

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Vincenpaul CANADA



The newsletter of the
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
National Council of Canada
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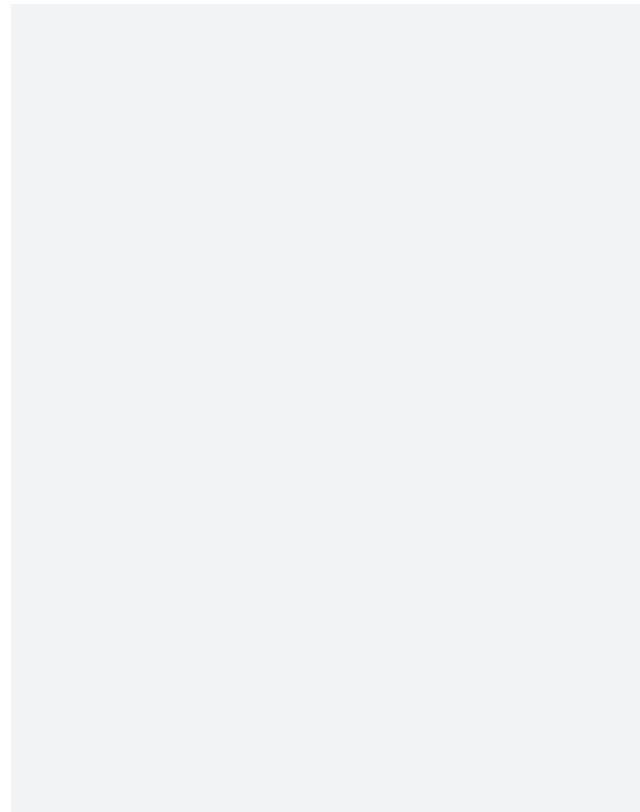


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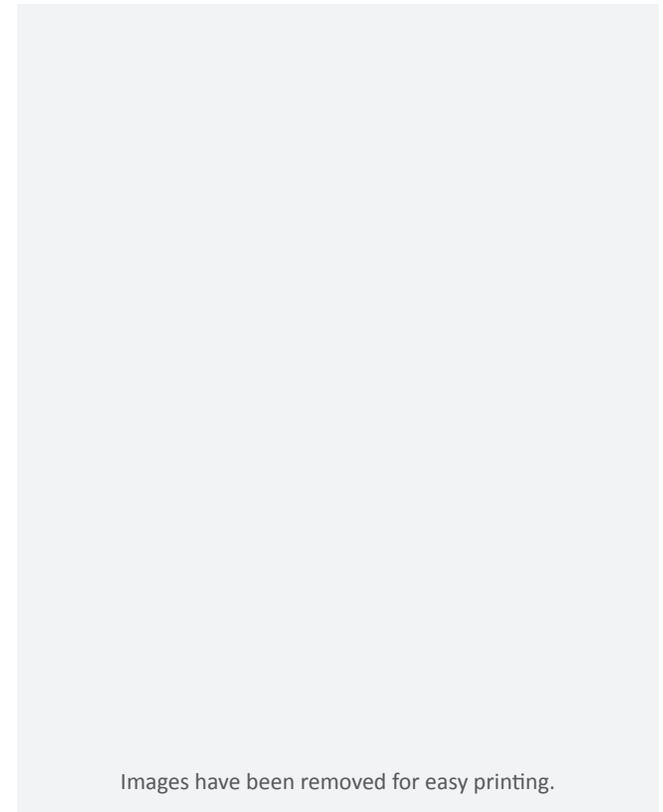
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EQUALITY DOESN'T MEAN JUSTICE



EQUALITY



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JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

Dear readers,

The format of the Vincenpaul-Canada magazine and the Changing Times newsletter were modified. We will now publish an electronic version of the Vincenpaul-Canada newsletter. Three editions of this newsletter are dedicated to social justice, editions of February, June and October.

Please enjoy this Social Justice edition of the Vincenpaul-Canada newsletter of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. I encourage you to submit any articles or comments that you may have about social justice that you may have for the next edition. You may also like to join our Facebook page for further discussions. Please help us to grow in our understanding and actions related to social justice.

Sincerely,

*Jim Paddon, Chairperson
Social Justice National Committee*

jpsvvp@hotmail.ca

CHAIR REPORT

Dear fellow Vincentians

I hope you will enjoy this social justice edition of our Vincenpaul newsletter. While we have informative and interesting articles in this edition, we value both your comments and articles from your local area. The goal of our current efforts to establish social justice at all councils and conferences is to provide information to our grass roots conference membership, as well as to give every member the opportunity to have a voice regarding various issues and to share your comments and questions regarding social justice. The next social justice edition will be in June, 2018, but if you would like to submit an article or question in time, please submit by April 15th to Jim Paddon at jpsvvp@hotmail.ca.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

We continue to place an emphasis on this topic and while we have accomplished some wonderful partnerships of sharing with indigenous communities through projects such as North of 60 and Cadotte Lake, there is much more we can and should be doing. The number of 1st nations with unsafe water is an embarrassment to all Canadians. The failure of our criminal justice systems to address crime and how it can negatively affect indigenous communities is also a major concern. One area we can all consider for action is to simply try to learn more about the culture and faith traditions associated with indigenous communities. Why not invite a member of nearby 1st nations to one of your meetings to provide your membership with firsthand knowledge about their people.

HOME VISITS

The very first systemic change project of our Society was the home visit program started by Frederic Ozanam and his fellow Vincentians. The home visit remains the basis of our efforts to meet, listen to and work with our friends and neighbours in need. However, due to many reasons a number of conferences have either stopped conducting home visits or have allowed visits to digress into a simple home delivery of food or vouchers. Our social justice committee will begin a home visit pilot project in the spring of 2018, which will invite selected teams of home visitors to include an enhanced visitation plan that seeks to provide those we visit with the opportunity to tell us about their challenges, barriers they face and possible solutions that can help them live a life of dignity and hope. While we certainly have conferences that already conduct that type of home visits, our goal is to collect data on how such visits can lead to some positive results for both our Society and those we serve. Remember these three words when conducting a home visit...ENGAGE...ENCOURAGE.....ENABLE. If anyone *would like to be part of this project or if you have comments on the goals we hope to achieve*, please let us know.

Please enjoy this newsletter and pass it on to a friend. If you are interested in getting more involved in social justice at your council, conference or parish please send us an email.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
Social Justice National Committee*

SPIRITUALITY

POVERTY AND LONELINESS

One factor of poverty that is often overlooked is loneliness, especially among the elderly. One parish in Ottawa was inspired some twenty years ago to establish a program that always begins the Sunday after Thanksgiving and continues until Passion Sunday, beginning Holy Week.

Every Sunday between those two dates, supper is provided free of charge in the parish hall, especially for those living alone in the wider neighborhood. The number attending is about 90 every Sunday. Cooking and serving is entrusted to four teams, each team responsible for one Sunday. Recipients look forward to the Sunday meal and especially because of the fellowship that fills a void in their lives. The project is financed each September by a fund-raising supper attended by parishioners

When we face the monster known as Poverty it is well to first see to the needs of food, shelter and clothing. However, the human requirement for community and fellowship must not be neglected.

