



# 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 housing<sup>i</sup> 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.”<sup>ii</sup>

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

*-Pope Francis<sup>iv</sup>*

*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*<sup>iii</sup> 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<sup>v</sup>

*“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<sup>vi</sup>

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](mailto: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.

*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



Act

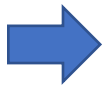
- Explain that SSVP has launched a national action campaign on safe, secure and affordable housing. Ask the people you visit:
  - Do they experience challenges with respect to housing?
  - What are those challenges?
  - What do they think could be done to make things better?
- Tell them that you may 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.

## Q&A 1.1: Listen

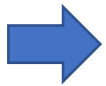


How can I move from a transactional relationship with persons in need (dropping off a gift card) to a more meaningful interaction?

Just start talking within your conference and then with those you serve. 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



Discussion about housing requirements of those you serve with your fellow Vincentians is essential to collaborate with each other to determine the direction best suited to learn from and support persons in need. You will find a summary of some questions and activities to help get the conference discussions started [here](#).

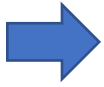


Once your direction is clear within your conference, you can now reach out to persons in need with a goal to better understand their housing challenges and what needs to change to ensure housing stability and a brighter tomorrow. You will find a summary of some questions and activities to get the conversation started [here](#).



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!

Prep

- 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

Act

- 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

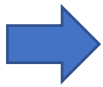
Nation-wide RAPID ACTION:  
Throughout the campaign, the National Action  
Committee will send you housing resource  
materials. Distribute them to Vincentians and to  
families you serve!

*"[People we  
support need] help  
with forms/  
papers/  
documents, etc." -  
SSVP survey  
respondent,  
Dundas*

Report

- 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.



When preparing to discuss housing issues with persons in need, Vincentians should know the facts about their incomes so that they can understand their situations better. You will find a summary of some questions and activities to help get these discussions started [here](#).



What can you do to become an advocate for the homeless? Discover 12 suggestions [here](#).



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!

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

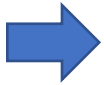
-SSVP survey respondent, Edmonton



## 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.

## Q&A 1.3: Advocate



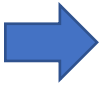
What are some ways that we can advocate?

- 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
- Housing advocacy can take many shapes and forms and often will often dovetail with other societal issues such as health care, living wage and environmental issues. An outline of how to create an advocacy campaign specific to your conference housing needs can be found [here](#).



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."*

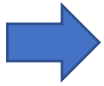
-Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops<sup>vii</sup>

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.

Creating housing can make a meaningful and tangible difference in the lives of those we serve. An overview of how to create affordable housing can be found [here](#).

## 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!

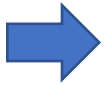
*You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis; You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement.*

-Blessed Frederic Ozanam<sup>viii</sup>

*"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<sup>ix</sup>

## 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!

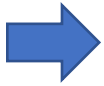
Report

- 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."*

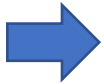
-SSVP member,  
Kelowna

## 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.

The Saint Vincent de Paul Campaign Prayer for safe, secure and affordable housing can be found [here](#).

Has your conference considered creating a prayer circle? Directions on how to create, facilitate and benefit from prayer circles can be found [here](#).

### 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

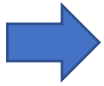
- Monitor media coverage of your campaign.
- Keep track of how many people your message has reached: how many parishioners were in attendance at an information meeting, for example.
- Share that information with the National Action Committee.

*"[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!

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 neighboring 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.

Report

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

*"[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*

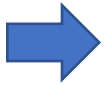
*"We need to explore how SSVP can work with other community organizations to have a greater impact on the housing deficit."*

*-SSVP survey respondent, London*

*"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.

# 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](mailto:sj-nac@ssvp.ca)], or
  - SSVP's National Action Plan on Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing ([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](mailto:sj-nac@ssvp.ca)].

## LISTEN

### 1. During regular conference meetings:

- \* Include a housing discussion period of 20-30 minutes.
- \* At the first meeting, invite discussion in response to list of prepared questions.
- \* Future meetings could include sharing resource information on a housing issue.
- \* Encourage members to conduct short random survey on a home visit or other engagement with persons in need. Refer to Handout 1.1 & February Changing Times.
- \* Ensure all members have copies of Changing Times newsletters.

### 2. Conference discussion questions:

- \* How has housing/homelessness affected persons in need?
- \* What are the major barriers affecting access to adequate housing for all?
- \* Are any members connected to local organizations or groups related to housing/homelessness?
- \* How can SSVP advocate for systemic changes to current structures related to housing/homelessness?
- \* What can SSVP do as a conference or within our council regarding housing/homelessness?

