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Safe, Secure and  
Affordable Housing  
is a Human Right



NATIONAL HOUSING CAMPAIGN

official launch date  
February 7, 2021

**“On the Street” Event Held by the SSVP Youth Conference of London**  
*[click here to read the article on the Ontario website](#)*

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

### THE EYE OF A NEEDLE!

If we were to provide a nickname to 2020, we could easily tag it “The Year of the Mask”. For 2021, we could tag it “The Year of the Needle”. In 2021, we’ll be hearing a lot and hoping for the needle, the vaccine needle. Hoping for normality to return. But, can we really return to the old normal? What will the new normal be?

Several sectors of the economy did not really see an impact; some have even thrived. Unfortunately, other sectors will suffer more, especially the service sector. Many businesses will not survive. And, by extension, many of the jobs impacted were held by women, and that is why the pandemic has been termed a “shecession” (she-recession).

For a new normal, what fundamentals of a just recovery should be considered? In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis brings forward fraternity and social friendship; he states:

*Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.* (7)

and

*It is not possible to settle for what was achieved in the past and complacently enjoy it, as if we could somehow disregard the fact that many of our brothers and sisters still endure situations that cry out for our attention.* (11)

Fr. Henri Nouwen was once asked: “Are you an optimist?” His reply: “No, not naturally, but that isn’t important. I live in hope, not optimism.”

Pope Francis reminds us:

*Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter.* (30)

A key principle for a just recovery comes from Catholic Social Teaching for the *dignity of the human person*, the opportunity to develop integrally.

For a charitable organization, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), in its guidance, *Relief of poverty and charitable registration* (CG-029), states:

*Although charities can be established to relieve poverty, they cannot be established to prevent poverty. Preventing poverty implies that the beneficiaries are not experiencing poverty, a requirement for beneficiaries under the relief of poverty category. However, charities can have activities that have the effect of preventing poverty.*

Jesus once said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were

greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” (Matthew 19:23-25). Interestingly, we have parallel texts in Mark (10:23-26) and Luke (18:24-26).

This is obviously hyperbolic, referring to the very narrow opening of the gate of Jerusalem, which opened after the main gate was closed at night, where a camel could not pass through the smaller gate unless it was stooped and had its baggage removed. Jesus was in reality using the metaphor, that, it may not be easy, and one may have to unload a few things along the way and make the necessary sacrifices to get into the Kingdom.

This then brings fundraising as a ministry in order to assist persons in need as part of the Mission. Fr. Henri Nouwen, captures this in *The Spirituality of Fundraising*,

*“Fundraising is a confident, joyful and hope-filled expression of ministry. In ministering to each other, each from the riches that he or she possesses, we work together for the full coming of God’s Kingdom.”* (p.37)

To assist with the Mission, a consideration as a source of funding is Legacy giving. The largest transfer of wealth in history is now in process, over \$750 billion in the next 10 years in Canada. The majority of Canadians say they have never been asked for a charitable bequest the option to do more by giving to a charity, with associated tax benefit considerations.

In the fall of 2020, the Canadian Association of Gift Planners (CAGP) launched the **Will Power™** pilot campaign held in the Hamilton, Niagara Golden Horseshoe (NGH), and Oakville area; SSVF joined as an initial founding partner. The long-term goal of the campaign is to raise legacy giving (bequest), and to connect charities with donors, with financial planners, and with lawyers and notaries who craft wills. In 2021, the **Will Power™** campaign will expand across Canada. You can visit the portal at: [www.willpower.ca/charities/society-of-saint-vincent-de-paul](http://www.willpower.ca/charities/society-of-saint-vincent-de-paul)

Vincentians are the thread assisting persons in need.

*Richard Pommainville*  
*Executive Director*

# SPIRITUALITY

## VINCENTIANS AND OUR PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

**The Preferential Option for the Poor** is a principle of Catholic social teaching. Simply stated, it means that we are obligated to prioritize those who need us most. Saint John Paul II said it this way when he visited Canada in 1984:

*The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich,  
the rights of workers over the maximization of profits,  
the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion,  
production to meet social needs over production for military service.*

Perhaps the most familiar scripture passage that explains a Preferential Option for the Poor is Matthew 25.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven,  
he will sit upon his royal throne and all the nations of the earth will be  
assembled before him.*

*Then he will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separate  
sheep from goats.*

*The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left.*

*The king will say to those on his right:*

*“Come. You have my Father’s blessing!*

*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.*

*For I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and  
you gave me to drink.*

*I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me.*

*I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.”*

*Then the just will ask him, “Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you,  
thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or  
clothe you in your nakedness?*

*When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?”*

*And the king will answer them:*

*“I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers,  
you did it for me.”*

Matthew 25: 31-40

Vincenians use it as the basis for the good works that we do: When we care for others, we are caring for Jesus; we are becoming more Christ-like. All of these – feeding the hungry, providing clothes, comfort, etc. – are excellent practices. Many good people do them. But we must do more and be more than a series of good deeds.