The solution of the Ottawa parish, described above, is one answer but without doubt, there are others. I suggest this would be a good topic for conference discussion. One thing is certain; the person burdened by poverty will be more likely to fight the said burden if he or she realizes that they are not alone but truly part of a community.

Msgr Peter Schonenbach
National Spiritual Advisor

47th Annual General Assembly
National Council of Canada
Wednesday June 20 to Sunday June 24, 2018
Online registration: www.ssvp.ca/2018-aga
A form is also available for registration
by mail at the same address on the website.

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YOUTH CORNER

In my various roles and positions within the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, I have often heard the call to recruit more youth to our Society. We need to get young people involved. But how do we find them and how do we interest them in joining us?

We have had some success in attracting youth to the Society but to my knowledge they are usually given duties that can seem rather minor or are related to charitable works that seek to help the marginalized. While this work is great, I have also felt we needed to find ways to give our youth a real voice in what we do and how we do it and perhaps even ask for their advice on how we might make changes in our operations.

As chair of our national social justice committee, I wanted to try to accomplish this goal and so we invited three members of our London, Ontario youth to join the national social justice committee. I also asked our London youth to consider writing one or more articles for this edition of *Vincenpaul* which would have a focus on social justice, youth and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. I invite you to read the articles that follow. I find them very well written while providing evidence of what our youth can do if given the proper encouragement. There is no doubt of the importance of using social justice as a great way to attract and retain more youth.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
Social Justice National Committee*

CHARITY VERSUS SOCIAL JUSTICE

The saying goes like this, **“Give a Man a Fish and feed him for a day but teach a Man to Fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”**

This is the most transparent way to define Charity versus Social Justice. Charity is needed in every aspect of the word, to help those in need in emergencies, absolutely! There is no dispute about the necessity of the actions of many to aid immediately in a crisis. Without Charity, there would be so many people struggling UN-necessarily. For example, the earthquake that happened in Haiti in 2010. Without the Canadian Military coming to the aid of the people in Haiti with their water purifying equipment, there would not have been drinkable water and, without water, there would have been so many more deaths after the earthquake. Ever since the devastating number of deaths and tragedies, the country has been able to create a solution to supply themselves with drinkable water and have become relatively sustainable with a source of drinkable water. With the Canadian troops coming to help as the first charitable act, Haiti was given the means to solve the country’s need for drinkable water and to become self-sustainable. The goal is to concentrate on finding solutions that will help as many problem areas in the world as possible to become self-sustainable. This is Social Justice.

Our outlook on Charity versus Social Justice is not a simple fix. To find a solution to any major problem requires a lot of research, but mostly a well-thought-out action plan! The housing situation in Canada is a major problem for our homeless population, the working poor and those with dependence on drugs, alcohol and other abusive behaviour or mental health issues. The government of Ontario now raising the minimum wage from \$11.60 to \$14.00/hour is a step in the right direction for those working poor. This increase can make a huge difference in the housing options of many individuals and families. The next important issue is housing or, more accurately, the lack of low income housing in Canada; these numbers need to be increased.

YOUTH CORNER

CHARITY VERSUS SOCIAL JUSTICE... continued

The statistics in London, Ontario after a survey taken in 2015-2016 led to a VI-SPDAT score category, Vulnerable Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool. **“This is a tool that service providers can use to assess and prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness and identify whom to treat first based on the acuity of their needs. After completing a series of questions, the scores for each question are added together and result in an acuity score, which indicates the level of housing intervention the individual requires. A score between zero and three means the individual requires little housing support or may be able to exit homelessness without a housing intervention. A score between four and seven means the individual is recommended for an assessment for Rapid Re-housing. A score of eight or greater means the individual is recommended for an assessment for permanent supportive housing or Housing First.”** (Solving Homelessness Together, London’s 2015-2016 Enumeration Results)

The homeless assessed for Rapid Re-housing are between 33% and 55% of those on the street. This means that those in this percentage can easily go back into a permanent housing situation and not have to depend on living in shelters, sleeping at a friend’s (sofa surfing), outdoors or elsewhere without any type of assistance. Twenty per cent of homeless individuals need housing support to maintain their housing situation and 25% need assessment for permanent supportive housing.

The charitable act is to make sure there are enough beds available to those on the streets, but the Social Justice action is to have enough permanent low-income housing accessible for everyone.

Currently, the wait time for low-income housing is between 1.5 and 8.5 years across Canada. It is unacceptable that anyone should have to wait for a roof over their heads. There are many cities in Canada trying to re-house people upon re-entry into society, meaning once they leave a facility such as prison, a hospital or a mental health institution. Efforts are made to ensure proper housing is available at the time of their release. Sustainability is the most important principal of Social Justice and this should be our future goal in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul: to help individuals to care for themselves and eliminate homelessness.

Lillian Mulder – Youth Adviser

St. Louise de Marillac Youth Conference, London, Ontario

YOUTH CORNER

YOUNG ADULTS, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE CHURCH

Our youth group understands the importance of direct service to our community and advocacy or promotion of «social change». We recognize that charity only helps a small few and only for short periods of time. We recognize the government can make the necessary changes in society that will remain in place long after the charity is done; that programs such as Basic Income Guarantee, End Poverty Day, Indigenous Cultural Training, and Food Policy Council all take us one step forward.

We are a generation raised on the ethic of service. We have been doing volunteer work since elementary school. We want to give something back. Social Justice is a ministry that appeals to youth.

Youth want to be part of something; we want to bring to fruition our ideas for what we perceive as life-changing social ministries. We do not want to fit into existing projects or ministry models. We want to address root causes of poverty (social and political inequality), not just treat the symptoms of poverty.

As SSVP members, we help people in need, but we also know that we need to minimize inequality and poverty and aim for social justice for all people.

A Millennial craves depth, a need the church and existing social justice teams are uniquely poised to meet. This may be a way the church can build a deeper, more lasting connection with youth. Embracing social justice is a key to attracting youth; it needs to be put out front and centre, so they recognize a potential partner in creating a better world for everyone.

We want, as Christians, to contribute positively to society, serve Jesus in a personal and relevant way. Social Justice teams may just have the cause or mission to motivate youth to discover their way and their own mission.

Social Justice teams are in the unique position to connect youth with the resources to do something amazing that they are passionate about. The goal of youth is to make a difference in the world, to do something sustainable, and to advance local policy and program initiatives that better serve people who are hopeless.

**WE WANT TO ADDRESS
ROOT CAUSES OF
POVERTY,
NOT JUST TREAT
THE SYMPTOMS OF
POVERTY.**

The church can be the community to actually engage in «doing stuff». We are ready; we are globally conscious; and we are aided by technological connectivity. We can Google anything. News and current social issues fill our Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr feeds. We face a moral essential need that pushes us to act even if we have no idea how or where to start! We realize there are so many issues that need to be addressed, such as climate change, mass shootings, gender violence and food and water access. Where there is an injustice, we want to respond, whether in person, online or with money.

