



SAFE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

A National Action Plan

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Canada

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OVERVIEW

The basis of our national housing campaign

On [date], the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul will launch a multi-year, nation-wide, action campaign promoting the concept that safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right. This campaign builds on, among other things, the guiding principles on housing and homelessness set out by SSVP-Canada in 2009. (See “Additional Resources” at the end of this document for an overview of those principles.)

A 2016 report by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized Canada for its “persistent housing crisis”. In 2017 Statistics Canada reported that over 25% of Canadians spent more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter costs, which is the marker for affordability. New purpose-built rental housing is not keeping up with demand and vacancy rates are continuing to decline across the country.

As Vincentians, we constantly witness the devastation that the lack of safe, secure affordable housing has on the people we serve. Across the country, we have seen how people are often forced to choose between paying the rent or buying decent food or even medications. Others put up with sub-standard or even dangerous accommodations that are somewhat affordable, rather than seek out more expensive but safer housing, so that they can pay for basic needs. People who might have had adequate housing in the past are more often experiencing homelessness in tight markets where affordable rents have disappeared for people living on the margins. These stories compel us to act and advocate on behalf of persons in need.

By saying that safe, secure and affordable housingⁱ is *a human right*, we mean that governments and society are obliged to act with respect to housing and homelessness. They must establish “legal recognition of the right to housing, a commitment to equality, measurable goals and timelines, and a comprehensive plan and accountability measures.”ⁱⁱ

Lack of housing is a grave problem ... since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand...

-Pope Francis^{iv}

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those in need who are suffering from injustice. The Society helps those in need to speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on their behalf so that they will not be ignored.

-The Vincentian Rule

This approach ultimately honours Catholic social teachings about the dignity of the human person, our rights and responsibilities toward one another, and the preferential option we must exert for the poor. (For further discussion of Catholic social teachings, see the “Additional Resources” section of this document)

We enter into this work at an opportune time. On June 21, 2019, the *National Housing Strategy Act*ⁱⁱⁱ became law in Canada. The *Act* acknowledges the right to housing, formally recognizing that “housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities”, and “access to affordable housing contributes to achieving beneficial social, economic, health and environmental outcomes.” The *Act* implements a federal National Housing Strategy, which will establish national goals, priorities, initiatives (including funding initiatives described in the “Additional Resources” section of this document) and timelines relating to housing and homelessness. The *Act* establishes a Federal Housing Advocate, whose mandate includes monitoring the implementation of the National Housing Strategy, researching and consulting with various people and groups - including groups like the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul - on housing issues, and regularly reporting to a designated Minister of Parliament. Under the *Act*, the designated Minister must respond to these reports within a specified period of time.

The *Act* will only truly deliver the right to housing if society – including groups like the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul – is willing to listen to the housing concerns of persons in need, learn about existing housing supports, determine what programs might fill gaps, use funding from vehicles like the National Housing Strategy to fill those gaps, and bring concerns about systemic housing problems to those with the power to effect change – from the municipal level right up to the Federal Housing Advocate.

The goal of this campaign is to promote change for those we serve. To help achieve this goal, we aim to educate Vincentians, parishes, and the wider community about housing challenges. We will embark on this work in partnership with those we serve.

“[A] belief that homelessness is the problem in itself (and not a symptom or effect of underlying systemic causes) prevails.”

-SSVP Position Paper on Housing^v

“The right to adequate housing covers measures that are needed to prevent homelessness, prohibit forced evictions, address discrimination, focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensure security of tenure to all, and guarantee that everyone's housing is adequate.”

-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights^{vi}

By engaging in this campaign, we will:

- Expand the breadth and depth of our Vincentian works,
- Deepen our Vincentian spirituality,
- Promote Vincentian activity, and
- Expand the Society and its membership.

We have organized this plan to align with each of these categories.

We understand and celebrate that all conferences are different. In spite of our differences, however, we have a shared purpose of assisting persons in need in all possible ways. We therefore encourage all conferences to take on some of the actions described in the next section of this document.

Look out for nationwide action items in these text boxes; these quick, ready-made, activities can get you started!

We encourage you to use the one-page handouts that accompany each action. They are straightforward activities that you can use with your conference with very little preparation. If you need further support, take a look at the “Q & A’s” section of this document. It will answer additional questions you may have about the actions.

You are not in this alone! Before the official launch of the campaign, the Committee will reach out to Particular/Central Councils, asking them to identify a few local Vincentians who are willing to act as Housing Champions during the course of the campaign. The National Action Committee will reach out to those Champions, to speak in detail with them about the campaign, to ensure that they have information about various housing resources in their community, and to give them practical tips for how to address common housing challenges that Vincentians might encounter. We will provide Vincentians with contact information for their local Champion(s) when we launch the campaign. That way, whenever you encounter a situation where you need advice or support, you can reach out to your local Housing Champion(s).

And, of course, you are always most welcome to contact your regional, central or particular council for further information or assistance! You can also contact the campaign organizers at:

National Action Committee (“NAC”), sj-nac@ssvp.ca

We look forward to learning from your experiences and sharing the resources that you may discover. In the spring of 2021, we will issue the survey included in the “ADDITIONAL RESOURCES” section of this document. Please read it now so you can start formulating your responses, and please be sure to respond to it next Spring. We will use your responses to shape the campaign going forward!

Let’s move together as one, to improve the housing situation of persons in need!

ACTIONS

1.0 Expanding the breadth and depth of our Vincentian works...

Vincentian work consists of both charity and systemic change, and so we have the opportunity to act on housing issues in a variety of ways.

We can:

- Listen to what persons in need have to say about their housing concerns,
- Connect persons in need with community housing services, and help them navigate those services effectively,
- Advocate for change among government and other service providers,
- Create solutions to fill gaps in services,
- Become agents of positive change with regard to our own work, so that we are an effective part of the housing solution.

