

Social
Justice
Edition

Vincenpaul
CANADA



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CLICKABLE!

World Day of the Poor

November 17, 2019

Information
and material:

www.ssvp.ca/world-day-poor-tools-members

NATIONAL HOUSING CAMPAIGN

CHAIR REPORT - NATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to our outgoing national president, Jean-Noël Cormier, for his outstanding leadership during the past six years. Jean-Noël has provided a high level of support for our social justice efforts as we continue to increase the number of councils and conferences that include social justice as a regular meeting agenda item and have appointed social justice reps.

I also look forward to remaining as chair of the social justice committee under Claude Bédard, incoming national president. Claude is the first national president from west of Ontario and I believe this will enhance our growth throughout our Western and BC-Yukon regions.

This coming year will see the start of our national housing campaign, with 2019 being the preparatory phase during which we shall invite our membership to provide their comments and advice on issues related to housing and homelessness in Canada. The national action committee distributed a letter and short survey to all regions in July with a reply date of late September. We shall use the information gathered from those replies to develop an action plan that will be sent back to each region for further consultation. The action plan can be customized to a certain region or community, thereby enabling our membership to have a plan that they are comfortable with. We hope this campaign will help to educate our membership and the larger community about the many issues related to housing and homelessness. The success of the plan will only be achieved with the involvement of as many councils and conferences as possible. **I invite and encourage every council and conference to consider ways they can become engaged in housing and homelessness in their community.** The campaign will then move into years two and three as it is rolled out across Canada.

In keeping with the four pillars of the 2015-2020 national strategic plan, the campaign will help SSVp Canada to:

- a. engage in broader and more meaningful Vincentian works;
- b. deepen Vincentian spirituality;
- c. promote Vincentian activity; and
- d. develop the Society and its members.

In addition, while raising the awareness of housing and homelessness issues, and by placing a focus on one major issue, we can better demonstrate social justice in action and why it should be included as an integral part to our charitable works.

Housing and homelessness are a common issue across Canada, in every city of various populations and in rural Canada. While being a national, provincial and municipal concern, if we are to achieve any level of success, it must start at the local community level where the community makes a commitment to address these issues. This is why it is critical that our councils and conferences consider how they can get involved in the campaign. Please join us and help us to demonstrate to all of Canada what being a Vincentian is about.

I would also like to discuss **how the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul can make a real difference in the relationship between Catholics and Indigenous Peoples in Canada.** Several actions can be taken that were outlined at a workshop at this year's AGA by Sister Priscilla Solomon, CSJ. You can access this information on the national website www.ssvp.ca/2019-aga. One very simple act would be to make an acknowledgement of the territory where we live and work at the start of an SSVp meeting, as a sign of respect for the indigenous history of the land. It is our hope to develop further educational material in the coming months to help every SSVp member learn more about indigenous history, culture and faith traditions.

Our **restorative justice and prison ministry efforts** are conducted by a small but very dedicated group of Vincentians. Please consider becoming involved in this much needed ministry. We can provide support and resource material.

In closing, I cannot end without encouraging everyone to **consider using social justice as a recruitment tool** for finding more members with an interest in any of our social justice areas of work. I believe social justice can also be an attractive message to any youth who may want to join us or simply volunteer some time to a project. I have seen some remarkable work being done by our youth across Canada. They deserve to have a voice in what we are trying to accomplish, and I have no doubt they can also teach us regarding various issues.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee*

SOCIAL JUSTICE 101

Education and communication are key in furthering the social justice component of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP). Many of us are new to terms such as **advocacy, systemic change, universal basic income**, to name a few. Over time, we will become familiar with this vocabulary and internalize it as we strive to put our social justice mandate into action.

In my opinion, the opportunity to meet with other SSVP members to share ideas and challenges is invaluable. In May, our BC and Yukon AGM was held at the beautiful location of Kawakawa Lake Retreat Center in Hope, BC with 35 SSVP members in attendance. Each session was attended by the group as a whole. The focus for the entire weekend was social justice. We met informally with one another, listened to presentations, learned from our experiences and came away inspired and with renewed enthusiasm.

Padre Ain Leema, from the Archdiocese of Whitehorse, attended our AGM, and was commissioned as spiritual advisor for BC/Yukon Region. Knowing that our theme was social justice, Father Ain led a retreat for us based on the following three parables: *The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, *The Parable of the Persistent Widow* and *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*. Padre Ain is very supportive of our efforts to reach out to those in need and is looking forward to his role as our spiritual advisor.