We are a generation that wants to make the world more just and equitable. We seek to collaborate when possible to resolve social problems. This collaboration on social justice holds tremendous potential as a recruitment tool to engage youth in attending church. If you want a Millennial to attend church, it must be personally relevant and of value to them.

We want to be part of a church that is doing things that are valuable, visible and memorable. We want to see words put into action. We want an experience with God. What better place for a young Catholic Millennial to feel they can truly make a difference with their gifts and talents than at their church and the social justice team may just be the vehicle to entice them to enter.

We are very much aware of the problems we face, and wouldn't it be amazing and inspiring for us to learn about and appreciate the work of generations of churchgoers, who gave birth to campaigns, movements, crusades and voices that we could add our perspective and bodies of energy to?

London Vincentian Youth

YOUTH CORNER

CHARITY VERSUS SOCIAL JUSTICE

We all know the familiar expression, **“Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, but teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime”**. It begins to get at the balancing act between charity and justice.

As we began our research on this topic, it quickly became apparent that we had a lot of reading to do, and as we researched, we began to realize that there was clearly a connection between charity and justice. We knew that with so much charity work happening, there was lots of room for planting the seeds of justice. For the sake of this article, we have decided to focus on the **“homeless as our social problem”**.

We feel that charity and justice are core principles of our group. We are involved in providing meals at Sisters of St. Joseph’s Hospitality Centre; we volunteer at the SSVP store; we donate to several organizations, money and time, and we feel blessed to be able to help. But now we must consider if we are doing anything to help eliminate the need for these services in the first place. Our fixation on charity work may be doing more harm than good for the people we profess to serve.

There is a large network of services across the city providing emergency shelter, approximately 360 emergency shelter beds. On average, 89% of these beds are used nightly. For the most part, persons utilizing these beds have little or no income. Most have little access to income, and have personal challenges such as addiction, mental illness, abuse, dysfunctional relationships, past or present, that further marginalize them. We have second and third generations of shelter users.

Under the Canadian Constitution, provincial governments have responsibility for providing for those in need. As citizens of London, members of Holy Family Parish and SSVP youth, we are mandated to care for our neighbour, including those who are struggling with poverty and homelessness. Too often, our group has focused on providing a one-time service without questioning why the need for such service has arisen in the first place. For example, our group serves in the local soup kitchen without analyzing the reasons for poverty. We hand out toiletries and supplies to on-the-street persons without asking them what they need. We are the servers, and the receivers often feel ashamed. We visit a seniors’ home without exploring why older people are often isolated in our society. We will now endeavor to make our charity efforts a true opportunity for relationships with clients from which we can learn about the very real and deeper social issues.

Perhaps our time could be better spent asking the difficult questions: Why does the government provide insufficient funds to deliver a service? Why are charities now making up this lack in services by pleading for donations? The charitable impulse to alleviate immediate suffering does nothing to solve the root problems. Our views are changing, charity mitigates and hides the consequences of the injustice of people being homeless and perpetuates the wrong. Charity responds to the symptoms of being homeless, while we need to address the causes of the homelessness or repeat shelter visits, by working to change the social structures that are helping to perpetuate this misery.

We spend so much energy and money meeting immediate needs that we do not do enough work to address their causes. It is our belief that preventing and ending homelessness would be cheaper than shelters and services, including hospitals, police and others that are band-aid approaches.

Providing services without housing does not end homelessness. Charity solutions can never meet the demands of poverty or homelessness. Our team hopes we can make the transition from charity towards justice in our mission. We have learned that helping at the soup kitchen, sending school supplies to third-world countries, giving out hygiene products on the street, will not transform our city into a place of justice. We need to remember that this charitable work does not let us off the hook. We need to find out why people are homeless and mobilize to do something about it.

It will take a lot of work to change the charity mentality mode we have been used to and address the social injustice issues of inequality, but have faith!

London Vincentian Youth

ATLANTIC REGIONAL COUNCIL

HALIFAX PARTICULAR COUNCIL - ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

**You asked for my hands
that you might use them for your purpose.
I gave them for a moment then withdrew them
for the work was hard.**

**You asked for my mouth
to speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.**

**You asked for my eyes
to see the pain of poverty.
I closed them for I did not want to see.**

**You asked for my life
that you might work through me.
I gave a small part that I might not get too involved.**

**Lord forgive my efforts to serve you
only when it is convenient for me to do so,
only in those places where it is safe to do so,
and only with those who make it easy to do so.**

**Forgive me,
renew me,
And send me out.**

(Adapted from a prayer by Joe Seremane, South Africa)

The Advocacy Committee members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Halifax Particular Council, read this prayer together at the close of their regular meetings. Each time, it challenges and reminds them of the personal investment and commitment needed to work for justice for those living in poverty. Currently, the Committee, supported by a staff person from the Halifax Particular Council Outreach Office, is made up of five individuals from four different conferences. Members take turns hosting and providing the opening spiritual reflection for the meetings held from January to June and September to November on the fourth Tuesday of the month.

Formed in May 2010, the Advocacy Committee is a Standing Committee of the Halifax Particular Council. As outlined in its Terms of Reference, the Committee, guided by Catholic Social Teaching, calls for justice on behalf of those who are socially, politically, or economically marginalised and works toward creating long-term social change that addresses structural and systemic inequalities. Over the years, members have undertaken a variety of activities in **four key areas of responsibility**: (1) conducting research, (2) providing education, (3) developing strategies/ actions for empowerment, and (4) building alliances.

RESEARCH

In its first year, the Committee surveyed conferences asking for input on advocacy topics. Vincentians identified affordable housing/ homelessness, Income Assistance reform, and mental health/addictions as priorities. These have formed the foundation for a number of educational events. One member provides the Committee with statistical information and analysis about conferences, homelessness and housing, and socioeconomic trends relevant to those living in poverty in Nova Scotia.

ATLANTIC REGIONAL COUNCIL... continued

EDUCATION

The Committee works to deepen its understanding of poverty. Initially, members read and discussed Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change to further their understanding of a systemic approach to addressing poverty. They continue to view documentaries and read online articles and reports. They also learn about community poverty initiatives. In addition to educating themselves, members have hosted sessions for Conferences on specific advocacy topics identified as priorities. Presentations have focused on an individual's journey from homelessness to stable housing, tenants' rights, subsidized housing through the local Housing Authority, women's, men's, and youth shelters, and mental health/ addictions. All the discussions addressed how the Society could support ongoing work and be an advocate for change.

STRATEGIES / ACTIONS FOR EMPOWERMENT

The Committee assisted the Particular Council by preparing advocacy letters about energy programs for low-income individuals. Members also facilitated two sessions in which Conferences determined local priorities from the National Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Strategic Plan. One of the five key recommendations for the Particular Council was to endorse the concept of systemic change and provide encouragement, resources, and training for conferences to develop their own strategies for implementing systemic change initiatives with those they serve. Another recommendation to facilitate an all-conference session to gather and exchange information and ideas related to operations, practices, home visits, and service was implemented in November with the first "Conference for the Conferences." Advocacy Committee members helped with the daylong gathering of Vincentians from fifteen of the eighteen conferences under the Halifax Particular Council.