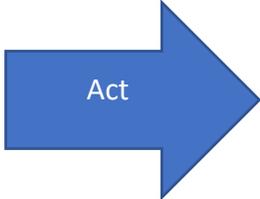
In the following pages, we outline actions you can take with respect to each of these items.

1.1 Listen!



Prep

- Understand that every individual or family facing housing instability is unique, and faces unique challenges. Commit to building a closer relationship with persons in need by actively listening to them, and learning about their housing concerns, during visits with them.



Act

- Explain that SSVP has launched a national action campaign on safe, secure and affordable housing. Ask the people you visit:
 - Do they experience challenges with respect to housing?
 - What are those challenges?
 - What do they think could be done to make things better?
- Tell them that you may share their comments (in anonymous form) with the National Action Committee so that we can further develop our campaign. Tell them what, if any, services you can offer them with respect to their concerns around housing. (See the next page for more info on this.) If they need help with a housing problem, follow the suggestions under “Connect & Navigate” (below), or reach out to your local Housing Champion for suggestions.



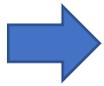
Report

- Keep a record of what you heard, so that you can share it with the National Action Committee (in anonymous form) during the Spring 2021 survey. The National Action Committee will consider these comments as the campaign evolves.

Knowledge of the poor and needy is [gained]... by visiting ... where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes.

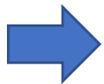
-Blessed
Frederic
Ozanam

Q&A 1.1: Listen



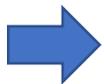
How can I move from a transactional relationship with persons in need (dropping off a gift card) to a more meaningful interaction?

Just start talking. Ask questions. Listen quietly and attentively. Make sure there are plenty of pauses in the conversation so that your persons in need have time to formulate their thoughts and opinions. Don't judge what the person says. Don't assume you know what the person wants: ask them what they think the best solution would be. Try not to be intimidating: avoid taking notes unless really necessary.



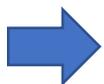
How do I share what I've learned with the National Action Committee if I haven't taken notes during the conversation?

Summarize the conversation after you leave, protect your documentation, and keep it completely anonymous. Then share your notes with the National Action Committee expeditiously.



How do I manage expectations when speaking to persons in need about their housing situation?

Don't make promises about anything you're unsure about. Feel comfortable saying "I don't know" and "I will look into this and get back to you", if you get difficult questions. Then be sure to keep your promise: follow up promptly.



How can I engage in listening to my persons in need if I don't do home visits?

You can still have respectful, listening, conversations with your person in need during encounters at food pantries, thrift stores, or service to those who are homeless. Be sure to respect their privacy, however, and do not ask personal questions within earshot of other people.

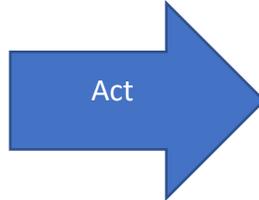
1.2 Connect & Navigate!



- Commit to really engage with what persons in need have shared with you, about their housing challenges.
- Make plans to connect persons in need with housing programs and services in the community.
- Familiarize yourself with at least one government, legal, social or medical support program that relates to housing. If you are not familiar with one, ask your local Housing Champion for ideas. Carry this contact information with you on every visit in case you need it.

Help honours when to the bread that nourishes it adds the visit that consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shake of the hand that lifts up the sinking courage...

-Blessed Frederic Ozanam



- Walk alongside persons in need as they make connections with outside resources, to ensure that they are able to access and benefit from the resources.
- Make your referrals more effective. Gather more information from the centre or program (like the name of the contact person, the information they'll need from people who use their services, their hours of operation, etc.) so you can share this information with the people you visit. Check in regularly with them to see if they have made contact with the centre or program, and if they have faced any barriers.

"Ask, ask and ask again, it is important to identify and join any existing networks..."

-SSVP survey respondent, Kelowna

Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:
Throughout the campaign, the National Action Committee will send you housing resource materials. Distribute them to Vincentians and to families you serve!

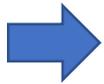
"[People we support need] help with forms/ papers/ documents, etc." -

SSVP survey respondent, Dundas



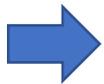
- Share a list of your contacts, and your experiences with them, with your local Housing Champion. They will pass them up to the National Action Committee which will prepare a list of resources for all.

Q&A 1.2: Connect & Navigate



What's a good way to start connecting people with housing services?

Research the housing services that are available in your area, and create a contact list based on what you find. (For an example see the document produced by SSVP-Kelowna in the "Additional Resources" section at the end of this document.)



What if I put people in touch with a service and they never call?

Set a time and date to follow up with them. Ask if they would like a reminder call or text. Ask if there is anything that intimidates them about contacting the service. If there is, offer to join them when they contact the service.



Why is this step necessary?

If individuals and families facing housing instability have ongoing, long-term and consistent support, they are more likely to find and retain a stable housing situation. While we help them find that support from government and community services, we can be a reliable and consistent presence at their side.

1.3 Advocate!

Prep

- Think about how you might inform and inspire government and other service providers to create needed services or remove barriers faced by persons in need. (If you need ideas for how to get started check out the Q&A section of this document.)
- Familiarize yourself with housing issues by listening to what persons in need have to say about it, by following relevant stories, and by doing the background reading found in the "ADDITIONAL RESOURCES" section of this document.

Act

- Take part in petitions, letter writing, and awareness-building campaigns that the National Action Committee, or your Regional, Central and Particular councils will issue throughout the campaign, or design your own!

Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:

The National Action Committee will prepare petitions and letters, seeking positive developments in housing, to government and others who can make change happen. Sign them and send them out!

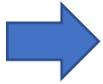
Report

- Tell the National Action Committee how many petitions, letters, etc. you've sent, and where
- If you create your own petition, please share it with the National Action Committee
- Send the National Action Committee a copy of responses you receive
- Send the National Action Committee descriptions of any changes you see in response to your advocacy work, so that the Committee can track your success and make recommendations for others to follow suit!
- Tell the National Action Committee how many people attend your advocacy events.