### 3. Results of conference discussion:

- \* Identify any conference members that demonstrate an interest in, or knowledge of housing/homelessness.
- \* Form a committee to address housing/homelessness.
- \* Invite interested members to assist with future conference discussions.
- \* Develop a plan to conduct short surveys during future engagement with persons in need. (home visits, food banks, soup kitchens)

### 4. Survey 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? Monthly income? Expenses? Hydro, telephone, food, etc. What do you have left at month's end?
- \* How is your family's health?

### 5. Survey results:

- \* Record brief summary of comments and submit to national housing committee( [si-nac@ssvp.ca](mailto:si-nac@ssvp.ca))

Note: These questions are a guide and can be revised by members as deemed appropriate.

## LISTEN

The Homeless can be intimidating but are generally very respectful and willing to talk given the opportunity if they believe their voice may be heard.

1. Contact/visit local shelters to explain your objectives.

- \*Provide handout about SSVP and housing action plan. Ask that they organize
- \*To conduct an informal survey regarding homelessness.
- \*To give the homeless a voice in future actions.
- \*To use the survey results to develop a summary of comments in order to formulate an effective plan for advocacy and action.
- \*To listen and gain a better understanding of homelessness and the reasons for being homeless.

2. Arrange a date and time. Request shelter selects several residents for a group meeting. ( 4-10).

3. Shelter visit:

- \* Be on time.
- \*Bring treats. (\$5.00 Tim cards)
- \*Introduce yourself and explain you are there to listen.
- \*Take 2 -4 Vincentians.
- \*Record comments. Tell group they will get a copy of comments.

4. Street visits can also be done but always with a pair of Vincentians.

- \*Approach people gently, quiet voice, explain who you are and ask if they are willing to talk with you.
- \*Listen, make brief notes.
- \*Give them a snack or Tim card.

5. Results:

- \*Prepare a brief summary of comments and observations and submit to national. ([sj-nac@ssvp.ca](mailto:sj-nac@ssvp.ca))
- \*Use summary for future conference meeting discussion.
- \*Develop some possible advocacy /actions based on comments.

## 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 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?



## Connect and Navigate

**When preparing to discuss housing issues with their neighbours in need, Vincentians should know the facts about their incomes so that they can understand their situations better:**

- What level of social assistance (regular welfare or disability benefit) that they receive?
- What level of support do they get for their children. Child benefits can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Information is available on the CRA benefits calculator pages
- Are there different rules or benefits if the family does not have permanent resident status. In Ontario they do not get CCB but substantially less support.
- Are there other benefits distributed through the income tax system? In Ontario, there is a Trillium benefit to help with shelter costs but people have to file their income tax to get it. Do other provinces have programs? Again, the CRA benefits calculator is a starting point.
- When everything is taken into account, what is the family's income?

How does this income compare to the poverty measures by dollars or by per cent. Sometimes, it seems to seniors that a certain amount is a lot because a seniors' household of 2 receives less money. But if they think of providing for 3 growing children with food and clothing or the need for a 3-bedroom apartment, then they can realize that it is not an adequate amount. Comparing the household's income to a poverty measure can give some perspective.

**Now the Vincentian can engage meaningfully with persons in need**

- How does the family spend its money?
- How much is their shelter cost? Do they pay for utilities as well as rent? What per cent of their income is spent on shelter.
- In the Vincentians estimation is the quality of adequate to provide safe and secure housing?
- If the shelter cost is more than 30%, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation considers that they are in core housing need.
- Find out what the family gives up to afford that shelter. Is it an acceptable trade-off or are vital needs being given up? What do they do to compensate?
- How does that make the Vincentian feel?

## **Is there anything that the Vincentian can do to help?**

- Are there other supports that Vincentians can help neighbours access:
  - Rent supplements: Who qualifies, how much, who to apply to?
  - Emergency helps such as once in 2 years bail-outs for rent or utilities?
  - Special utility support programs such as OESP in Ontario
  - Are there other community supports: Saint Vincent de Paul Stores, food banks, community resource centres to help fill the gaps that excessive shelter costs impose?
  - Special counselling or resource agencies such volunteer income tax clinics?