ALLIANCES

The Committee has worked with the local Sisters of Charity to share information and materials about systemic change. Members often attend community poverty events on topics such as food security, Income Assistance, Living Wage, and Basic Income. The Advocacy Committee is looking forward to being joined by new members in 2018. It is heartened to see that the National Social Justice Committee is encouraging a wider participation in justice issues among Councils and Conferences across the country. There remains much work to be done. It will take time and, in the words of Saint Vincent de Paul, two beautiful virtues: **perseverance, which leads us to attain the goal, and constancy, which helps us to overcome difficulties.** www.azquotes.com/author/21572-Vincent_de_Pauldone

*Jocelyne Granger and Valerie Getson
Conseil particulier d'Halifax*

QUEBEC REGIONAL COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER BENEFICIARIES

The Old Brewery Mission works with homeless people in Montréal: meeting their basic needs and finding concrete and durable solutions to end homelessness.

Homeless men and women can find at the Mission the tools and support they need to settle down, including assistance to obtain official ID documents and monthly social welfare income. In a healthy and secure environment, the programme offers personalized support with an appointed agent. Participating people can focus on what they have to do to become autonomous because their basic needs are met, through balanced meals, a clean bed and a change of clothes.

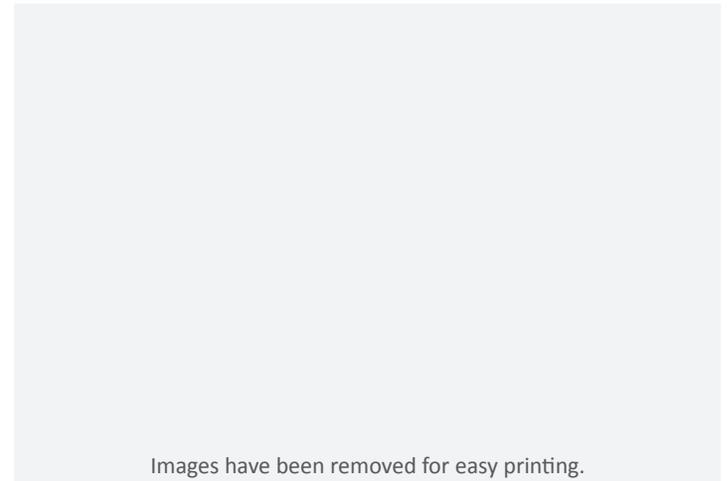
To end homelessness, we must ensure that homeless people have access to a place where they feel at home; that is the basis of safety and dignity. The Mission works closely with local housing authorities and affordable housing landlords to ensure that its clients do not have to depend on emergency shelters.

When they are ready, several Mission clients are housed in semi-furnished apartments on the territory served by the Saint-Léonard Conference. The Old Brewery Mission informs the Saint-Léonard Conference members, who immediately start helping newcomers. Conference members complete furnishing the apartment, and invite them to Boutique d'Amélie (the conference's store) to offer them clothing, dishes and household linen. In addition, they offer them a weekly subscription card to the food bank, the Garde-manger de Rosalie.

In view of such a warm welcome, the newcomers in Saint-Léonard appreciate Vincentian hospitality and offer to help at Boutique d'Amélie or at Garde-manger de Rosalie. They become volunteers, feeling a part of that large family. Vincentians appreciate their involvement. Incidentally, several volunteers who work at Boutique d'Amélie and Garde-manger de Rosalie are beneficiaries. All beneficiaries receive an invitation to join the conference's activities. Those who become volunteers are invited to special events, such as the Christmas party for the members of the Saint-Léonard Conference. Some of them continue volunteering, even when they do not need help anymore. It is for them a good way to feel useful, valued, and to have regular social interactions.

*Ellen Schryburt, President
Saint-Léonard Conference, Montréal Québec*

**FOR THE BENEFICIARIES,
VOLUNTEERING IS A GOOD WAY
TO FEEL USEFUL, VALUED, AND TO
HAVE REGULAR
SOCIAL INTERACTIONS.**



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Part of the Thursday morning group of Vincentians and volunteers, at the food bank the "Garde-manger de Rosalie".

ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

WHY DON'T THEY GET A JOB?

There was a time when people with reasonable health and the will to work could find employment and sustain their families in a modest lifestyle. Regrettably, that time has gone because of changes in the economy and workplace practices. Many sectors of the population are suffering because of these changes: women, single parents, youth, people with low levels of education, immigrants and older workers.

Many jobs are disappearing because of automation. There are fewer cashiers because retail stores have self-checkout. Sales positions are fewer because people are shopping online. Office positions are fewer because people receive and pay their bills electronically. Other jobs will soon be eliminated due to technological innovations. Self driving vehicles will take over the trucking and cab driving industries. Self service kiosks will reduce the number of people working in the fast food industry. Artificial intelligence will soon affect even professions like medicine and legal practice. A report from the Brookfield institute at Ryerson University predicts that 40% of jobs in some sectors will be eliminated over the next two decades. Low level jobs which allow people to enter the workforce and gain experience are becoming scarcer.

Another reason that many people have difficulty in securing sustainable employment is that many jobs today are either part time or contract, so fewer full time jobs are available. While the job creation numbers issued by the government may report increases, they also state that many of those jobs are part time. To make matters worse, employers often require part time workers to be available on-demand, which makes it impossible to hold a second job to boost income. This can be very hard on families, especially single parents.

In addition, what is termed precarious work can be a very big problem for many people. It includes situations where people don't know how many hours they will work in the next week or when they will work them. It can mean working in situations where people don't know how long their employment will last because the employer may fire them for no valid reason. It can also mean low wages that are not enough to sustain a proper living. The neighbours that we serve are particularly vulnerable because often they do not have high levels of education which would help them secure new employment when one job ends.

The minimum wage rates in many parts of our country are below the poverty line even for a single person. When the costs of employment such as regular transportation and better clothes for the workplace are included, even the proposed \$15 per hour minimum wage which some of our progressive jurisdictions are moving towards, is not adequate to raise people out of poverty.

The Brookfield Institute predicts that soon, 60% of jobs will require post-secondary education. In addition to academic qualifications, successful workers will need high levels of soft skills such as social intelligence, entrepreneurial skills and

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for easy printing.

Pamphlet available here:

ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/vop.php?page=pamphlets

ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

WHY DON'T THEY GET A JOB? ... continued

the ability to manage risk. These skills are not usually learned through classroom activities. They are acquired in an enriched environment through participation in athletic and cultural activities. In Canada, we are increasingly aware that inequality (the gap in lifestyle between people living on low incomes and people living in better off families) is a major issue in preventing people from escaping poverty. People growing up in low income families cannot compete with those from enriched backgrounds because they don't have the necessary soft skills. Getting and keeping jobs will be even more difficult.

We must not blame the victims, our neighbours in need, who are caught in the trap of systemic poverty. Vincentians need to understand that times have changed and what was possible 30 or 40 years ago is not achievable now.