"Governments should not be allowed to offload these important issues to charitable organizations like they are currently doing with providing assistance to those in need in society. ..."

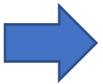
-SSVP survey respondent, Edmonton

Q&A 1.3: Advocate



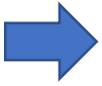
What are some ways that we can advocate?

- Write letters, postcards, petitions to decision-makers and those with influence in housing decisions (government, businesses, landlords, owner's organizations, national housing bodies, etc.)
- Visit your elected representative (for tips on how to do this, see this resource from the SSVP-Ontario Advocacy group: <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/Meeting-with-all3-level-Representatives.pdf>)
- Hold a public meeting or vigil or speaking tour or work with teachers, school boards and local colleges to draw attention to housing issues
- Reach out to the media (for tips on how to do this, see [insert SSVP-ON link -tbd])



How can we create an advocacy campaign focused on education about housing issues?

- Advocate for incorporation of affordable housing themes in official training and educational programs for municipal, provincial and federal government staff, and for those in the private sector who do a substantial amount of work in the housing sector
- Support the work of affordable housing educators inside and outside SSVP
- Organize, alone or with other organizations, informal educational opportunities such as writing or drawing competitions for young people, radio and television appearances, etc.
- Pull together best municipal housing practices to use as examples



What are some specific housing policy areas where we might direct our advocacy work?

- A local conference, Particular Council, Regional Council or National might sponsor an action on one or more of the following items:
 - **Build Public / Social Housing.** Ask municipal, provincial and federal levels of government to build, or support the creation of, dedicated affordable housing, which will be permanent and not subject to market fluctuations.
 - **Free up public land for affordable housing.** Ask municipal, provincial and federal levels of government to ensure that any properties declared surplus in the public realm are first considered for affordable housing. (For an example of this type of campaign see the following materials from SSVP-Moncton, which conducted a survey of vacant lots and made recommendations regarding how they could be used to create more affordable housing [insert link]).
 - **Free up diocesan owned land for affordable housing.** Ask religious groups (including your local Catholic Diocese) and other non-profit agencies whether they are looking at how they can better use or redevelop their property to include an element of affordable housing. Brainstorm whether more might be done.
 - **Housing Allowance.** Housing becomes unaffordable if rents are too high or potential renters' incomes are too low. Urge the federal and provincial governments to develop and maintain a housing allowance for qualified households, to help persons in need find housing in the private market.

- **Regulate short-term rentals.** A recent study from McGill University estimates that “Air B&B” type short-term rentals have taken 35,000 long-term rental units off the market across Canada. Ask municipal government to put restrictions and limits on these types of rentals.
- **Discourage speculative actions that result in leaving houses / rentals vacant.** Sometimes, property owners are only looking at making a quick return on the resale of their property. They find it more convenient to leave the property vacant rather than live in it themselves or put it on the rental market. Vancouver has a vacant property surtax and a foreign buyer’s surtax to discourage this behaviour. Direct your communications about the vacant property tax to the municipal government, about the foreign buyer’s surtax to the provincial and federal government.
- **Encourage the development of secondary suites in existing properties.** Many Canadians are ‘over-housed’ living in properties that are too large for their own immediate needs. Homeowners can access significant rental income, and potentially receive tax benefits, if they rent out a secondary suite in their home. By doing this, they will also increase housing stock for our persons in need. Where secondary suites are permitted under local regulations and codes, encourage homeowners to consider renting out a secondary suite. Where secondary suites are not permitted under local regulations and codes, encourage municipal and provincial governments to adapt local regulations and codes to encourage the development of legal secondary suites in existing properties.
- **Inclusionary Zoning.** Encourage municipal and provincial government to establish regulations calling for a certain percentage of new residential development to be designated as ‘affordable’.
- **Rent Controls.** Check to ensure your province regulates annual rent increases.
- **Reno-victions.** In some areas with low vacancy rates, landlords are evicting tenants under the premise that they are either renovating the property or need the rental unit for their own immediate family. Then, the units are re-rented to someone else at a much higher rate. Ask the provincial government to develop Landlord and Tenant legislation to address this and provide for protection for the tenant.
- **Supportive Housing.** Often when agencies or local government want to build supportive housing or shelters, they have to go to the local community to engage the residents and/or apply for zoning variances. Local conferences should look out for these community meetings and plan on attending and supporting these initiatives in an effort to counter the “Not in my backyard” sentiment that is sometimes demonstrated at these events.

1.4 Create!

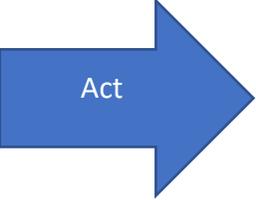


Prep

- Pay attention to gaps that seem to exist with respect to housing services in your community. Discuss with your conference whether they can take steps to fill these gaps.

We are here on this earth to accomplish the will of Providence.

-Blessed Frederic Ozanam



Act

- Create a solution in partnership with persons in need, your Particular or Central council, and outside organizations. *Partnership avoids overlap and helps us get more done: small groups working together can do great things!*
- Join a local coalition of Catholic or faith-based helping agencies, or a local coalition working on housing or homelessness. Work together with them to determine how you can best fill

“In order for the overall housing situation in Canada to improve, there must be collaboration between charitable organizations, local governments, parishes, and the individuals these programs target. This will allow for initiatives to focus their efforts strategically while avoiding unnecessary overlap. Through collaboration and communication, the dignity of the human person can be recognized and promoted.”

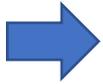
-Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops^{vii}



Report

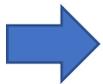
- Keep your local Housing Champion and the National Action Committee apprised as you go along. Tell us about your successes and pitfalls so we can share your experiences with others who might try a project similar to yours.

Q&A 1.4: Create



Is seed money available to kick-start a project?