St. Vincent de Paul said the poor are ‘our lords and masters’. As we serve others, they evangelize us; they bring us closer to God. Because this is a sacred service, we must perform it wholeheartedly. Our service must be preferential; that is, it must come before other things and it requires living our vocation every day:

*The Christian charity we are called to practice is not giving away  
to the poor the left-over,*

*our spare time, our extra money, our old clothes, etc.*

*Charity for us must mean giving our best and at times our everything.*

*Our life must reflect the life of Jesus Christ who has called us  
to this great vocation of love.*

*Our respect for the dignity of poor persons must lead us to treat them  
as guests at our family table*

*and not as beggars at our gate, waiting for the crumbs.*

Sister Betty Ann McNeil, D.C.

Pope Francis addressed the COVID-19 pandemic and our Preferential Option for the Poor in August 2020:

*The pandemic has exposed the plight of the poor and the great inequality that  
reigns in the world.*

*And the virus, while it does not distinguish between people,*

*has found, in its devastating path,*

*great inequalities and discrimination.*

*And it has exacerbated them!*

*The response to the pandemic is therefore dual...*

*It is essential to find a cure...*

*On the other hand, we must also cure a larger virus, that of social injustice.*

*In this dual response, there is a choice that cannot be lacking:  
the preferential option for the poor.*

As followers of Blessed Frédéric’s social teaching, we exercise the Preferential Option for the Poor as we lift up our fellow citizens with love, respect, justice and joy. Our reward is great, right here and right now. We learn from those we serve and from our fellow Vincenians at the same time as we come closer to becoming who Jesus asks us to be. Confident that our greatest reward will not be of this world, we pray that at the end of our lives, God who calls us to serve in his name will greet us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

*Denise Bondy, Spiritual Advisor  
Ontario Regional Council*

## CONTINUING OUR MISSION DURING THE PANDEMIC

When the pandemic came upon us in March 2020, I am sure none of us imagined that we would feel its impact for as long as we have. However, this is our reality.

Many of us have taken this opportunity to learn new ways of doing things and being creative in how we continue to serve our friends in need in all possible ways.

In Ontario, I have seen conferences and councils re-think how they serve, and these are a few examples:

- Phone calls to our friends in need to have a conversation with them to see how they are doing, providing SSVP support and referencing resources as needed,
- Food card mailbox drop-offs or arranging food card pick-up appointments at the church, where possible, or emailing digital gift cards,
- Serving take-out meals in place of community meals,
- Having people visit their food bank/food pantry with social distance guidelines in place, and
- Youth continue with their “On the Street” program, providing hygiene products to the homeless with the necessary social distance guidelines in place.

Councils and conferences were very resourceful in applying for federal, provincial and municipal funding as was appropriate with very successful results.

Some conferences/councils are signed up with [FoodRescue.ca](https://www.foodrescue.ca) which is a program that connects businesses with good, unsold food to donate to local non-profit organizations. Any SSVP council or conference with a CRA number can sign up for this free account, if interested.

After our stores had to close, store managers met virtually to discuss strategies, best practices, and how best to implement the necessary measures to safely re-open when the time came.

Conferences and councils stayed connected by holding virtual meetings through Teams, Zoom or another virtual platform. This was a learning curve for many members; however, the more virtual meetings that took place, the easier it became, and members are now enjoying this virtual connection.

With churches closed and with lower attendance once churches re-opened, councils and conferences have facilitated different avenues of receiving donations, and these are a few examples:

- Set up a Canada Helps donate button on their SSVP website,
- Encourage donating on the national website, specifying which conference / council the donation is for,
- Encourage e-transfer or PayPal,
- Encourage regular monthly donors, and
- Receive funding from local Community Foundation.

I have heard and seen many people use this opportunity to make positive changes while keeping our members, volunteers, staff and those whom we serve safe. Let’s continue with this positive and forward way of thinking to always carry out our mission in the best way possible.

I believe that our prayers and being united in our actions are making us stronger than ever in carrying out our mission of serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy, while seeing Christ in anyone who suffers, coming together as family, having contact with the poor and helping in all possible ways.

*Linda Dollard, President  
Ontario Regional Council*

## SAFE, SECURE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT!

When people don't have enough money to pay for adequate safe housing and basic necessities:

- they forego medicines and nutritious foods to pay for their shelter;
- they crowd too many people into a small apartment, which makes them vulnerable to disease and stress; or
- in extreme circumstances, they live rough on the streets or in tent cities and endure frequent dismantling of their communities by local authorities.

These circumstances occur all too often, and we can no longer deny that there is a housing crisis in Canada. News reports say that the incidence of COVID-19 is much higher in low-income neighbourhoods, where many people are crowded into small apartments. Tent cities exist in communities across the country. Vincentians visiting their neighbours in need know that many of them spend almost all their income on shelter and have so little left for food that their health is seriously at risk.

We think that Canada is one of the best countries in the world. However, for a growing number of Canadians, their quality of life has been deteriorating over the last while. Housing cost is a major driver of this trend because shelter allowances for people on assistance are unrealistically low. The rise in minimum wage is likewise inadequate for keeping up with the cost of inflation. Vincentians see more and more people in crisis over housing costs.