We must advocate for systemic change with our friends, allies, MPs, MPPs and elected city officials at every opportunity and especially at election time to find ways to help our neighbours in need. Our neighbours in need require access to high quality education and opportunities to develop social skills. They also need our governments to legislate labour regulations that will protect workers so that they can earn a decent living.

For more information: http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/VOP_pamphlets.php

Future Proof: preparing young Canadians for the future of work; Brookfield Institute

*Corry Wink, National Social Justice Committee
Ontario Regional Council*

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ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

OZANAM EDUCATION FUND

One of the key factors that contributes to generational poverty for someone is the lack of an education and the ability to obtain one, either for themselves or their children. The main obstacle is the lack of funds for tuition, course fees, computer equipment, tools, accommodation, food, transportation, day care, previous debt payments, etc. ONRC recognized the importance that this fundamental change can bring to a family and as a result created the **Ozanam Education Fund**. The objective is simply “to provide resources for an education to help escape the cycle of poverty”. Vincentians are in direct contact with people in these situations and are in a unique position to help.

Since the program started in late 2012 we have responded to 174 requests for help and have provided over \$300,000 in assistance. Most of those we have helped are from families that are living in poverty with burdens of debt, medical problems, job loss, family difficulties, etc. and are wishing that they could afford to send their child on to post-secondary education. A significant number are from single parent families where the parent has young children and they are trying to move from a low paying job (often part time) to one that allows them to live with some dignity. Others are for people struggling financially and trying to take courses or go back to school full time for training. The program is focused on any training leading to a better job and is not limited to post-secondary education.

Recently the government introduced programs to help cover tuition cost for those who qualify. These are welcomed changes; however, there is still a need for the Ozanam Fund to assist people like those we have been helping. Even with free tuition, most of the people that we have been helping would still have major financial challenges in getting an education. A significant number of our cases are single mothers that are trying to raise a family and are trying to get some form of education to get a better job. As a result of our flexibility in allowing the funds to be used for help other than just tuition, it helps them make ends meet. Many of the young people we are helping have to make a decision of getting an education or staying home and helping their parent(s) put food on the table for them and their siblings.

A single mother who was working two part time jobs with two children was able to take an eleven month college course that lead to a better full time job. She commented, “The funds helped provide the basics (food, bills, etc.) for me and my sons... I am now finished school...but thank you does not seem enough.....please continue to help others in need.”

A Vincentian who helped two students with the fund said “Bringing the funds to the two students was so wonderful. There were tears in their eyes and the mother was so happy and relieved. It was the difference between them staying in college or having to quit to get work which would have been a disaster. These are the actions that make us proud to be Vincentians.”

Jere Hartnett
Chair Systemic Change Committee
systemicchange.ssvp@ssvp.on.ca

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WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL

WHAT OUR COMMITTEE IS UP TO

The Western Region Social Justice Committee is experiencing a change. You can call it “rebuilding”. Some existing members had to move on to other matters in their lives and we have acquired some new members. Having said that, there is room for representatives from other parts of the Western Region, such as, Saskatchewan.

In a country as rich as Canada, it is hard to believe that poverty exists. However, we all know that many people in all provinces and territories live below the poverty line. How is this possible? Well ... cost of living is high from the rents people must pay to the cost of food or any of the other necessities of life. Also experiencing financial problems because people are not paid a living wage, are unemployed or under employed, or have financial challenges because of illness, mental or physical problems.

Poverty is a weapon of mass destruction.

There are a whole lot of reasons and factors that contribute to these situations, such as, single parents not receiving Maintenance payments, not applying for Child tax credits, government cheques that are too small for the family size, receiving cheques late, scarcity of jobs, etc.

This past week, I attended the Western Region meeting in Red Deer, Alberta, and gave a report on what we are trying to accomplish. Everyone was excited about the fact that Social Justice is moving forward.

Firstly, at the request of the National Social Justice Committee, we are working on establishing a Social Justice Committee in each conference, in each Particular Council and in each Central Council.

If a conference or council cannot establish a Social Justice Committee, we asked that they find a Social Justice representative that can research and bring to the conference or council issues that need their attention. If a Parish already has a Social Justice committee, then a representative of the SSVF conference in that parish can sit on that SJ committee and be a liaison between the committee and the conference.

I am pleased to report that in addition to the conferences that have representatives on the Western Region Committee, other conferences have forwarded to me the names of members who want to be that SJ person in their conference.

IT IS NECESSARY TO ASSIST WITH PEOPLES' IMMEDIATE NEEDS, BUT THEN IT IS EVEN MORE NECESSARY TO RESEARCH THE ROOT CAUSES OF THOSE NEEDS AND FIND PERMANENT SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS.

Another project we are working on is a Social Justice website, where anyone can find many articles or reports on projects on Social Justice. Such projects can be spearheaded by the Social Justice Committee from any conference or council, not just by the Western Region Social Justice Committee.

In the Advocacy field, we are working on a postcard to send to the House of Commons lobbying for housing for the homeless and the working poor. We need to lobby for “housing now”, not three years from now. Funds must be made available now. Housing is required as soon as possible.

And finally, we are organizing a Social Justice Workshop for all the Social Justice people in Edmonton and we are inviting all representatives in the Western Region to attend. It is always good for everyone to meet and exchange ideas.

Of course, this is only the beginning. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a charitable organization, but Charity should lead to Justice. It is necessary to assist with peoples' immediate needs, but then it is even more necessary to research the root causes of those needs and find permanent solutions to the problems.

As soon as we have the final drafts of these projects and the necessary approvals, we will be publicizing them and asking for your support and participation.

Please stay tuned to the works of the Western Regions Social Justice Committee.

Serving with joy,

*Maria Lupul, Chair
Western Region Social Justice Committee*

BRITISH COLUMBIA & YUKON REGIONAL COUNCIL

HOW TO RUN A LISTENING CAMPAIGN *Adapted by Gordon Stuart from the Industrial Areas Foundation*

A **LISTENING CAMPAIGN** is a focused effort to build community and identify concerns and priorities of a group of people. A Listening Campaign can also help a group shape its vision to find out where it is now and where it wants to go in the future. Vincentians can do a Listening Campaign with our friends in need to determine how their needs can be served by charity and justice activities.

'Listening' is accomplished through "one-on-one" or small group meetings aimed at encouraging people to:

- Talk about how they experience life in their community;
- Identify the issues that they care about;
- Suggest concerns that they would like addressed.

The purpose of a listening campaign is to

- Connect stories that are offered to find trends;
- Build relationships between people experiencing similar challenges;
- Help to understand how deeply or broadly people are affected by specific issues;
- Identify issues people are concerned about and willing to work on.

Listening campaigns should be run by Vincentians who:

- Explain the ground rules - listen respectfully to others; be conscious of sharing the time; people's stories stay within the group;
- Explain the purpose of the meeting;
- Introduce the questions being discussed;
- Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak;
- Record the key points that come out of the discussion.

Example of questions:

- What is the most significant thing happening in the lives of you and your family?
- What are the challenges you are facing?

- What are your concerns about living and working in [your community/ neighborhood/workplace]?
- What would you most like to see changed?
- What issues do you think should be prioritized?
- What are **YOU** willing to work on?

