

# SOCIAL JUSTICE

Vincenpaul  
CANADA



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## CONSULTATION FOR A NATIONAL ACTION CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

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## CHAIR REPORT - NATIONAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

As we move into the new year of 2019, I'd like to thank all councils and conferences that have appointed a social justice representative and, in some cases, a committee. In addition, many now have added social justice as a regular agenda item for all meetings. If you do not yet have a representative at your council or conference, please make it a priority to do so this year. While there are many issues that can be discussed at your meetings, the important thing is to have regular conversations on these issues and to educate our own membership about them.

You may recall our **Changing Times** social justice newsletter which was discontinued a couple of years ago. I am pleased to announce the revival of Changing Times, with the first edition having started in January of this year. Changing Times is being published monthly (except July-August) and will endeavour to further provide readers with news and interesting social justice topics.

**Basic Income, Ontario** - The current government in Ontario abruptly ended the three-year basic income project last fall after only a few months of operation. While this was disappointing, it does not mean an end to the discussion about a guaranteed basic income for all who qualify. There are several misconceptions about such a program, as well as a general lack of knowledge about the potentially positive results that can happen. We shall continue our efforts to support basic income by providing further information in the coming year. The most important component of a basic income is not just the extra money, but the opportunity for all to participate in society while experiencing the human dignity that all of us deserve.

**Indigenous Peoples** - Please continue to be open to learning more about Indigenous culture and the many issues that still need to be addressed. One of the easiest ways to do this is to contact any nearby First Nations community and invite representatives to speak at a future conference or council meeting about their community, culture and faith traditions. You may even be able to expand this to a parish-wide presentation sponsored by your conference. There are also many of our cities that have an Indigenous friendship centre to assist those living in an urban community. These centres may also offer speakers and relevant information about how poverty affects their people in your community.

The **North of 60** program continues its great work in both the NWT and Nunavut. In addition, we have developed sharing programs in both Alberta and Ontario. Please consider helping in these programs.

**Restorative justice** - Please let us know of any work you may be doing in relation to prison ministry or community outreach to former inmates or, as we prefer to call them, returning citizens. In Hamilton, Ontario, we have had a very successful program known as the Prisoner release kits, which are bags containing some essential items that are given to those inmates in need upon their release from the local prison. This is a project that can be easily replicated in any community with a prison or detention centre. Our Dismas program may also interest you, as it has a number of ways your conference can get involved. We can provide further information upon request.

**Catholic Social Teachings** - Please read the 10 principles of Catholic social teachings (CST) which can be found on our national website [www.ssvp.ca](http://www.ssvp.ca), as they can be a resource for how we view social justice and make for a good discussion at a future conference meeting. The history of CST is a long one that many Catholics are not aware of. I would invite you to read more about this rich history and how much our efforts are really based on those principles.

In closing, I would also encourage our membership to remember how important our Vincentian charism is to social justice. It is our personal contact with those living in poverty that should inspire us to seek and find solutions to poverty. The goal of any social justice action should be based on the hope of giving our neighbours in need a true sense of human dignity and the feeling that they can and should be equal members of society. They should be able to participate in society and be given the opportunity to contribute to the common good of all. If we can, even in some small way, break down the barriers they face, then we are contributing to the common good of our community and nation.

Please join us at your conference level by being a voice for social justice and for those who do not have a voice.

*Jim Paddon, chair - [jpssvp@hotmail.ca](mailto:jpssvp@hotmail.ca)  
National Justice Committee*

## NATIONAL ACTION CAMPAIGN

“The national board of directors approved a proposal by the national social justice committee to develop a national action campaign and to form an ad hoc committee to carry out this project. A final report is to be presented to the national board of directors in April 2019.”

### INTENT

The intent of this national action campaign will be to coordinate, over a period of at least two years, the collective resources and energies of the Society with respect to an issue that affects the people we serve.

The overarching goal of the campaign is to educate Vincentians, our parishes, and the community at large about an issue, and to promote change around that issue. By working towards that goal, we will deepen our Vincentian spirituality, rejuvenate the membership of the Society, and thereby enhance our service to those living in poverty.