In February, the National Council of Canada will launch a National Action Campaign to engage Vincentians to help make safe, secure, affordable housing accessible for all Canadians, because it is a human right. It is the basis of stability on which people can build a decent and happy life.

In 2019, the government of Canada launched a national housing strategy that aims to cut chronic homelessness by 50% and remove 530,000 families from housing needs. The strategy calls for renovation and modernization of existing substandard housing. It calls for building 125,000 new homes.

Provinces, territories and municipalities must work to create solutions to acute homelessness. The current pandemic has resulted in some creative solutions such as turning unused hotel rooms into safe housing for homeless people. Could this become a large-scale solution? Municipalities can encourage the construction of secondary suites in homes where the owners have unused space. Modular homes are a cost-effective way to construct new housing. There are many ideas and opportunities that could build the stock of affordable housing.

Vincentians in their daily work have close contact with people in precarious housing. There is more to do, however. Vincentians can build better bridges to connect with homeless people who are the very neediest in our communities. They can build on this connection to understand better what people in need want most from their housing. They can involve neighbours in solving the problem.

There are multiple levels in which Vincentians can engage in this campaign. The long-term goal of the campaign will be to make safe, secure and affordable housing a reality for all, but there are many people who need help now to address their urgent housing needs. Support programs, such as rent banks and rent subsidies are available to get people through a housing crisis, and they are often funded by the provinces and territories. However, people need to know what supports are available and how to access them. Vincentians can find out what those resources are and walk alongside their neighbours to access them.

In the long term, there needs to be a commitment to funding safe, secure, affordable housing so that Canadians can begin to build better lives for their families. There are two main ways that this will happen. Governments need to do their part in providing funding for housing that meets the needs of all Canadians. Vincentians need to become advocates for this funding. Secondly, Vincentians can join with other like-minded people to develop affordable housing in their own communities.

By learning more from our neighbours in need, we deepen our Vincentian spirituality. By participating in solving the housing issues, we expand the breadth of our Vincentian works and participate in meaningful systemic change.

The National Action Campaign also calls us to reach out to our fellow parishioners to understand and support the right to safe, secure and affordable housing. Public support will be critical to encouraging the government to reach for this essential goal. Engaging our fellow parishioners can also lead to increased membership in the Society.

*Jim Paddon, Past President & Chair of National Housing Campaign and  
Corry Wink, Vice-President, Social Justice & Advocacy  
Ontario Regional Council*

## STORES STRONG

The year 2020 started out well for all our SSVP stores. Then March and COVID-19 hit. We were at the start of a global pandemic, something we have never dealt with before. All stores had to decide when to shut their doors or if the government was going to mandate them. Hence, all stores were shut within a couple of weeks. Everyone was concerned for the wellbeing of our managers, employees and volunteers. They are our family. We were all assuming this would be a short shutdown, but soon realized it would be going on for a considerable length of time. With Richard Pommainville's help, we started a monthly Managers Team meeting. We needed to put our heads together to plan for when the stores would be allowed to open. First, we started a working document on what the requirements would be. Information was exchanged daily and we all tried to stay up to date. Every month, the document continued to grow, with valuable information from all managers on how to reopen. This document was shared with some managers from out of province. We shared it with anyone who requested it.

The Ontario Regional Council (ONRC) quickly realized that the cost of all the safety measures to reopen would be considerable for councils and conferences, costs that were totally unexpected and that might hinder the ability to open quickly when we were given the go-ahead. The ONRC executive understood this and provided stores with \$100 for each sneeze guard they had to purchase.

We have continued to have monthly managers meetings and we continue to work on/adjust and add to our working document. Not only is it on how we are going to open up the stores again, but also on having all the necessary protocols in place for a lot of "what if's", such as having to shut down again due to the second wave. Our concerns were and are how to keep our staff, volunteers and customers all safe.

A big thanks goes out to Brother Dermot McGilloway from Ireland who connected us globally. We had a Zoom call with all our colleagues in Ireland, England, USA and Australia. We were all facing the same situation of loss of stores, loss of employees, loss of revenue for councils, and especially, not being there to support our friends in need. We all shared our documents and we all shared our fears and dreams for our life after COVID-19.

What all this goes to show is the need for us to have not only a National Stores Committee, but the greater need to have an International Stores Committee. We all face the same issues and not just with a pandemic. It is time that stores are recognized by all levels of our Society. We can all learn and share information that can, in fact, help each other, and that in turn can help our most vulnerable. We are much stronger together than we are separate!

In the midst of all this happening, Hamilton took the time to revamp their store. They have a new manager and a new look. During their opening, they had the Bishop and many clergy members present. They took the time to honour long-time volunteers. Congratulations to John McKay, President, Guido Kelly, Store Chair, and the many hard-working volunteers who made this all come true.

*Sue Mazziotti-Armitage, Vice-President, Stores Liaison  
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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