There are a number of ways in which you can carry out a listening campaign:

- A series of one-to-ones: a group of Vincentians agree to do a number of one-to-one meetings with our friends in need. One-to-ones are conversations between two people where the agenda consists of learning about the other person: their story, their interests, their anger, and their ideas for change. They should last between 25 and 45 minutes.
- A series of house meetings. House meetings are small group meetings chaired by a Vincentian ideally with between 5 and 15 participants lasting between 25 and 45 minutes. They can be held in people's homes or anywhere that is convenient.

After the listening campaign, the leaders should meet to reflect on the results and focus on ways to address concerns identified.

- Take the information collected and categorize it; look for patterns; gather the concerns and issues into clusters;
- Take it back to all participating groups and say, "This is what we heard. Is this right?"
- The team will then need to turn problems (broad) into issues (specific) that are actionable.
- Hold a meeting with each of the issues listed on a separate sheet. Give people sticky notes and ask them to put them on the sheets (with their name & phone number) with the issue they want to work on. See where there is energy and capacity to move forward.

*Gord Stuart, Social Justice National Committee
BC & Yukon Regional Council*

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CIRCLE

The Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLG) Circle meets twice a year in its efforts to respond to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as well as to address the way in which we can develop and sustain stronger relations with the indigenous people. As the representative of the National Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, I am pleased and honoured to be a member of the OLG Circle. Our recent meeting on November 6th in Ottawa was another step in our mission. I would refer you to our [national website](#) to read more about the TRC and the 8 recommendations the OLG is working on. I have learned a great deal as part of the OLG and have also made some valuable connections with other members that can help our Society in its efforts related to indigenous people. Some of the important topics at this meeting included relationship building between the OLG Circle and indigenous organizations, development of governing procedures for the Circle, such as roles, responsibilities and member terms, and review of various meetings that our smaller working group has undertaken. I also made a [presentation](#), which can be found on our website, to the OLG Circle on behalf of the Society, which expressed our views on the work of the Circle as well as our efforts within the indigenous community to develop strong working partnerships that seek to address the needs of indigenous people. Some examples of our efforts include the North of 60 works being done in our Western and Ontario regions as well as the Cadotte Lake, Alta project, and future plans for Ontario to work with the 1st nations communities of the James Bay region.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

We continue to stress the need to educate our membership and even the larger Catholic population about social justice issues. This is also very true about specific issues such as the many issues related to indigenous peoples. The greatest failure we have is ignorance of the issues, but especially about the history, culture, faith traditions and challenges faced by many indigenous people. We encourage our members to educate themselves about these topics in an effort to understand the issues and most importantly develop a personal relationship with our fellow Canadians. If you live near a 1st Nations community why not invite a representative to attend a council or conference meeting to begin such a dialogue. If you are not sure where the nearest 1st Nations community is located, we can help. There are also a number of Indigenous Friendship Centres across Canada and some of our members have partnered locally to offer help. We can also help you find the nearest location, or visit their website www.offc.org. Urban living indigenous people face many challenges that quite often result in their living in poverty. We can help to build bridges of understanding, compassion and support. Please let us know about any of your local efforts related to indigenous people.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
Social Justice National Committee*

SOCIAL JUSTICE GUIDE

As mentioned in my chair's report, we have developed a Social Justice Guide to help committees or representatives at the council/conference level.

The guide will be available on our national website www.ssvp.ca by April 2018. There are several documents included in this guide that may be helpful in the development and operation of a social justice committee or the duties of a social justice representative at the council or conference level. We also encourage the use of this material to educate members about social justice. We certainly have a long-standing relationship with social justice issues that we need to inform our membership about.

While many of our members can become very frustrated with poverty issues for which there seems to be little effort to address, social justice can help us to learn how we may well be capable of changing systems or at least advocating for the changes needed to address the root causes of poverty. While it can certainly be a challenge for our members to find the time to support social justice, how can we ignore the cry of the poor for help beyond the food voucher?

SOCIAL JUSTICE HOME VISIT PROJECT

When we discuss social justice, it is always helpful to have examples of what it means. One of the areas that social justice includes is systemic change, which simply means changing current systems that may result in being more helpful to those living in poverty. It can also mean developing new programs or ways to address the root causes of poverty. In addition, it may also include looking at how we operate, with the goal to make needed changes to our operation or even our personal understanding of dealing with poverty issues. One of the best examples of a systemic change project took place when Frederic Ozanam and his fellow founders of our Society started the home visit program. Yes, this was the first systemic change project of our organization.

The home visit in Canada has certainly undergone some subtle changes in recent years. We even have conferences that do not conduct home visits. Whether we call them reasons or excuses for not doing home visits, we shall not discuss them at this time. We also have some who think they are doing a home visit when it is really just a food or voucher delivery service, which again is the result of the same reasoning for not doing the home visit.

We would like to encourage our members, whether they currently do home visits or not, to consider an enhanced home visit pilot project we are starting in 2018 with selected councils/conferences. As an organization, we often fail to give those we serve the opportunity to have a real voice regarding the challenges they face every day living in poverty. In addition, the concept of the home visit or our visit with the poor can be a way to gain a much deeper understanding of what it means to face such challenges. Whether via the home visit or an opportunity to sit, listen and learn about the lives of those we serve, it is vital to make those encounters as meaningful as they were to Ozanam and our early members.

Your conference may well be doing home visits as they were first meant to be and we would like to hear from you about what it means to have this personal relationship with the many people we visit. The pilot project will start in several locations across Canada and we will maintain related data based on the results of these local efforts. If your council or conference is interested in learning more about this project, please contact us for further information. There will be information posted on our national website in the spring of 2018. **ENGAGE-ENCOURAGE-ENABLE.**

*Jim Paddon, Chairperson
Social Justice National Committee*

**THE PILOT PROJECT
WILL START IN SEVERAL
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LOCAL EFFORTS.**

CAN BASIC INCOME HELP PROMOTE A MORE JUST AND FAIR CANADA?

Around the world, interest in the idea of basic income has exploded. Once considered marginal or utopian, **numerous countries** are now setting up pilot projects or studying how a basic income could help address poverty, precarious work, unemployment and income inequality. In Canada, the **Ontario government** has just started a pilot project, **British Columbia** is planning a pilot project, Quebec has been studying the idea, and other provinces are paying attention. So, what is a basic income?

Basic income ensures that everyone has enough money to meet basic needs and live with dignity regardless of employment status. In Canada, discussions have focussed on a minimum income guarantee, meaning that anyone below a set income level (for example, the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) or Canada's version of the poverty line) would qualify for the basic income. It would replace the meagre, stigmatizing, demeaning and complicated system of social assistance with a payment that has no conditions other than financial eligibility. Like Medicare, basic income would be available for anyone who needs it. **Other countries** are considering a universal payment to all citizens that would be clawed back through the income tax system for those who don't qualify for it, but this model, known as the universal demogrant, is not currently under consideration in Canada.