## **The Housing Champions can be charged with finding out some of the information to help Vincentians get started**

- Find out from the provincial or territorial government websites what the income levels for various types of households are. Check provincial or territorial community and social service website. Find out if there are poverty reduction organizations that provide information.
- Check in with the CRA website to find out what federally distributed benefits are available in your area.
- Find out and share poverty measure information for various sizes of household
- Check out if non-governmental organizations exist in your area to help with advocacy or material support. Some of these supports may be part of church-based outreach or they could be arms length government agencies.
  - Community legal Centres
  - Range of supports from SSVP or other faith-based organization
  - Community Resource Centres
  - Food banks
  - Free clothing outlets
  - General information can help conferences get started

**To make this a true spiritual growth opportunity for the conference members, share and discuss what you learned from your experience of walking in your neighbours' shoes. Resist the temptation to criticize their lifestyle choices and focus on the depth of their poverty. If you were in their shoes, how much better would you do?**

## Connect & Navigate

### What Can I Do to Become an Advocate for the Homeless?

#### Twelve Suggestions for Voices of the Homeless.

1. Start with the right attitude: a spirit of solidarity with the homeless, a compassionate heart, a yearning for social justice, a long-term commitment grounded in faith, hope and love.
2. Educate yourself about homelessness issues, human rights, the systemic causes of homelessness, the connection between lack of affordable housing and homelessness. Read literature and surf the net to find out what is being done against homelessness locally and elsewhere, and to learn about efficient strategies and best practices.
3. Get to know the people with housing challenges personally, to understand their situation and point of view: you are dealing with people who have problems not with problem people.
4. Listen more than you talk: ask questions to become knowledgeable about the positive and negative elements of local, provincial and federal programs to counter homelessness.
5. Learn positive messaging strategies: express your beliefs and values about housing in a thoughtful, non-aggressive way, rejoice in progress, and push for still more improvements.
6. Speak out: share your knowledge (proven facts and solid research only) and convictions about universal housing with anyone who will listen: your relatives, your friends, your co-workers, your fellow worshippers, anyone you network with.
7. Write about homelessness issues: prepare and distribute fact sheets; publish blogs and newsletters; send homeless advocacy letters to editors of your local papers and to locally-elected officials. (What is the housing problem? Why should we care? What are the solutions?)
8. Work as a team, network with like-minded people, become involved in organizations that advocate for the homeless or start one yourself.
9. Take part in concrete action to organize non-profit housing projects such as housing co-operatives.
10. Organize educational workshops and conferences on the issues of homelessness, because fostering public awareness and education is advocacy in action.
11. Train, motivate, and support other housing-rights advocates and strategists, to multiply the effects of your personal involvement.
12. Pray a lot, so that you will be bold to challenge housing injustice in the power of the Spirit and not lose heart when the struggle is difficult.

See the Housing Campaign web page - <https://www.ssvp.ca/housing>

Choose one item to pursue from the list in the “**Actions to help create Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing**” document. Here are several ways and means of pursuing your advocacy.

These suggestions are taken from the Citizens for Public Justice. Further details can be accessed at: <https://cpj.ca/cpjs-advocacy-toolkit/>

You can find contact information for your federal MP here:

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en>

You can find contact information for your Ontario MPP here:

<https://www.ola.org/en/members>

You can find contact information for your local councillor by checking the website of your local municipality. Remember – you might have one councillor for your local town, city or village and another one at the Regional level (ie York, Peel, Norfolk-Haldimand, etc).

Do a Google search to find out which other organizations are engaged in similar advocacy activities. Maybe they have a form letter or other suggestions as how to add your voice. There is strength in numbers!

Once you have completed your first advocacy initiative, pick another one and do it again!

Let us know how this works out for you, or if you require any assistance contact us at [advocacy@ssvp.on.ca](mailto:advocacy@ssvp.on.ca)

## CALLING YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

**(The following suggestions apply equally to your MPP and local Councillor)**

A quick phone call to your Member of Parliament's office can be more effective than writing a letter in some cases. As a constituent, you may be able to speak to your MP directly (rather than speaking with their staff). One phone call can be more effective and memorable for an MP if you show that you have some knowledge about the issue, that you respect their time, and that this issue is important to their constituents.

Speaking to a member of the MP's staff can also be very effective. They will have the time to hear your position and they will be able to relay your concerns to the MP.

### On the Phone

- Introduce yourself and identify yourself as a constituent by providing your postal code or address.
- Ask to speak to the MP directly, but do not be surprised if you must speak to the MP's staff instead. Staff can help move your issue forward.
- Give the reason for your call and explain your concern.
- Focus on one or two main concerns per phone call. Do not unload on the MP or their staff with all of your political concerns at one time.
- Ask clear and pointed questions that require some explanation.
- Ask for a commitment to action.