Yes. Speak with your local Housing Champion or the National Action Committee for help exploring grants, loans, and other funding models – including opportunities under the Government of Canada’s “National Housing Strategy”. (For more information on the National Housing Strategy see the “ADDITIONAL RESOURCES” section at the end of this document.)



How do we survey existing services to ensure we’re filling a gap?

To get an initial overview of existing resources, reach out to your local or provincial government housing office. (For example, in Quebec you can reach out to the Régie du logement; in BC you can contact BC Housing.) For more detailed contact information, ask your local Housing Champion for help.

You can also reach out to local warming rooms, shelters, affordable housing organizations and charity organizations.

Once you have a general sense of what housing supports are currently offered, you can conduct a more formal audit of existing services and gaps. Reach out to your local Housing Champion or the National Action Committee for help.



1.5 Become Agents of Positive Change!

Prep

- Start thinking about how we can change the systems in our SSVP conference and our community to better serve those who are underhoused or who are homeless.

Act

- Determine whether your conference unwittingly deters those who are underhoused or homeless from accessing your services. For example, does the home visit model have an appropriate alternative for those who are homeless? Is there an implicit hierarchy of the "deserving" and the "less deserving" based on people's housing status?
- Proactively interact with those who are living or have lived homeless in your neighbourhood. Engage in polite, meaningful conversation with your heart open to hear more than the words, ready to be supportive through the sharing of resources and – most importantly – if you agree to do something, then do so.]
- Consider applying a systemic change framework to your analysis. For example, try the framework included in the Q&A section of this document.

Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:
The National Action Committee will distribute educational materials regarding housing issues across Canada. Share them widely!

Report

- Share your successes and lessons learned during the spring 2021 survey!

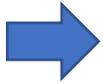
You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis; You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement.

-Blessed Frederic Ozanam^{viii}

"In today's world, voices are being raised which we cannot ignore and which implore our Churches to live deeply our identity as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first of these voices is that of the poor. ..."

-Pope Francis^{ix}

Q&A 1.5: Become Agents of Positive Change



How can improve our conference approach to those who are underhoused or homeless using a systemic change model?

Consider the following sample plan:

- Step 1: Develop a Vision
 - *The Vision:* We as a conference want to serve all those in our community who are in need. We will work to ensure that those who are underhoused or who have no homes do not face barriers in accessing our services. We will in particular work to ensure that those from vulnerable groups experience no barriers when accessing our services. We will reach out to local community agencies who do work with the underhoused and those who are homeless to determine what barriers may exist in our current mode of operating. We will also ask those we currently support for their feedback as to how we might improve our service to the underhoused and those who are homeless. In two years' time, we will have a revised mode of operating which empowers us to actively engage with those who are underhoused and who are homeless in our communities.
 - *Indicators of Success:* The Vision Indicates:
 - why we are undertaking this project
 - who we hope to serve, who will do the work, and with whom we will partner
 - what we hope to accomplish
 - when our deadlines are
 - where our project will focus
 - how (broadly speaking) we hope to achieve our goals
- Step 2: Seek Spiritual Guidance
 - *The Plan:* We will pray as individuals and as a group for inspiration and success with respect to this project. We will seek out other prayer opportunities. We will prayerfully consider how this project could be tailored so that it fulfils the ten social teachings of the Church (ie, the principles of dignity of the human person, respect for human life, association, participation, preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, stewardship, subsidiarity, human equality, and the common good.)

- *Indicators of Success:* The Plan ensures that:
 - The group has a spiritual director, who can either attend meetings or prepare reflections for the beginning of each meeting.
 - The group has regular prayer meetings (at least three per year) that focus on this project.
 - The project is tailored to fulfil the ten social teachings of the church.

- Step 3: Network and Invite Participation
 - *The Plan:* We will reach out to those we serve to ask them how we can best address this issue, and how they might like to participate. We will examine whether other organizations have already developed interesting solutions for this problem – beyond what we are already doing. We will approach them and build a partnership with them. We will brainstorm what other groups we might approach for input and participation. We will examine whether we have untapped knowledge within SSVP or our parishes.
 - *Indicators of Success:*
 - The group includes people whom we serve, and their insights have shaped the project.
 - The group has established active partnerships with a variety of different groups such that:
 - we have a comprehensive description of how other community groups engage with those who are underhoused or who are homeless,
 - we are aware of a contact person for each of those groups, and we have connected with them and told them about our project, and
 - members of those groups participate in the delivery of our project, and we participate in their projects
 - There is an ongoing campaign to recruit new talent for the group from within SSVP and the Parish.

- Step 4: Build Capacity
 - *The Plan:* We will brainstorm what types of assistance we can provide to our volunteers, to enhance their knowledge of the problem, their understanding of root causes, and their sense of how we might move forward.
 - *Indicators of Success:* We have an education plan which details the ways in which we will educate our members with respect to this project.

- Step 5: Gather and Catalogue Data
 - *The Plan:* We will determine a user-friendly method to record how other community organizations engage with those who are underhoused or who are homeless.
 - *Indicators of Success:* We have a dynamic (ie. regularly updated), electronic, database with this information.

- Step 6: Identify Root Causes of the Problem
 - *The Plan:* We will brainstorm amongst ourselves, with the families we assist, with our community partners, and with others, as to why our services may not be fully available to those who are underhoused or who are homeless.
 - *Indicators of Success:* We have compiled a list of root causes which identifies the people or groups responsible for each cause, those who can make change happen with respect to each cause, and ways in which we can pressure those changemakers. We have compiled the list in conjunction with the families we serve, and with other groups that do work on this issue.

- Step 7: Design a Plan for Change
 - *The Plan:* We will determine what steps are needed to create a system where our conference actively engages with and supports those who are underhoused or who are homeless.
 - *Indicators of Success:* We have prepared a comprehensive action plan that addresses necessary steps, our specific role with respect to those steps, and metrics to measure our success with respect to the plan's rollout.

- Step 8: Implement the Plan for Change
 - We meet all metrics within the plan, during implementation.