The campaign will support each pillar in the 2015-2020 National Strategic Plan:

### VINCENTIAN WORKS

- The campaign will encourage more meaningful home visits, and a broad range of systemic change initiatives.

### VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY

- The coordinated action will make it easier for conferences to present a clear example of their work to their parishes, their diocese, and to inter-faith groups with whom they work.
- The coordinated action will provide a clear focus, and impetus, for inter- and intra-conference prayer efforts.

### PROMOTION OF VINCENTIAN ACTIVITY

- The coordinated action will provide a focal point for messaging and promotion.
- Because there is a single cohesive issue at the heart of the campaign, national and regional leadership can develop promotional materials for use by all conferences.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY AND ITS MEMBERS

- The campaign will challenge conferences to make their current Vincentian work more meaningful, and to try out some new types of Vincentian work, within a structured and manageable framework.
- The campaign will encourage conferences to learn from the successes of other conferences.
- The campaign will celebrate successes at the end of the first year, and will encourage further growth over the second year.

- The campaign will create momentum around one clear message, encourage partnerships with outside organizations, and call for Vincentian works which require a variety of skill sets, all of which open the door to new members.

### SELECTION PROCESS

The issue should be something that flows directly out of our personal interactions with our neighbours in need. This is a fundamental requirement so that the campaign has authenticity and legitimacy in the eyes of those we serve, and of the public.

The campaign will be most successful if SSVV councils and conferences from across the country work on it together. As a result, the issue should have relevancy across the country and at the local, provincial and federal levels.

At the same time, the issue should be narrowed as much as possible to make the campaign manageable. Therefore, it would be beneficial to select an issue that is familiar to Vincentians and that clearly relates to the work we do.

Potential issues might include the following:

- Employment and income security (basic income, living wages, fair labour laws)
- Affordable, adequate and available housing
- Universal child care
- Affordable and accessible post-secondary education and vocational training
- Affordable health care (pharma care, vision care, dental care)

We ask for your support of our efforts regarding this national action campaign. We are currently consulting with regional presidents to gather their comments on possible issues and to answer their questions. This committee will make a recommendation to the national board on the favoured issue. It is anticipated that the national board of directors will approve the selected campaign issue in April 2019 with a final report being made to the voting members at the 2019 AGA for their approval.

Once the campaign has been approved, we will begin the process of encouraging all councils and conferences to support our efforts and make their own contributions at the regional and local levels. In addition to helping those we serve, this campaign has the potential of raising public awareness of the selected issue and the image and vision of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

*Jim Paddon, chair - [jpsvvp@hotmail.ca](mailto:jpsvvp@hotmail.ca)  
National Justice Committee*

## CHILDREN, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

How does a disposable income of \$3,863 per month for a family of four sound? For some of us, who raised our families 20 or more years ago, it sounds all right.

However, the low-income cut-off (LICO) for a family of four is a disposable income of \$3,863 per month. LICO is one of three poverty measures that Statistics Canada uses and people who live on this amount of money are financially stressed. One in five children lives in poverty, according to the organization Canada Without Poverty.

What does life look like for a family on this level of income? Rent for a three-bedroom apartment in a mid-sized city in Canada will cost at least \$1,500. The family may have to pay utilities. A basic diet for a family of four costs about \$800<sup>1</sup> per month. That leaves \$1,563 for all its other needs, such as transportation for parent(s) going to work and other transportation, employment expenses such as suitable clothes for work, clothing for growing children, household needs, personal grooming, school items for children, dental and other health care needs. Clearly, there's not a lot of money left over for athletic, cultural and recreational activities.

Do limited resources impact the daily life of a child? Here are some scenes from Katey's life:

Marie to Katey: I'm going to join the swim club. Why don't we sign up together?

*Katey thinks: The swim club trains at the university on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. We don't have a car and it would take me over an hour to get there by bus and again to get home. It's just not worth it to me; I would be exhausted all the time.*

Says to Marie: No, I don't think so. I'm not really a good swimmer.

Sue says to Katey: The gang went to see the new movie that everyone is talking about. It was totally awesome. We missed you.