Elaine McMurray, president of Immaculate Conception Conference in Kelowna, and I hosted a series of social justice workshops. To set the tone for the overall day, we shared a video to demonstrate the invisibility often experienced by those in need. The video starts with a seemingly homeless man sitting on the steps of a Catholic church while parishioners come to Mass. Everyone ignores the man. The video ends with the man actually being the new parish priest! Understandably, everyone was taken aback. From there, as an introduction, we presented the ten principles of Catholic social teaching. These principles are not widely known by most Catholics. Our overall goal was to integrate them into the assorted topics of the day.

Home visits and the different styles that are carried out throughout the region followed the above introduction. We learned of challenges sometimes faced by members doing visits. We all agreed that 'listening to the needs of those requiring assistance of some sort' was the most important aspect of our visits.

Elaine challenged us to apply what we just learned by guiding us through a poverty game. In small groups, we were given real life situations we might encounter. We brainstormed ways we might respond to the needs presented to us. We

gained awareness of various kinds of resources that we might access in our communities. We realized that sometimes we need to seek professional help. In a practical way, we learned the difference between charity and justice.

A national social justice project, *Seeds of Hope*, was introduced and discussed. All were encouraged to consider initiating it in their conferences.

The national three-year campaign theme of safe, secure and affordable housing was introduced, followed by discussion. The first year will be data collection and program design. In years two and three, all conferences and councils will be encouraged to participate in activities drawing attention to the challenges faced in our country to find safe and affordable housing. The campaign will consider all aspects of housing including housing the homeless, assisting families to maintain housing, especially in times of crisis, and encouraging governments to ensure that there is sufficient housing for all of us.

At our formal AGM meeting there was a lively discussion about the importance of increasing membership, including the significance of youth/young adult involvement in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The two goals set for 2019/2020 were:

1. for conferences to learn about the ten principles of Catholic social teaching and to put them into practice;
2. for conferences to reach out to youth.

Moving forward, our Canadian SSVP conferences and councils are required to have a social justice component on each agenda. We need to be open to new opportunities and to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in expanding our mission to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

*Johanna Cross, National Social Justice Committee
BC and Yukon Regional Council*

HOW DO WE GET TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

At the Annual General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Windsor this past June, we were blessed with the presence of Renato Lima de Oliveira, President of the Council General International of the Society. In the question period at the end of his presentation, Brother Jim Paddon asked Mr. de Oliveira, **“What is the way to achieve social justice?”** The response was, **“to elect good governments”**.

Vincentsians know that charity is not enough to give people the basic needs that would give them health and dignity, let alone the means to get out of poverty. Vincentsians ponder about what else they can do. Mr. de Oliveira gave us the answer that has been accepted in some progressive countries in the world. **Social justice is the responsibility of the whole community.**

Progressive countries that provide for the well-being of all their citizens have happier, more cohesive communities and their economies are also competitive in the world. **In a progressive country, each person has the financial means to have good nutrition, safe, secure and affordable housing, quality health care and access to services such as education that will let them participate in the life of the community.**

People in progressive countries pay higher taxes and those citizens accept those higher taxes because everyone benefits from the more equitable distribution of wealth to allow people to live in dignity and health.

We also know that poverty has a hefty price tag. **Many studies have shown that people who live in extreme poverty, sometimes cost the community more money than it would to provide the means for them to meet their basic needs of decent shelter, nutritious food and basic health care.** Lack of safe, affordable, housing forces people into shelters that cost the community much more than affordable housing. Lack of healthy food causes serious physical and mental illnesses that send people into hospitals, which is even more expensive than shelters. Poverty erodes the health of people and makes it virtually impossible for them to get out of poverty through participation in education and eventually in the workforce.

Canadians need to understand that people do not choose poverty and that poverty is not usually the result of poor choices that they made. **Many causes of poverty are structural, which is to say that it is part of the way that our society works.** A very important issue is that the minimum wage is grossly inadequate for providing for the well-being of even a single person, let alone someone with dependents. Also, many people cannot get secure full-time jobs even at minimum wage and must accept part-time, contract or seasonal jobs that cannot provide stability. Industrial processes and computers have eliminated many traditional jobs that did not require high levels of education.