2.0 Deepening our Vincentian spirituality

Prep

- Ask for support from your conference's spiritual advisor, your parish, your bishop, and any interfaith alliances we may have.
- Regularly reflect on ways that Catholic social teachings -in particular the teachings about the dignity of the human person, our rights and responsibilities toward one another, and the preferential option for the poor - can inspire the ongoing campaign.

Act

- Encourage your persons in need to pray for themselves and others who are underhoused and homeless. Let them know we are praying with them.
- Organize an inter-and/or intra-conference prayer effort or retreat with respect to housing
- Ask your Spiritual Advisor to lead the conference in prayer with regard to what housing actions it might undertake
- Make arrangements for petitions regarding housing matters, following Mass at your local Parish.
- Arrange for a Mass to be said for the intentions of those who struggle with their housing situation
- Seek out existing prayer initiatives in the community about housing (led by a variety of faith groups) and join them

Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:

The National Action Committee will distribute a prayer dedicated to our campaign, and some spiritual reflections. Consider using them at your conference's regular meetings, or before you do a home visit!

Report

- Share your successes and lessons learned during the spring 2021 survey!

"I am feeling quite overwhelmed as we are doing most of this work in the Okanagan and some days we feel like we are hitting brick walls, that does not mean we stop, it just means that I am grateful we are going to do this nationally and pray to God that we get some action."

-SSVP member,
Kelowna

Q&A 2.0: Deepening our Vincentian spirituality



Where can we look for inspiration?

Consider making reference to Pope Francis' extensive work and commentary on service to those struggling with poverty.



Our conference is stretched tight as it is; how can we have time to work on this campaign?

Recruitment will help, but even before that, seek spiritual support. Consider organizing a retreat so that conference members can step back, take a breath, pray for guidance, and get inspiration on taking some small, manageable steps on the campaign.

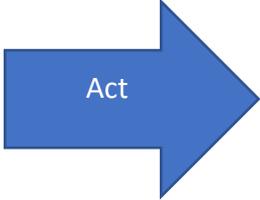


3.0 Promoting Vincentian activity



Prep

- Sometimes those in our parishes and our communities are not aware of the good work that we are doing. We want to think about how we can change that, so that persons in need are aware of our presence, and so that we can attract new volunteers.



Act

- Provide semi-annual updates to your parish about the work that we are doing on this campaign
- Put detailed information about your housing work in church bulletins, church publications, and community newspapers so that the word gets out on the kind of support that SSVP can provide to those in housing need.

Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:
Throughout the campaign we will provide campaign posters and other promotional materials you can use in your parish and in your community!



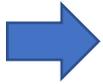
Report

- Monitor media coverage of your campaign.
- Keep track of how many people your message has reached: how many parishioners were in attendance at an information meeting, for example.
- Share that information with the National

“[A friend told me] in their parish bulletin they have a weekly entry called Vincent’s Corner. Because there is some info for parishioners to read EVERY week, the work of SSVP is showcased in an ongoing way. ... [We could use this model to] (1) ask for furniture, clothing, etc. (2) give some info about the Society locally, nationally or world-wide (3) give info about our housing campaign [and] (4) inform families about Canada Learning Bond – for just a few possibilities!”

-SSVP member,
Maple Ridge

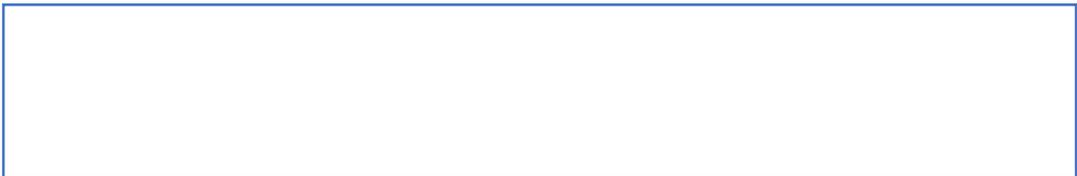
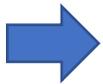
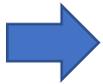
Q&A 3.0: Promoting Vincentian activity



How can we get started telling people outside of SSVP about this campaign?

Start with your Parish networks! Address the congregation. Put a display about the campaign at the back of your church and stand by it to answer questions at the end of Mass. Set up a meeting with your Parish's Catholic Women's League, Knights of Columbus, or Sierra Club group, and see if they might be able to partner with you on your campaign work. Find out if there is a gathering of Catholic or other religious helping agencies in your community, and join it, and tell them about the campaign.

After that, reach out to broader civil society groups that work on housing!



4.0 Developing the Society and its Members

Prep

- Commit to growth, change and new, engaged, membership in your conference!

“[Our] goal is to build a network of members who hopefully will join actively in this campaign. ... [W]e could consider approaching Catholic and other Christian churches plus organizations in our local community.”

-SSVP survey respondent, Maple Ridge

Act

- When you make campaign updates to the parish, ask for new volunteers to meet a specific campaign need (ie, people who enjoy acting as a resource liaison, people who enjoy advocacy work, social workers or anyone who might be drawn to helping persons in need navigate social services, etc.)
- Work to build a strong relationship with at least one other community organization.
- Join a local coalition of Catholic or faith-based helping agencies, or a local coalition working on housing or homelessness.
- Identify an action in this campaign for which you feel you lack competency (for example, conducting a dynamic home visit), and ask for some assistance
- Survey your conference members and the parishioners in your Church to uncover hidden talents that might help you achieve this competency. With help from your local Housing Champion, ask your neighbouring conferences, your Regional, Central or Particular councils, and community organizations if they have knowledge or training that they can share with you to help you achieve this competency.

“We need to explore how SSVP can work with other community organizations to have a greater impact on the housing deficit.”

-SSVP survey respondent, London

Report

- Share your successes and lessons learned during the spring 2021 survey!

“We do not have enough members to do the extra work [on housing]”

-SSVP survey respondent, Kelowna

Q&A 4.0: Developing the Society and its Members



How can we get our current members excited about this campaign, and also get new people interested in joining us because of the campaign?

