing Times.

Please check out our national website (www.ssvp.ca) on a regular basis as we continue to add more resource material.

Sincerely,
Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

British Columbia-Yukon Regional Update

Activities and plans for the BC/Yukon region are in their formative stages since I am a new member of the National Advocacy Committee. A very valuable conference call with other members of the committee provided inspiration for two activities.

Since I am new, I need to discover what type of advocacy activities are occurring in the BC/Yukon region so the mention by Jim Paddon of a survey instrument used in Ontario spurred me to request more information for the purpose of administering our own survey. This document along with the email list of conferences and councils in the BC/Yukon region should be all I need to get an on-line survey out to the region's members. Results of the survey will be shared with the national advocacy committee members.

The second inspiration resulting from the recent conference call was a discussion on collaboration. I

have been personally involved with establishing a new collaborative advocacy effort in Victoria and have observed a similar successful collaboration in Vancouver. A key to advocacy that changes harmful societal structures causing poverty and inequality is not protest and writing letters against the status quo but rather to set the agenda for change. This is happening in Vancouver with the Metro Vancouver Alliance (MVA) that is an umbrella organization that counts as its members about 60 organizations that represent over 300,000 people. This level of cooperation achieves the scale of membership that causes politicians to take notice of the agenda set by MVA. In Vancouver, the MVA identified Poverty, Housing, Social Isolation and Transit as campaigns to set the agenda for politicians to follow. MVA convinced Vancouver City and all of its sub-contractors to be Livable Wage employers; con-

vinced North Vancouver mayors to commit to affordable housing land parcels; achieved 126 community-driven english as a second language (ESL) support groups for socially isolated immigrants. This is a start for real change and the Society of St Vincent de Paul should recognize opportunities for this type of collaboration across the country because adding our voice to the voices of other organizations results in a large voice for advocacy of change to harmful societal structures that cause poverty and inequality. Similar broad-based umbrella organizations currently exist in Edmonton and Calgary and one is in formation in Victoria. SSVp can take a lead and effective role in advocacy by joining similar broad-based collaborations in locations across Canada. For more inspiration see <http://www.metvanalliance.org/>

Gordon Stuart

More Updates from Across the Country ...

Atlantic Region

Hello! My name is Parnell Kelly. My wife Ann and I live on Prince Edward Island. Our Regional Council is made up of the four Atlantic Provinces.

In Atlantic Canada, we are facing record under employment as well as record high unemployment. This, of course, leads to a population that is facing food security stress. The increase in the needs for breakfast and lunch programs in our schools has seen a dramatic increase in the last year. The cost of fruit and vegetables, as well meat, has reached a point where parents can-

not feed their children the foods that they need.

In Atlantic Canada, we have an older population. Our seniors are trying to deal with the cost of food, medications, and the high cost of personal items. It is at a point where, do I get my meds or do I do without for week and buy something to eat.

Systemic change can only be successful when we come to the realization that there is another great need that we must take on, home visits; one of our pillars is one that we fail to address

with the urgency that it deserves. Just think about sitting for hours, days and weeks and having the sound of a familiar voice or the touch of a gentle hand. This is something that we all can do something about. "Be like Jesus every day"

May the love of Jesus wrap its arms around you like a warm summer breeze.

Parnell Kelly
Acting President

Quebec Region

The Québec region has prepared a 5 page document to send to the provincial government to contest the government project to cut to the welfare benefits (most of 30%);

Quebec region plans to contest in pub-

lic the remuneration of the CEO of so many big enterprises with indecent salaries;

Quebec plans to contest the fact that stocks options for the main managers in big enterprises are treated as capital

gain instead of what they are – salaries.

Thank for your involvement.

Best regards,

Pierre Morissette.

Western Region

We are preparing letters for submission to the Federal, Alberta, Manitoba, and NWT governments with input from our committee to advocate for a Basic Income Guarantee as submissions to the 2016 budget consultations.

Yellowknife is very active with Social Justice programs serving the indigenous poor.

Edmonton is actively working to support new refugee families

and of continuing their support of the North.