Katey replies: I had stuff to do at home. You know.

*Katey thinks: I asked my mom for \$20 so I could go out with the gang to the movie and buy snacks like everyone else, but she said we couldn't afford it.*

Sonya shows Katey her new down-filled coat and raves about how cosy and warm it is.

*Katey thinks: Must be nice. My coat came from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul store and it's okay but it's definitely not new. How come I never get anything brand new and beautiful?*

Barb and Katey are working on a school project at Barb's house. Barb says to Katey: That was a great start to our history project. We should get together on the weekend to finalize it. Would you like me to come to your house on Saturday morning?

Katey says: Oh sorry, I have something on then. Can we stay after school on Thursday to finish it?

*Katey thinks: Are you kidding me? No way are you coming to my house. It's a dump.*

Do these sound like minor tragedies? Everyone experiences ups and downs. This doesn't look like poverty. What's the big deal?

Inequality is a big deal. It exists when some have a lot and others have much less. The child who lives in poverty is always on the outside looking in at the wonderful things and experiences that her classmates have and she is sad because she has so little. She has nothing to share on Monday morning when she goes to school because she did nothing exciting over the weekend. She doesn't get opportunities to develop athletic or team skills because she can't afford to participate in sports. She feels deprived because her clothes are second-hand and her home is shabby. She is always making up excuses for not being able to do what others do or have what others have.

She feels like a second-class citizen and wonders if she is unworthy of having nice things like her peers. Second-class status erodes self-esteem and reduces the chances of success in life. The lack of enrichment from sports and cultural activities means that young people in this situation don't develop the networking and social skills that are crucial to success in today's world.

Some Vincentians probably grew up in poverty and think that they did "all right". However, the world has changed, and deprived children are at risk of failure in today's world. We need to understand inequality and work to lessen it by advocating for better programs to support children at risk.

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

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.foodinpeterborough.ca/2017/10/>

## “GIVE A MAN A FISH, AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A DAY. TEACH HIM HOW TO FISH, AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A LIFETIME.”

Food insecurity - **inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints** - is a serious problem in Peterborough. Based on a study done by the Peterborough Public Health Unit, food insecurity impacts one in six households in the city and county of Peterborough. The cost of healthy eating for a family of four in this area was \$898/month in 2018. After paying for rent, utilities, telephone, child care, transportation, clothing and other costs of living, many families and individuals, employed or not, did not have enough money for food. People living in food insecure households often report poorer health than people with higher incomes. Being food insecure makes people more vulnerable to chronic diseases. They may eat less fruit, vegetables and milk products because they cannot afford them. They are forced to skip meals or fill up on cheap foods that are not as nutritious. Food insecurity also impacts learning and development in children.

Food banks are not a long-term solution to food insecurity. Community gardening is one way of addressing the ever-increasing costs of fresh produce and food insecurity in our communities. Everyone should be able to enjoy healthy food. **We need to engage the marginalized by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, tools and space to grow their own fruits and vegetables.** By helping the people we serve to grow nutritious foods, we are ensuring that they are adequately fed, that they feel dignified, and that they are helping their families grow. Along with increased food security, there is community building through interaction, engagement of people experiencing poverty, and the beautiful transformation of green space.

The Talwood Community Garden started in 2016 with the goal of providing the Syrian refugees and other tenants of the apartment buildings on Talwood Street a place to grow their own fresh produce. But the garden became much more. It was also used for impromptu gatherings where people met their neighbours. One day, lawn chairs and a garden swing appeared.

On any given night, you could see families working in their garden, some sitting and chatting in various languages while the kids played off to the side. The young helping the older folks. The experienced gardeners helping the less experienced. It was evident that the community garden created a sense of ownership and pride.

Working in their 10'X10' plot had different benefits for each gardener, i.e., “It fights mental health like depression.” “It’s therapeutic.” “I loved that everyone helped each other.” “It’s fun playing in the dirt!” “There is something to learn and you get to talk to others.” “It’s helping to forget the tragedies of war.” “It brings us happiness.” “My wife likes to garden and I like to eat the fruits of her labour.”