Canada already has a guaranteed minimum income for seniors, through Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and a minimum income for children, through the Canada Child Benefit. Basic Income would extend a minimum income to working age Canadians. Canada has also already run an important pilot project, the **MINCOME** experiment in Dauphin, MB from 1974-1979. MINCOME was an experimental guaranteed annual income that was jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments. It wasn't evaluated at the time, but recently, Professor Evelyn Forget from the University of Manitoba analyzed some of the archived records of the experiment's results. One of the main concerns about basic income is that people won't work if they get "free money" but Dr. Forget found that only two groups had lower participation in the labour force: new mothers, who stayed home to look after their infants (in the days before extended maternity leaves), and teenagers, who didn't need to work to support their families but stayed in high school. This result fits with research from developing countries that shows that the stability that basic income brings to people's lives helps them plan for and invest in their futures.

Dr. Forget also found the MINCOME experiment produced an 8.5% drop in hospital visits, notably for psychiatric illnesses, injuries and accidents. The positive impact that a basic income would have on health is one of its most important effects. It is also one of the ways in which basic income would pay for itself. The Canadian Medical Association estimates that 20% of our health care costs are directly attributable to poverty, so eliminating poverty through a basic income could dramatically free up health care resources. Basic income would also create savings in the justice and education systems. Research by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has demonstrated that every dollar we invest in poverty reduction produces two dollars in savings, and other researchers have calculated much higher "returns on investment" for poverty reduction among children. In our efficiency-driven era, it is hard to fathom why we have not already seriously invested in poverty elimination to reap the economic savings. But the real reward in poverty elimination is the reduction of human suffering and the development of human flourishing.

Images have been removed for easy printing.

CAN BASIC INCOME HELP PROMOTE A MORE JUST AND FAIR CANADA? ... continued

As US attorney and author [Bryan Stevenson](#) has said, “The opposite of poverty isn’t wealth ... the opposite of poverty is justice.” The potential for basic income to eliminate poverty, support social justice, enhance human dignity and promote the common good makes it entirely consistent with the deepest held principles and values of the world’s major religions. According to economist [Charles Clark](#), a senior fellow with the Vincentian Centre for Church and Society and advisor to the Holy See’s mission to the United Nations, basic income effectively implements Catholic social teaching.

Canadian advocates for basic income are working with a vision of basic income as the Medicare of the 21st century—the Canadian social program that we can’t imagine living without. But as we wait for the results from the basic income pilot studies, we urgently need to implement effective poverty reduction strategies (including adequate social assistance rates and minimum wages) and to strengthen public policies so that all Canadians can afford basic necessities of life and live a dignified life. It is the least a rich country owes to its most marginalized citizens.

Elaine Power is an associate professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston and the co-founder of the Kingston Action Group for a Basic Income Guarantee.

For more information about basic income, see:

[Basic Income Initiative](#), a multi-faith consortia that supports the adoption of basic income

[Basic Income Canada Network](#), the national advocacy network for basic income

[Basic Income Charter](#), developed by the [Kingston Action Group for a Basic Income Guarantee](#) to outline guiding principles and parameters for a national basic income program

Elaine Power, professor - Queens University, Kingston ON

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THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD, MATTHEW 20:1-16

Dear fellow Vincentians:

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard is certainly one that raises some issues that would be very much part of today's world. Can you imagine how many of us would react if we worked hard all day for our wages and then saw our employer hire others to come in an hour or so before the work day ended and paid them just as much as we had earned for a full day of work? How would you react...anger, frustration and confusion? How unfair would it be to you that these others got paid the same amount as you and yet they only worked an hour or two?

How many of us would be pleased that these newly hired people, who could find no work, ended up getting a very fair and just reward for their own frustration, disappointment and failure to find work.

I believe this parable has a very modern and relevant comparison to a current issue in Ontario and other areas of Canada. That would be the issue of a rather large increase in the minimum wage, not to mention a pilot project that will give people a basic guaranteed income, whether they work or not. How appalling. How unfair. I have also heard from workers that if the minimum wage is raised, then they must certainly deserve a similar raise.

Let's hear from the landowner in this parable and what he said to those disgruntled workers. "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage. Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous. So the last will be first and the first will be last."

Yes, we do hear from small and large businesses that the increase in the minimum wage will mean lost jobs, less hours or higher prices for their products. While this may well happen in some cases, I believe the overall impact of paying a higher wage has many benefits when we look at this issue from a view that is not merely financial or business related. Let's first consider the effect this increase can have on those living on a wage below current poverty levels. Consider a family that has two members working at a minimum wage of \$11 an hour for 30 hours a week. If they have their wages increased by \$3 an hour, this would mean an extra \$180 to \$200 a week for this family. This extra may actually allow them to buy more nutritious food for their family or perhaps allow their children to enjoy activities such as dance, music or sports. Maybe even save a little for future expenses. What does this increase mean to the self-esteem and dignity of the person? Does it not give them the ability to be able to participate more fully in the community in which they live? Perhaps they have been avoiding

the expense of proper dental care for their family or even some medical expenses not covered by government.

The basic income guarantee project (BIG) goes even further by actually providing fellow citizens with extra money that is given with no strings attached. There is ample proof from various sources that a BIG can lead to a healthier lifestyle, meaning fewer trips to the doctor and less expense on our health care system. People are also able to further their education, leading to better paid and more secure employment, meaning more income for the government via taxation. Once again, we must also consider the positive effect a BIG can have in restoring a sense of basic human dignity to all.

*Jim Paddon, Chairperson
Social Justice National Committee*

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DENTAL NEEDS

Mom, Age 45, SSVP Christmas Wish: Teeth Cleaning

This was the 'aha' moment that shocked many SSVP volunteers at Christmas 2012. What we all take for granted was certainly not a given for this mom and they realized that there were many others like her. She really did only want her teeth cleaned for Christmas.

It was the key moment of change for us as we realized we had been missing the dental suffering throughout our SSVP families. In our conference at Mary Mother of God in Oakville, we have since helped over 50 people by connecting them with dentists who are willing to do the work pro bono or at discounted rates. Three other conferences in our council have started to look out for dental suffering now and, with some funding support, these conferences have helped four people since the start of this year.

Once you start, it's not hard to find the stories of dental suffering while talking to the families at home visits. One young teenage boy had been nicknamed Frankenstein by his classmates because his teeth were so uneven and, after a heartfelt outreach to key people in the circle of SSVP supporters, the right amount of money was raised to make sure this boy was provided orthodontic treatment.

Some dentists will perform extractions, as these services are reimbursed by Ontario Works, whereas fillings generally are not. One young dad we know had all of his back molars extracted instead of filled, causing all of his remaining teeth to shift. We found a sympathetic dentist to provide the needed reconstructive treatment.

One woman had undergone extensive cancer treatments and was in desperate need of dentures, due to the damaging effects of the treatments. We were able to connect her to the services she needed which, in turn, enabled her to resume her healthy eating habits.

Dental care falls way down on the priority list behind food, rent, utility bills and clothing, especially for the parents, and even sometimes for the children, even though all children of low income families are covered by Healthy Smiles Ontario if they are under 18.