Calgary is rebuilding several conferences and building an alliance with Calgary Catholic Immigration Society to support poor refugee families requiring assistance and exploring an alliance with a consortium of churches wish-

ing to acquire warehouse space to support the storage of donated goods ready for those in need.

The Red Deer conference is actively serving the poor in that city.

Winnipeg's single conference is actively serving the poor of Winnipeg and building an alliance with the North.

Blessings

Heather Schilling



The Work of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society

It's minus 8 outside and icy. We meet him at 7:00 pm.... We stand just inside his doorway — he has no chairs. We can't see his whole place, just a glimpse of the tiny kitchen. A burlap curtain cuts off another part of his small abode. It's rather dim. He begins shuffling through papers that are dangling from a clip and a clump of elastic bands on the wall. "Do you need to see anything?" he asks. We don't. Pain... His spine is disintegrating the doctor told him.... He hasn't eaten much in the past 3 days. "I take my pills and I lie down." He points to a phone bill with figures scribbled in on the margin. "\$180.00 is what's left after rent".... He turns away, he can't look at us. His much-too-big jogging pants are rolled up several times at the top. He then faces us, speaks softly, "Do you have bus tickets?" Transportation allowance taken away.... "I don't deserve it." Not enough appointments. "I take my pills and I lie down. That's all I can do."¹

This account of a home visit as told by a Vincentian, a volunteer with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, is one of many stories the members encounter as they visit those living in poverty in their homes and try to help them in all possible ways. They are carrying out the Society's mission "to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, and joy."²

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an international lay Catholic organization that began in Paris, France, in 1833. Its principal founder was a twenty-year-old university student named Frederic Ozanam who, when defending his Catholic faith, was issued a personal challenge, "What are you doing for those in need?" His response was to gather together a small group of friends and seek out those living in poverty. In pairs, they began visiting people in their homes and providing assistance.

From the beginning, Frederic recognized that poverty had to be addressed through charity and justice working together. For him, it was the parable of the Good Samaritan that embodied the

role faith communities could play in serving those in need. He said, "Charity is not sufficient. It treats the wounds but it does not stop the blows that cause them. Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attacks."³



The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, under the Halifax Particular Council, has 18 Conferences or groups located in Halifax and surrounding area, as well as in five other communities in the province. Recent data shows that, collectively, the Conferences provided approximately \$600,000 to assist 11,000 individuals with food, rent, power, transportation, and other needs.

But these are statistics. Someone has said, "Statistics are human beings with their tears dried off." During their home visits, the Society members see and hear about the pain behind these numbers, the pain of poverty:

- ◆ They see the exhaustion of parents who work at more than one job but, at minimum wage — now \$10.60 an hour for those with experience — still cannot meet their living expenses and struggle to support a family.
- ◆ They see the frustration of single people whose Employment Insurance has run out. Unable to find a job, they begin receiving Income Assistance. With a monthly shelter allowance of \$300, they must find a place to live in a city where the average rent for a bachelor apartment is \$723 a month.

- ◆ They see the struggle of seniors who live in subsidized housing and receive both Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, but still find it difficult to pay their bills because of rising costs and must often make choices between "eat" or "heat."
- ◆ They see the humiliation of those who were previously employed and well-paid, whose lives were changed forever by a job lay-off, an illness, an accident — circumstances beyond their control — who have come to the end of their resources and are mortified to have to rely on a system that does not treat them with dignity and respect or provide them with enough income to live.

In the face of this reality, how can we as faith communities respond?

I think we need to begin with a look at ourselves and ask a tough question. In this time of transition in our faith communities — declining numbers and closing doors — have we become focused on self-preservation, or have we remained rooted in our faith and continue to witness to Gospel love? Are we following the clear directive of Jesus to go and carry out His mission of justice?

Justice is about people living in right relationship with God, with one another, and with creation. Doing justice is doing what is necessary to make relationships right at all levels. As leaders and members of faith communities, are we prepared to stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and work together with them for justice? If the answer is "yes," it is important for us to be aware of our perceptions and our attitudes. Each of us looks through a lens of class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture that influences what we see and our view of reality. These factors have implications for the relationships we form and the conclusions we draw about those we encounter.