The St. Alphonsus SSVP Conference has been a regular contributor to the Talwood Community Garden. In 2017, the members agreed to donate money to buy a water cistern and gardening tools. In 2018, SSVP paid for a shed to house the gardening tools, and an additional \$300 was given to the garden coordinator to pay for materials to build a composter and other incidentals.

The fight must continue for longer-term strategies to reduce food insecurity. **We need to educate ourselves about the root causes of poverty and food insecurity and advocate for change while supporting local food programs that make healthy, local food a priority.**

*Lynn-Marie Gallant-Whipp  
Peterborough Particular Council’s social justice committee.*

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## SHARING IDEAS TO MULTIPLY THEM

The late Guy Paiement, s.j., dedicated his life to the promotion of social justice. He highlighted the importance of sharing our “good moves” to encourage others to imitate them. Some Canadian conferences could be inspired to take on the three actions described below, carried out by the Mother Teresa Conference.

### STRONGLY SUPPORT AN ADEQUATE SOCIAL SAFETY NET FOR THE POOR

The New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc. (CFSJ), in collaboration with the Mother Teresa Conference, has launched a campaign with the slogan “Let us repair our social safety net!”. Many people “drown” because the provincial social safety net has holes in it.

Approximately 15 interviews helped to **identify what led people to “drowning”**:

a) physical disability preventing someone from earning a living following an accident; b) reduced emotional or cognitive abilities preventing someone from controlling emotions without ending up in self-destruction; c) lack of a support system, including close relatives who have resources; d) inability to earn a living due to a criminal record or the obligation to stay at home to care for children or a sick relative.

Rather than focusing on symptoms, the researchers determined **the causes of poverty** of those interviewed:

a) low rates of social assistance; b) lack of subsidized housing; c) lack of flexibility in granting disability status to people who are unable to work; d) decreased accountability of citizens with regard to the integration of the poor into their networks; e) fiscal inequities leading to lack of funds that would ensure an adequate social safety net.

The researchers advocated for major changes that would allow the poor to come out of their unstable situations. Social assistance rates must be increased significantly. Access to subsidized housing and house repair must be facilitated, especially for disabled people. Provincial legislation must expand the definition of disability so that the handicapped are recognized as disabled. The following **recommendations** were submitted to the government of New Brunswick:

a) increase social assistance rates to reflect inflation, and plan the catching up required to increase recipients’ net income according to the Market Basket Measure of Statistics Canada; b) in collaboration with the federal government, invest the money required to ensure that every person unable to work for physical or psychological reasons has access to subsidized housing.



### CELEBRATING THE WORLD DAY OF THE POOR BY EATING WITH THEM

Jointly with the members of an Anglican church in Moncton, the members of the Mother Teresa Conference organized a celebration to mark the World Day of the Poor. In the context of a Drop In, they gathered homeless people and physically or mentally handicapped people to have fun, eat and celebrate together. Everyone played bingo and enjoyed a substantial snack. There was joy all around. The poor felt welcomed and listened to. The Mother Teresa Conference was motivated to organize that celebration by the psalm quoted by Pope Francis: **“The poor will eat and be satisfied.”**

### INTERVENTIONS WITH POLITICAL DECISION-MAKERS TO BREATHE NEW LIFE BACK INTO A POOR PERSON

Thérèse Caissie, president of the Conference and her companion, Stella Foran, visited a woman, almost in her sixties, who had health problems. Her social assistance benefits were only \$537 per month, while her rent was \$650. The Ministry of Social Development threatened to cut her benefits if she did not move to a lower-cost room. The two Vincentians immediately phoned the office of the Ministry’s Regional Director, to explain that it was inhuman to force that woman to move. Their compassion touched the Director who, within the next few days, found an appropriate subsidized apartment for her. The same day, a relative of the woman wrote to the Mother Teresa Conference, saying that the two visitors did as Christ himself would have done, and he included a cheque for \$100 in his letter.

The three actions described above remind us to hear the cries of the poor, to love them tenderly, to detect the causes of their poverty and to advocate for justice whenever the situation calls for it.

*Sr. Aurica Cormier  
Mother Teresa Conference, Moncton, NB*



## 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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