Address the congregation, tell them about the ongoing campaign, and include some personal (but anonymized) stories about housing struggles your person in need face and how the congregation can help you address those struggles.

Build momentum by having a display at the back of the church and standing by it after Mass to answer questions and welcome potential new members.

Reach out to your local schools to tell them about the campaign and encourage youth involvement.

Host a social event to create a buzz – for example screen a movie about housing issues.



[Redacted]

[Redacted]



[Redacted]

[Redacted]

HANDOUTS

A Vincentian Call to Action:

Let's do our part to achieve safe, secure and affordable housing!

Handout #1.1: Listen!

1. During at least one home visit this month, talk about SSVP's national action campaign on safe, secure and affordable housing. Explain how Vincentians across Canada are:
 - Listening to what persons in need have to say about the housing situation,
 - Learning about housing resources in the community and working to connect persons in need with those services, and
 - Doing what we can to use our organization to secure better housing for all.

2. Tell the persons in need you're visiting that we'd like to hear their thoughts about the housing situation. Tell them that you will share their comments (in anonymous form) with the campaign organizers so that we can further develop our campaign. Ask them: do they experience challenges with respect to housing? What are those challenges? What could be done to make things better? To get the conversation going you can try the following specific questions:
 - Is your home safe and in good repair? Why or why not?
 - Is your home a stable, long-term place to stay?
 - Is your home affordable? How much is your monthly income? What other expenses, like electricity, heat and telephone, do you have? Once your expenses are paid, how much money do you have left? What do you have to buy with what is left? How do you manage to get all that you need to stay healthy? Do you have other sources of help?

3. Consider whether there's anything you can do to support the person you're visiting, in light of what they've told you. For example, you may be able to connect them to community housing services, and/or help them navigate those services. For inspiration consult with:
 - The Vincentians in your conference or particular/central council,
 - Your local SSVP Housing Champion
 - The National Action Committee [at sj-nac@ssvp.ca], or
 - SSVP's National Action Plan on Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing (at [link]).

Remember: you aren't expected to know everything on the spot. When you need to help someone more after you've listened to them but you don't know how, simply say "Thanks so much for sharing this with me. Let me take some time and see if we can find some ways to help you out with your housing situation. We'll call you back as soon as we can." Then ensure you deliver on your promise promptly.

4. Write down a brief summary of the comments (please don't include the individual's name or any identifying information) and send them to the National Action Committee at [sj-nac@ssvp.ca].

A Vincentian Call to Action:

Let's do our part to achieve safe, secure and affordable housing!

Handout #1.2: Connect and Navigate!

1. Devote a few minutes at your next conference meeting to talk about how SSVP can play a role in linking persons in need with housing services that might help them. Discuss the following questions:
 - What would we do, right now, if we went on a home visit and a person in need told us that she was she was going to be evicted in two weeks? Or that he had a bug infestation? Or that her landlord told her she would have to move out because she was going to have a baby?
 - Do we struggle sometimes, figuring out who we might refer our person in need to for help?
 - Are there some referrals that we've done really well, that we should remember for future?

2. With the help of your local Housing Champion, develop a navigation map that illustrates when and how your conference will connect to services such as your local government housing office, your local legal support office, housing charities, etc.

3. Ensure the navigation map is shared with conference members. Develop a protocol for use of the navigation map. The protocol could answer the following questions:
 - a. Will we use the Map for our own use, or distribute it to persons in need?
 - b. Will we carry it with us on every visit?
 - c. Will we make it otherwise available, such as on our website?
 - d. What will we do to ensure that our persons in need successfully connect with the contacts we give them? Will we, for example, have a policy that we will make the initial call together with our persons in need? Or will we leave the information with our persons in need and call back within two days to see how the call went and if any further connections need to be made?
 - e. How will we keep the Map current?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The industrial revolution, which began in 1760 and which continues to this day, fundamentally changed the way that society works. Before this time, most people lived in small communities in relationship with persons in need. The production of most goods was accomplished by hand on a small scale. The industrial revolution made possible the mass production of goods in factories using machines driven by steam. Workers migrated to cities where social supports broke down. Slums, pollution and child labour became facts of life. It was the beginning of greater wealth disparity between owners and their employees. Industrial evolution continues ever more rapidly in our time.

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical called *Rerum Novarum* which pointed out the negative social and economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. *Rerum Novarum* defended the dignity of the person and the principle of the well-being of the worker being more important than profits. While *Rerum Novarum* rejected socialism and communism, it did promote the state's obligation to work for the common good. It promoted the preferential option for the poor saying that when one's needs in life had been met, the rest of what we own, belongs to the poor.

Later popes released more encyclicals in response to political, social and economic events. These encyclicals urged the need for a living wage for workers and the duty of Catholics to aid to those in need. Human dignity, world peace, economic justice and care for the earth were also topics of encyclicals.

In recent times Catholic scholars have studied the papal encyclicals from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* up to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* in 2015. They have discovered themes that speak to the ancient biblical truths about our responsibility to care for the less fortunate and applied them to today's social context.

There is no single version of what we call Catholic Social Teaching but there is consistency among the issues that comprise the teachings and they all flow from the most basic principle which is the dignity of the human person and respect for life.

Themes that follow from this principle are:

- call to community within the family and the broader society;
- responsibilities of governments to provide social structures that promote the common good;
- dignity of work and the right to fair wages;
- subsidiarity: issues should be addressed by the most appropriate level of government.

- solidarity: the recognition that we are all part of the human family and each other's keeper;
- the preferential option for the poor: putting the needs of the poor first for the common good;
- world peace by ensuring social justice which secures the well-being of all;
- care for God's creation.