The Work of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society continued from page 3

In the Scriptures, there are many references to "the poor." When we say "the poor," do we think of the individuals we know — Mary, John, Susan, David — or do we think of a single group or class of people? When we use this language, we create an "us" and "them" and fail to acknowledge all of the areas in our own lives in which we experience lack. If, instead, we acquire a new language that reflects a current economic condition rather than the totality of human beings, we move from referring to "the poor" to "those living in poverty."

Poverty is complex and exists within a socioeconomic system. If all of the elements that influence people's lives in the system function together positively, people thrive. If one or several of these elements are lacking, the system breaks down. To bring about sustainable change for those in poverty, we cannot focus on only one particular aspect; for example, feeding people. Instead, we need to think in terms of systemic change.⁴

In recent years, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has begun to learn and will continue to learn about a systemic change approach to poverty. In the future, we are considering implementing long-term mentoring partnerships to accompany and support individuals in poverty with goals they have identified as important for improving their lives.

There will continue to be those with illness or disability, those in crisis or transition, who will require our assistance in the moment. Often, as faith communities, we function independently to provide for immediate needs; sometimes we form partnerships to share financial resources. By the way, the best definition of "partnership" I've ever heard is, "I don't have any money. Do you?" Is there a way that as faith communities we can move beyond financial sharing to collaborating with each other and with those living in poverty to develop expanded services or alternative models? For example, one

faith community turned its food bank into a food co-op in which those in poverty paid a small membership fee to join and then managed all aspects of the operation.⁵

In all of our efforts, it is most essential for us as faith communities to be educated about the realities of poverty

by those with lived experience of it. By listening and building relationships characterized by dialogue and mutual respect, we can grow in our understanding. When we do, we must take every opportunity to challenge the pervasive stereotypes that exist about those living in poverty. We have all cringed when we hear "people are lazy," "they don't want to work," "they use the system." Together we can create strategies for change.

Faith communities need to show leadership when it comes to poverty and injustice. Working ecumenically and speaking with a unified voice, we need to keep poverty always on the agenda of those who have decision-making power at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Often we talk about advocating "for" people. Instead, we need to provide support and create opportunities for those living in poverty to have a voice and then join "with" them to advocate for change.

By inviting to the table many and diverse voices from their local context, faith communities convey the message that poverty impacts all of society. Represented at the table would be those living in poverty, those from other faith traditions, government, the private sector, unions, media, and others — all joining together to create a shared vision for change and action.

Some of these approaches to addressing poverty may be new to us and may require us to change and to grow. Here is what one leader believes it takes to bring about transformation.

To get the culture started, you have to believe in it, live it, show it, be part of it. You have to be willing to

jump in a hole with people. 'Change' was a verb and it should stay a verb. It has to happen in action. You have to do it. I don't think a leader can accomplish major change without being willing to slice yourself open and become part of the change.

This is the challenge before the leaders of our faith communities and before each of us. Working for justice with those in poverty will require total commitment and involvement. It will cost. But so too did it cost the One who sends us out to create a just and loving world for all.

Notes

1. Account given by a volunteer of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul - Halifax Particular Council - at a retreat on April 23, 2015.
 2. The Rule and Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Canada (June 2007), 11.
 3. Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change (Vincentians Family's Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, 2008), 46.
 4. Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change (Vincentians Family's Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, 2008), 1.
 5. Robert D. Lupton, Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It). (New York: HarperOne, 2011).
 6. Alan Deutschman, Change or Die: the Three Keys to Change at Work and In Life (New York, New York: HC, 2007), 90
- Valerie Getson – Valerie is the Outreach Office Coordinator of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for the Halifax Particular Council. The above text is the presentation she gave this past May as part of an event called Justice Tour 2015. For more information on the Saint Vincent de Paul Society contact your local parish.

** this text was also published in A Journal of the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth*

Why does the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul call us to Advocacy?

