

## **The Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle, Indigenous Peoples and SSVV**

Dear fellow Vincentians:

The history of the Catholic Church in Canada in relation to Indigenous peoples has been one that few Canadians can be proud of. Whether it is the overall colonial treatment of Indigenous peoples or specific issues such as residential schools, there is a rather large void that needs a real sense of understanding, caring and sharing if it is to ever become a positive example of what can be accomplished.

The recently completed Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) resulted in a total of sixty-four recommendations of which there are eight that are related directly to the Catholic Church. As Catholics and members of the Church we should share the responsibility of finding ways to take actions in response to not only these eight recommendations but to actions that go further in developing and sustaining a partnership with Indigenous peoples across Canada that includes the sharing of our faith traditions, languages, customs and cultures as well as our common love of Canada and our environment. There is much we can learn from Indigenous peoples when we talk about care of our earth and its many gifts.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has always been an organization that simply seeks to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, regardless of race, creed or colour. While there is no doubt we already assist many Indigenous people living in urban centres, until recently there has always been a lack of such assistance for Indigenous people living in their own communities. Our North of 60 project has had some wonderful results as we work with the Inuit of the Far North across Canada. In addition, such efforts as the Alberta based Cadotte Lake Project have been directed to our First Nations communities.

The Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle is an extremely important coalition of several Catholic institutions which was formed in late 2016 in response to an invitation from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) to meet and discuss how such a coalition could take actions that would effectively respond to the eight Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations. It was deemed to be crucial that this was not a list of actions by only the Catholic Church but rather a broader Catholic response and one that would be better able to gain the trust and support of Indigenous peoples. The name of this group was chosen because of the importance of the vision of Our Lady in Guadalupe, Mexico in 1531 appearing to St. Juan Diego, an Indigenous person. December 12<sup>th</sup> is the annual feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe and is also the National Day of Prayer and Solidarity with Indigenous peoples of Canada.

The opportunity for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to be a member of this coalition provides us with the ability to dialogue with other coalition members, to share our current and future plans and hopes, to learn about initiatives, to gather relevant information and to walk together as a Catholic coalition with our Indigenous sisters and brothers. I cannot stress enough how important being a member of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle is for our organization as a means to develop stronger relationships with the Indigenous community which can enhance our ability to accomplish much more in our efforts to address injustices and the causes of poverty amongst Indigenous peoples. I invite and encourage all Vincentians to join us in our efforts. Your support can include helping to sponsor local

efforts to assist specific Indigenous communities, contacting local Indigenous organizations or First Nations communities and invite their representatives to speak to your membership and/or parish about their culture, heritage and community. You could celebrate the December 12<sup>th</sup> Feast Day for Our Lady of Guadalupe as well as the National Day of Prayer and Solidarity.

We are living in a time that our world is in danger of becoming more isolated from other nations and cultures and when some leaders are using language which can only divide and build walls between people. It is more important than ever that we demonstrate our love for our fellow human beings and our respect for the dignity of every person. We seek to build bridges. We enjoy a high level of trust amongst Indigenous peoples as well as the Catholic community. This is why our participation in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle is crucial if our humble Society of Saint Vincent de Paul wishes to continue its efforts to identify and challenge the social injustices that exist in Canada and the world for Indigenous peoples. My sisters and brothers, we are in a unique position from which we can provide real hope for a better future for all.

Sincerely,

Jim Paddon, Chair  
National social justice committee  
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Canada.