Some people say that in an industrial revolution, more jobs are created than are eliminated. That may be true but those new jobs require high levels of skills training that is not available to many who don't have good basic education. **We need to make it possible for people who are currently living in poverty to become strong and healthy. We need to provide support so that they can regain good health and dignity.** This will lead to success in education so that they can participate in job skills training, and thus participate fully in society and in the economy. Individuals and our country will be better off if we do this.

Mr. de Oliveira's advice is that we exercise our right as citizens to participate in the political process to elect governments that will govern our country for the good of all. **Why do Vincentsians and Christians in general shy away from politics?** By definition, politics is a set of activities associated with the governance of a country. As citizens and taxpayers, we have both the right and the obligation to participate in how our country is governed. **We need to study the issues, evaluate what the various parties offer and then vote for whomever will work for the best future for our country.** If necessary, we can advocate with elected officials for programs and laws that we think are important. The result will still be an imperfect system because that is the nature of life on earth. However, cynicism and inaction are not acceptable. If we fail to participate in the political process, we are failing as Christians and as citizens.

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

MONCTON'S MOTHER TERESA CONFERENCE COOPERATES WITH LOCAL NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

At the onset of its creation in 2016, the Mother Teresa Conference executive emphasized the importance of collaborating with local non-profit organizations. We visited them and later, we invited 15 of them to a session where they presented their field of expertise. This is a report on our current interactions with five of them.

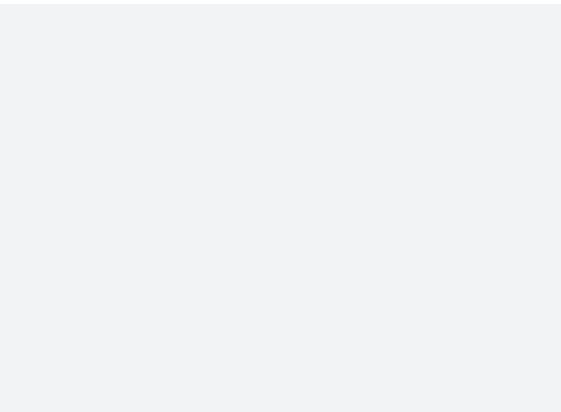
- 1. Enviro Plus** Unlike most SSVP conferences in Canada that are associated with a local parish, we opted to have Enviro Plus as our sponsor. This NGO is also known as a "Second Chance Workshop". The founders of Enviro Plus, Jeannette and Léo Johnson, believe that the best way to reduce poverty and restore dignity for marginalized people is to give them quality training to improve their skills so they can re-enter the workforce. As a source of income to support its training program, Enviro Plus refurbishes and sells used furniture and electrical appliances. Its recycling activity prevents tons of material from ending up in the landfill. We have our office in the Enviro Plus building, where our telephone line picks up requests from needy people in Moncton. We collaborate with Enviro Plus through our purchasing of beds, sofas, electrical appliances, etc., for the needy people we serve. They sell us furniture at half price and deliver it free of charge.
- 2. Peter McKee Community Food Centre** Every three weeks, members of our conference receive a generous supply of non-perishable food as well as fresh and frozen items from this food bank. Through cooperation with the "Service d'aide" of N.-D.-de-la-Paix parish, we are able to store this food in one of our member's garage and can access it when needed. This food assistance, delivered promptly, is a way of establishing a climate of confidence between our

visiting members and the person in need of food. Another major advantage of this cooperation is that the food boxes we donate don't cost our conference anything. We often purchase milk and meat to complement these food boxes.

- 3. St. Vincent de Paul Clothing Depot** This well-organized clothing depot serves hundreds of people monthly. The staff serves them on site, but they do not process cases where money is required to purchase food or services. The manager of this clothing depot refers these people to our conference, with the understanding that we will visit these needy people, listen to them and fulfill their needs. Because of the expenses we incur in serving these people, the clothing depot allows us \$1,000 per month. Every month, we forward a report of our monthly activities to them. Our relationship with this non-profit organization is excellent.
- 4. New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc. (CFSJ)** This organization advocates to the N.B. government on behalf of people living in poverty. We participate in their organized activities and attend their annual general meeting. One of our conference members is active in several CFSJ activities. Recently, their group conducted a survey on the number of vacant lots in the city of Moncton, with the intent of developing awareness among city councillors of the need to reserve land to plan for more low-income housing. A CFSJ member presented our results to the regular meetings of the mayor and city councillors. The media covered the presentation and weeks later, the issue of lack of affordable housing still came up in the press. Our member is also collaborating with the CFSJ in a campaign that is in the planning stage. Its purpose is to counteract the many prejudices circulating against social assistance recipients. One objective is to document the most prevalent prejudices. Another one consists of asking 50 company owners to plan a monthly budget on \$537, the current rate allocated to a single individual on social assistance. Other activities include the use of 30-second radio ads, YouTube and Facebook to counteract prejudices.
- 5. Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC)** This organization is preparing its 10th yearly plan for poverty reduction in New Brunswick. One member of the conference participated in their public consultation sessions and is planning to work with the Inclusion Network Director on parts of the anti-prejudice campaign.