Adults with dental issues are less likely to address them because of cost. Ontario Works covers limited dental treatments and ODSP a larger percentage of coverage depending on each circumstance. Oftentimes, a root canal is not covered at all and these can range up to \$1,200. Tooth decay and tooth loss can make it painful to eat, leading to diet deficiency. With constant pain, managing to work or parent during the day or to sleep properly at night is compromised. Tooth loss and major front teeth decay can inhibit a person's chance of getting a job or keeping employment. Taking time out of work to go to the dentist is much

harder for the families we serve in their precarious employment circumstances.

Unmet dental needs can lead to deterioration in overall health. Diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease are also linked to prolonged dental neglect.

Our opening prayer says: "seek and find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived..." As we enjoy immediate dental response to our toothaches and root canals, let us think about those who are needing to access these services but have been forgotten, those in pain and therefore suffering, or those deprived by inhibitive cost of even the basic teeth cleaning. Let's start the conversation and work together to help find the dental solutions for the families we serve.

*Linda Alexander and Judith Nunn
Mary Mother of God Conference, Oakville ON*

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VINCENTIAN FAMILY SYMPOSIUM: WELCOME THE STRANGER

From October 12-15, 2017, the city of Rome was awash in a sea of yellow scarves as over 10,000 members of the Vincentian Family from 99 countries around the world gathered for a symposium marking the 400th anniversary of the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul. With a focus on the theme of Welcome the Stranger, the symposium included opportunities for prayer, a meeting with Pope Francis, and keynote presentations on specific topics. The symposium also offered a special schedule for consecrated youth and young adults whose enthusiastic presence enlivened the weekend for all participants.

Established in 1995, the Vincentian Family of approximately two million members includes some 225 branches: religious communities and lay associations, groups, institutes and movements who share Vincent's charism, responding to the call of the poor Christ dwelling in the midst of those who are impoverished. Among these branches, lay groups are well placed. In fact, the Confraternities of Charity, now known as the International Association of Charities, was Vincent's first foundation in 1617. And, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded by Frederic Ozanam in 1833, is the largest branch of the family. Both of these serve as permanent members of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee.

On Saturday, October 14, symposium participants met with Pope Francis in Saint Peter's Square. The audience was preceded by testimonies from the National Presidents of the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria and the Italian Saint Vincent de Paul Society, as well as a keynote address describing the Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance. Following an introduction by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Pope Francis spoke of his appreciation for the four hundred years of the Vincentian charism, highlighting three verbs: to worship, to welcome, to go. He concluded with words of thanks: "Dear brothers and sisters, thank you

for moving in the streets of the world, as Saint Vincent would ask you today." And, he expressed his hope that all members of the Vincentian Family would be able "to continue to draw from the adoration every day the love of God and spread it in the world through the good contagion of charity, availability and concord."

On Friday, October 13, participants met in six language groups (English, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish) to consider three topics: Vincentian Spirituality and its Prophetic Challenge, Vincentian Formation and Communication in the Information Age, Vincentian Ministries: From Here to Where? Following presentations on each topic, participants were invited to discuss what actions or steps they would commit to take: for themselves personally? In collaboration with other groups?

In every language group, several participants had been asked to serve as synthesizers to identify the primary ideas of each presentation, including comments and opinions expressed in feedback, and to interview individual participants to gather further comments. At the conclusion of the symposium, the synthesizers prepared summary reports of their language groups, and then a representative from each group met with those from all other groups to prepare a composite report of all language groups. This composite report is intended for use in local follow-up sessions to help set future directions for the Vincentian Family. In each local area, the composite report will be accompanied by the synthesized report specific to its own language group. Texts from the various language groups as well as the papal audience will be available on the Vincentian Family website: www.famvin.net. A committee met in early December to develop a process to assist in local follow-up sessions.

This 400th anniversary of the charism provides us with the perfect opportunity to celebrate our Vincentian heritage, to give thanks for all that has been done, and to develop ideas and plans for the future. Of great importance is the consideration of our changing demographics and social contexts, the pressing needs of the poor, and our ability to best respond to these as a Family. We face a future that offers new possibilities and thus much reason for excitement and hope as we grow in our understanding of the Vincentian Family, with its many branches and members, not being institutionalized but in a fluid movement toward service of the poor.

Donna Geernaert, Sister of Charity, Halifax

ADVOCACY

MAKE IT RIGHT; WRITE THAT LETTER!

As Vincentians we are responsible for “identifying the root causes of poverty and contributing to their elimination” (Rule 3.22). One effective means of achieving this is by writing letters to our elected representatives to advocate on behalf of our neighbours in need.

A personalized communication carries more weight and significance than merely signing a petition or forwarding a form letter. It demonstrates that the issue is of such importance that someone has taken the time and trouble to communicate personally and directly.

Who am I representing? As an individual, you are free to write a letter to your political representative on any topic you wish. As someone who identifies as a Vincentian, you are writing on behalf of the people we serve. The issue should be related to our direct interaction with our neighbours in need. If you are writing in the name of your conference or council, your message needs to be approved and endorsed by the other members of that group.

Who should I contact? Make sure the elected representative you are addressing has jurisdiction over your issue. For instance, minimum wage and social assistance are provincial responsibilities; the conversion of a local property to be used as a shelter is a municipal concern. Other issues, such as affordable housing, are multi-jurisdictional.

The letter should go to your applicable local municipal, provincial or federal representative. In addition, copies should be sent to the particular politician(s) who have jurisdiction over the issue. That might include the Mayor or councillor that chairs a municipal committee, or a provincial or federal minister whose Ministry (provincially) or Department (federally) is responsible for the issue.

How should I compose the letter? Begin by briefly stating the issue and concern. Do not include unrelated issues but stick to one topic and perhaps 2 or 3 aspects of that issue. Then, identify yourself and briefly state why you have some credibility concerning this problem. Briefly describe what your conference does, how many families you visit or the special works your council operates. If you are concerned about affordable housing, talk about

the experience of the people we visit, and how the issue impacts their quality of life.

In addition to asking that the person take some kind of action, it is better if you suggest the action to be taken. For example (depending on the specific issue), raise social assistance rates, raise minimum wage, or build affordable housing. There might be a pending piece of legislation that you would like passed, defeated or amended to better represent the concerns of the people we serve.

For suggested actions, research on line what other groups advocating on the same issue are suggesting. They might even have a form letter you could use as a template to put into your own words. Always close by thanking the person and stating that you look forward to their response.

Sending a hard copy by post or e-mailing the message are both acceptable. E-mails generally result in a quicker response. The message should be no longer than one or two pages.

What else? Let others know what you are doing. Post a copy of your letter at the back of the church and display it on your, or the parish, website. Send a copy to other larger agencies that might be advocating on behalf of the same issue. They like to get a sense of how many others are adding their voices to a particular issue.

The important thing is to get the message across to our leaders as well as our fellow community members. Try it!

For an example of how to set up an advocacy letter – see the Citizens for Public Justice web page at www.cpj.ca/writing-letter-your-mp

For an example of Vincentian submissions see www.ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/vop.php?page=submissions

*Danny Bourne, Chair
Advocacy committee, Ontario Regional Council*



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.

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