The preferential option for the poor is an urgent call to Vincentians today because rapidly increasing inequality causes suffering to those in need. While some are getting richer, others are driven to despair by their increasing inability to secure their basic needs for health and dignity. Vincentians must advocate for social reforms that will give dignity to persons in need and that will benefit the whole society at the same time. The National Action Campaign is one initiative, that can make a big contribution to the well-being of our persons in need. It can be a start to addressing inequality.

Frederic Ozanam said "The order of society is based on two virtues: justice and charity. However, justice presupposes a lot of love already, for one needs to love a man a great deal in order to respect his rights, which limit our rights, and his liberty, which hampers our liberty."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SSVP-CANADA POSITION PAPER ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING, OCTOBER 2009: FIFTEEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Adequate housing for all is a human right.
- A collaborative approach is necessary to fight homelessness.
- Social housing can be provided by public, private, or non-profit sector developers.
- Helping people retain their present housing is a best practice.
- Emergency shelters and transitional housing are necessary stop-gap measures.
- Supportive services are essential for successful homeless housing.
- Permanent supportive assisted housing is cost-effective.
- Scattered assisted housing is a best practice.

*For the full document, see [\[here\]](#).

PRINCIPLES OF “HOUSING FIRST” APPROACH, ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA^x

1. **Rapid housing with supports:** This involves directly helping clients locate and secure permanent housing as rapidly as possible and assisting them with moving in or rehousing if needed. Housing readiness is not a requirement.
2. **Offering clients’ choice in housing:** Clients must be given choice in terms of housing options as well as the services they wish to access.
3. **Separating housing provision from other services:** Acceptance of any services, including treatment, or sobriety, is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing, but clients must be willing to accept regular visits, often weekly. There is also a commitment to rehousing clients as needed.
4. **Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities:** Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income towards rent. The preference is for clients to contribute 30% of their income, while the rest would be provided via rent subsidies. A landlord-tenant relationship must be established. Clients housed have rights consistent with applicable landlord and tenant acts and regulations. Developing strong relationships with landlords in both the private and public sector is key to the Housing First approach.
5. **Integrating housing into the community:** In order to respond to client choice, minimize stigma and encourage client social integration, more attention should be given to scattered-site housing in the public or private rental markets. Other housing options such as social housing and supportive housing in congregate setting could be offered where such housing stock exists and may be chosen by some clients.
6. **Strength-based and promoting self-sufficiency:** The goal is to ensure clients are ready and able to access regular supports within a reasonable timeframe, allowing for a successful exit from the Housing First program. The focus is on strengthening and building on the skills and abilities of the client, based on self-determined goals, which could include employment, education, social integration, improvements to health or other goals that will help to stabilize the client's situation and lead to self-sufficiency.

CANADA'S NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY^{xi}

“Through the NHS, the federal government is bringing together the public, private and non-profit sectors to re-engage in affordable housing. Using a mix of funding, grants and loans, the strategy will create affordable, stable and livable communities.”

Targets include:

- “Cutting chronic homelessness by 50%
- Removing 530,000 families from housing need
- Renovating and modernizing 300,000 homes
- Building 125,000 new homes”

Priority areas include:

- “Housing for those in greatest need - the vulnerable populations.
- Social housing sustainability
- Indigenous housing
- Northern housing
- Sustainable housing and communities
- A balanced supply of housing”

Initiatives include:

- “Creat[ing] new housing supply
 - Funding and financing opportunities to build new affordable housing in Canada
- Moderniz[ing] existing housing
 - Funding and financing opportunities to renew and/or renovate the existing housing stock
- [Providing] Resources for Community Housing Providers
 - Technical assistance, tools and funding opportunities to increase capacity and support the community housing sector
- [Promoting] Innovation and Research
 - Promoting excellence, innovation and funding opportunities, in the housing research and data sector.”

For more information, see the complete strategy document here: <https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sf/project/placetocallhome/pdfs/canada-national-housing-strategy.pdf?rev=97491935-2a97-405f-bd38-decf72266ee9>

SURVEY TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN SPRING 2021

1. Please circle any actions that you took:

Engaging in broader and more meaningful Vincentian works

- ✓ Listen: informal conversation with persons in need about [campaign theme]
- ✓ Connect & Navigate: familiarize self with support information, gather more information, check in and support
- ✓ Advocate: take part in petitions and letter-writing campaigns
- ✓ Create: fill service gaps
- ✓ Become Agents of Positive Change: look inward to the conference and parish's own actions that might impact the local housing situation

Deepening our Vincentian spirituality

- ✓ Organize prayer effort or another spiritual activity to support the campaign

Promoting Vincentian activity

- ✓ Provide semi-annual updates to parish, or otherwise keep the community informed about campaign developments

Developing the Society and its members

- ✓ Seek out new volunteers, including those with skills that support the campaign
- ✓ Build a strong relationship with at least one other community organization
- ✓ Network with other organizations that do housing work

2. If you had a conversation with persons in need about housing, please share what you learned here (please do not include any names or other identifying information):

3. What if any services did you connect people to? (Please provide full name and contact information for the service.) What did you do to help people navigate those services? Would you recommend those services to others?

4. What if any advocacy initiatives did you undertake? (Please provide details of what if any letters/petitions etc you supported and if you received any responses.)

5. Did your conference identify any housing service gaps? If so, did you conference take any steps to address those gaps?

6. Did your conference do anything to change its approach/structure, or the parish's

approach/structure, to housing?

7. What if any impact has this campaign had on your conference or council's spirituality? Did you undertake any spiritual endeavours (prayer group, petitions, Mass request) to support the campaign?

8. What if any impact has this campaign had on your conference or council's ability to promote its activity?

9. What if any impact has this campaign had on your conference or council's ability to grow and recruit new members? Did your team build competency by for example doing training?

10. Did you recruit any new members directly in connection to this campaign? Please explain how.

11. Did you establish a partnership or a working relationship with another organization throughout this campaign? Please explain.