We hope that these five examples of cooperation with local non-profit organizations will inspire other conferences to reinforce their collaboration with other like-minded groups in their local communities.

*Sister Auréa Cormier, National Social Justice Committee
Atlantic Regional Council*



Trainees steaming a mattress to be resold

FAST FASHION

Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arm to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us.”

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

How often do we stop to think about where our clothes came from? What resources were used? Who made them? Were those workers treated equitably? Despite the popularity of clothing in our society today, rarely are these questions considered or discussed. With a new trending model referred to as “fast fashion”, where companies like H&M, Forever 21 and Joe Fresh rapidly produce low-cost clothing, the importance of discussing the consequences of the clothing industry has become more significant.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, fast fashion can be defined as an “approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing fashions that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers”. Did you know that there are over 100 billion garments being produced every year? This number has doubled since the year 2000, and it’s expected to continue to rise in the future. Due to the fast turnover in the fast fashion industry, more and more unwanted or unused clothing items are ending up in landfills across the world. The McKinsey Global Institute report states that almost three-fifths of all clothing articles are sent to landfills within the same year of production. Our clothing is often not biodegradable and sits stagnant in our landfills for hundreds of years.

Fast fashion is also causing other negative impacts on our environment. The clothing industry is second only to the oil industry for producing harmful environmental pollution. Greenhouse gas emissions, textile waste, and pollution from dyes and chemicals used in the production of synthetic fabric are only some of the myriad of issues that often go undiscussed, despite the harm being caused. Our current clothing production methods are unsustainable, and harmful to the world.

Not only is the rapid consumption in the clothing industry causing devastation to our natural resources, it has also served as a way to exploit our brothers and sisters across the world. “The success of the fast fashion model depends on low production costs. That’s how you end up with the low-paid workers and unsafe working conditions as revealed to the world when the eight-storey Rana Plaza building collapsed in Bangladesh in 2013. The deadliest garment-industry accident in history, the Rana Plaza collapse took the lives of 1129 workers. Bangladesh’s minimum wage is just \$68 per month.” See <https://smartasset.com/credit-cards/the-economics-of-fast-fashion>

FAST FASHION CAN BE DEFINED AS AN “APPROACH TO THE DESIGN, CREATION, AND MARKETING OF CLOTHING FASHIONS THAT EMPHASIZES MAKING FASHION TRENDS QUICKLY AND CHEAPLY AVAILABLE TO CONSUMERS”.

As Catholics, it is our duty to be stewards of God’s creation, and to make sure there is a planet for future generations to call home. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated, “**There can be no Plan B, because there is no Planet B.**” We need to uphold the dignity of those involved in the clothing industry and make more informed decisions about the clothes we choose to wear.

Although this may be a global social justice issue, we can all do our part as instruments of change. We can reduce our fashion environmental impact by buying less, thinking twice before throwing out clothing, and by considering options such as buying second hand or even renting clothing. Despite the attraction of the latest fashions at cheap prices, we should always try to purchase from clothing suppliers that value their employees by offering fair wages, and safe and reasonable working conditions. As Pope Francis perfectly outlines in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, we drastically need “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.” The clothing on our backs that has resulted from fast fashion, therefore, does not simply reflect a great sale or the latest fashion trend; behind it lies a deep, global, social justice issue that demands change. We should be mindful of the negative impacts of the fast fashion industry, and if possible, choose sustainable solutions to benefit both our brothers and sisters, and the world we call home.

*Victoria Goldsack and Olivia Gioiosa
St. Louise de Marillac Youth Conference,
London, Ontario*



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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