From the earliest days, sharing and looking after community members was integral to the identity of Christ's followers. The Acts of the Apostles (4:32) describes the caring of community members for each other: "All the believers were of one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own but they shared everything they had". And Acts (4:34) continues "For there was not a needy person among them for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and they would be distributed to each as any had need".

Vincentians are called to follow the early apostles. Charity and social justice are the mission and work of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Historically, the Society has addressed the need to alleviate suffering by distributing funds for food, clothing and other necessities. Advocacy means taking steps beyond this to discover and redress situations of injustice that cause poverty.

Vincentians see the deplorable realities of poverty. We see homes that are often slums, cupboards that are bare and worst of all people who have lost hope for a decent life. Incomes of those we serve are often 50%-60% of the Low Income Measure (LIM1). Reliable estimates state that 14% of Canadians live in poverty. These facts move us to advocacy, to look for causes of poverty and help bring about solutions to improve the lives of those we serve. In short, we look for social justice. One definition of social justice that speaks to Vincentian spirituality includes assuring protection

of equal access to rights and opportunities as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society.

There are many reasons why people end up in poverty. Computers and robots have replaced many workers and this trend will continue. Service sector jobs are notorious for part time sched-



ules and such low wages that workers cannot afford the basic necessities of life. Some we serve have grown up in poverty and so were never able to get the education or skills needed to participate in the labour economy. Others have chronic physical or mental illnesses made worse by their poverty. People don't choose poverty; it is something that happens to them.

We see some progress as elected governments take steps to reduce poverty. There are increases in child tax benefits and more money for affordable housing. We see steps to reduce poverty among seniors and increases to social assistance rates. These are hopeful signs and we believe that our advocacy efforts have had some impact but there is still much more to do.

The St Vincent de Paul Society works at local, provincial and national levels to advocate for people who are the most marginalised and at risk. We are working to develop strategies to improve advocacy skills. As Vincentians, we are encouraged to get involved with other advocacy groups to learn more and participate in activities that can reduce poverty. Here are some organizations that you can contact: Canada without Poverty, Acorn Canada, Workers' Action Centre and Citizens for Public Justice.

We can reduce poverty if we persevere and work with other like-minded people. It will take time and effort but together we can do it.

1 The Low Income Measure is 50% of the median income in Canada.

~ Corry Wink,
Social Justice Coordinator, Eastern Area
Ontario Regional Council
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Social Justice Committee Mission Statement:

- * To proclaim the Christian response to all forms of injustice.
- * To bring about positive change in people's lives by deepening the understanding of the ways that all forms of poverty deprives people of their dignity, their health, and the opportunity to participate fully in society.



**SOCIETY OF
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
NATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE
COMMITTEE**

For more information or
To subscribe to this newsletter,
contact:

Jim Paddon,
National Social Justice Committee Chair
jpsvvp@hotmail.ca

Check us out online at:
www.ssvp.ca

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Mission:

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization whose mission is: **To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.**

Values:

The Mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul implies that as Vincentians, we:

See Christ in anyone who suffers;
Come together as a family;
Have personal contact with the poor;
Help in all possible ways.

Catholic Social Teachings & the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

There is no doubt that our founder, Frederic Ozanam, was a proponent of social justice.

Many of Ozanam's ideas would have been considered quite radical for his time and yet he is considered to have been one of the key lay members of the Church as it developed its original Catholic social teachings. One cannot exist without the other. The basic concept of Systemic Change requires a personal transformation of our own thinking in order to embrace and accept the need to address the root causes of poverty. Please join us in this effort.

~ Jim Paddon, Chair
Social Justice Committee



Ten Foundation Principles in Catholic Social Teachings

1. The principle of the Dignity of the Human Person
2. The principle of Respect for Human Life
3. The principle of Association
4. The principle of Participation
5. The principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable
6. The principle of Solidarity
7. The principle of Stewardship
8. The principle of Subsidiarity
9. The principle of Human Equality
10. The principle of the Common Good

More information can be found at
www.ssvp.ca