12. What if anything did you find challenging with respect to this campaign?

13. What if anything would you change about this campaign?

14. Do you have any additional general comments?

BACKGROUND READING

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul work on Housing - General

- FamVin Homeless Alliance, <https://vfhomelessalliance.org/eng/>
- “13 Houses’ Campaign”, FamVin, <https://vfhomelessalliance.org/c13h/>
- “Homelessness and Hunger”, FamVin, <https://famvin.org/en/2019/11/17/homelessness-and-hunger/>
- “Position Paper on Housing”, SSVP-Canada, Albert Lozier, October 2009 [insert link to pdf]
- “A Guide to Tenancy in Ontario”, SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/GUIDE-TO-TENANCY-IN-ONTARIO.pdf>
- “Making Housing More Affordable” (Backgrounder), SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/AllAboutAffordableHousing.pdf>
- “Addressing Homelessness: Room for All?” (Pamphlet), SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/Pamphlet-Homelessness.pdf>
- “Affordable Housing” (Pamphlet), SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/Affordable_housing_pamphlet.pdf
- “Let’s Talk about Affordable Housing” (Pamphlet), SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/Affordable%20Housing.pdf>
- “Let’s Talk about Affordable Housing and Rent Supplements” (Discussion Starter), SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/Lets-talk-Rent-Supplements.pdf>
- “National Housing Strategy Submission”, SSVP-Ontario Advocacy Committee, <http://ssvp.on.ca/socjus/en/pdf/voice/NationalHousingStrategySubmission.pdf>

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul work on Housing in Canada – specific/regional projects

- “Local Resources Guide: Food, Shelter and Services”, SSVP-Kelowna, [insert link to pdf]
- “Survey of Vacant Lots” & “Observations on Vacant Lots”, SSVP-Moncton, [insert link to each pdf]

Poverty and Housing in Canada

- “Poverty in Canada: Ensuring safe, secure and affordable housing”, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2019, https://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/Poverty_and_Affordable_Housing_EN.pdf
- Jon Willing, “City council declares a housing and homelessness emergency”, Ottawa Citizen, January 29, 2020, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/city-council-declares-a-housing-and-homelessness-emergency>

The Right to Housing in Canada

- The National Right to Housing Network, <http://housingrights.ca/resources/>
- “Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights on the Right to Adequate Housing”, The National Right to Housing Network, March 2020, <http://housingrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-R2H-Network-CESCR-Submission.pdf>

- Housing First, Government of Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/resources/housing-first.html>
- “The Right to Housing 101”, housingrights.ca, <https://nhs.socialrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/R2H-101.pdf>
- Backgrounder: The Right to Housing in Canada, Right to Housing Coalition, <https://nhs.socialrights.ca/resources/background-right-to-housing/>
- “Legislating the Right to Housing in Canada”, housingrights.ca, <https://nhs.socialrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Key-points-for-legislation.pdf>
- “Fighting for the Right to Housing in Canada”, Tracy Heffernan et al, 2015, <http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1207&context=jls>
[p](#)

The Right to Housing, Worldwide

- “The Shift”, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, <http://www.unhousingrapp.org/the-shift>
- “Thematic Reports”, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, <http://www.unhousingrapp.org/resources>
- Institute of Global Homelessness website, <https://ighomelessness.org/>
- UN NGO Working Group to End Homelessness <http://www.unngoendhomelessness.com/>
- “Finland ends homelessness and provides shelter for all in need”, Scoop.me, January 29, 2020, <https://scoop.me/housing-first-finland-homelessness/?fbclid=IwAR2Gffrou5bgQSRcvWHkFJ4JvpN9ajm2wh4INMIbtwlsIjm41RPDL854>

Licensing Landlords in Canada

- “Landlord Licensing”, ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) <https://acorncanada.org/what-landlord-licensing>

Housing Stability in Canada

- “Housing First: Helping People Move from Homelessness to Long-Term Housing Stability”, Homeless Hub, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/housing-first-helping-people-move-homelessness-long-term-housing-stability%C2%A0%C2%A0>
- “CMHC head sounds the alarm on housing policies that push up prices”, Financial Post, Kevin Carmichael, November 22, 2019, https://business.financialpost.com/news/economy/cmhc-head-sounds-the-alarm-on-housing-policies-that-push-up-prices?video_autoplay=true
- Overview of FRAPU (Le Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain) work to promote social housing throughout Quebec, [insert link to pdf]
- “The High Cost of Waiting: Tenant-Focused Solutions to Enhance Housing Affordability”, An Edmonton Social Planning Council Report,

[INSERT ADDITIONAL LINKS]

ⁱ “Safe” means that the shelter is appropriate to the household’s needs, meets minimum building and safety standards and is not a threat to the health of the people dwelling therein. “Secure” means that the cost of the housing and security of the tenancy are reasonably guaranteed. “Affordable” refers to the concept that the cost of housing does not preclude the ability to adequately clothe and feed your family. “In Canada, housing is considered “affordable” if it costs less than 30% of a household’s before-tax income.” <https://cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/developing-and-renovating/develop-new-affordable-housing/programs-and-information/about-affordable-housing-in-canada>

ⁱⁱ Leilani Farha, the executive director of Canada Without Poverty and a UN rapporteur, as quoted by John Paul Tasker of CBC News in *Trudeau says housing is a human right — what does that mean exactly?* on November 23, 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The National Housing Strategy Act*, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-11.2/FullText.html>

^{iv} Pope Francis, “On care for our common home”, paragraph 152

^v Albert Lozier, “Position Paper on Housing”, SSVP-Canada, October 2009.

^{vi} The Right to Adequate Housing, Fact Sheet No. 21, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 2014. Page 6

^{vii} “Poverty in Canada: Ensuring safe, secure and affordable housing”, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2019. Page 6.

^{viii} See the *Rules and Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Canada*, Article 3.22

^{ix} Pope Francis, “Address at the Patriarchal Church of St. George”, Istanbul, Nov. 30, 2014.

^x Principles of Housing First, Government of Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/resources/housing-first.html>

^{xi} Canada’s National Housing Strategy, CMHC, <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/nhs>