#### **Keep in Mind: Tips for Calling MPs.**

- Tell the MP that this issue will matter to you in the next election.
- Avoid revealing party affiliation or sympathies. If you show that your vote is already cast for a certain party, the MP may not have the incentive to respond to your requests.
- Be as brief as possible while outlining concerns. Show that you respect their time.
- Remain calm and respectful in dialogue. Be willing to work with them.
- Follow up: Find out what actions were taken as a result of your call, and respond appropriately.

# MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

(The following suggestions apply equally to your MPP and local Councillor)

## Step 1 – Setting up a meeting

- Call, email, or visit the constituency office to set up a meeting with an MP. Provide your name, your postal code, and the reason that you would like to meet with the MP.
- If the MP is unavailable for a meeting, request a meeting with a member of their staff. MP staff have more time to meet with you and they can bring your particular concerns to the MP.

## Step 2 – Preparation

- Stay informed on the issue (see “[Doing Research](#)”).
- Write a list of questions that you have for the MP (and specific proposals for solutions).
- Bring materials that the MP can refer to later (such as a [one-page brief](#)). Provide a concise background on the issue, your concerns, and your proposed solutions.
- Ask staff how much information the MP has on your issue. Offer to send informational materials before the meeting.
- Be prepared to listen: In a typical meeting with an MP, the MP talks two-thirds of the time, you one-third.
- Focus on how you can help the MP do their job. Where are the gaps in information? Do you have information that will be of value?
- Get others involved! The more voices, the stronger the message.

## Step 3 – At the meeting

- Present your case clearly and concisely. Focus on one or two issues.
- Insist on a straight answer to your questions. If the representative agrees with you, get it in writing so you can hold them accountable.
- Have a calm and respectful dialogue (even if the MP disagrees with you). Show that you are willing to work with them.
- Always thank the MP for their time and for the opportunity to meet.
- A meeting with an MP usually lasts no more than an hour. Respect any agreed-upon time limit.
- Relax

## Step 4 – After the meeting

- Follow up! Write a letter (or e-mail) thanking the MP for meeting with you. In your letter, summarize any commitments that were made, and ask for an update on what has been done.

# WRITING A LETTER / EMAIL TO YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

**(The following suggestions apply equally to your MPP and local Councillor)**

A personal letter to your MP (Member of Parliament) can be an effective tool for change. Whether you are writing individually or with a letter-writing campaign, the following guidelines will help you know how to write an effective advocacy letter to an MP.

## Style

An original letter can be more effective than a form letter, so try to use your own words.

- Personalize and include your own relevant experiences.
- Two to three Specific points about your issue to explain your position.
- Concise is most effective (one to two pages is best). If you have more information, include a brief on the topic or any other informational materials. See section on “Writing a One-page Brief”.

## Content

- State purpose/objective at the beginning and briefly introduce concerns.
- Describe your interest in the issue and any relevant credentials.
- Include questions that provoke a response.
- Ask for more information or clarification on your MP’s position.
- Request a commitment to a specific action, and give a rationale for your request.
- Thank the MP for any positive action they have taken in the past on this issue.
- Request that the MP respond to your letter.

## Sending Emails to Politicians

An email is just as effective as a letter by post as Parliamentary staff handle both in the same way.

When sending e-mails to a MP or other elected representative, be sure to follow many of the same standards included in the “Writing a Letter to a MP” section (p.25). The email should be brief and focused, with the correct style of address for the representative. Be kind with language, and make sure to ask the representative to respond to your email.

Include your address and postal code so that the representative is aware that you are a part of their constituency.

### **Letter-Writing Campaign**

When MPs receive multiple letters on the same issue, they will pay more attention to it. If you have a large network, share your letter with others as a template. Encourage them to personalize the letter as much as possible.

- No postage is required when you send a letter to an MP.
- Keep a copy of the letter you send to refer back to it when you receive a response.
- Share your letter with other individuals and organizations (like CPJ) who are also advocating for your cause.
- Follow up! Write back to the MP thanking them for their response, adding any reminders of your requests and commitments they have made.

See more information on how to write to your MP <https://resultscanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/how-to-write-to-your-MP.pdf>

**See next page for a Sample Letter explaining the elements that should go into developing your own correspondence.**

**(from Citizens for Public Justice – you can open this letter in word and edit if you want to use some of the content and layout for your own letter - <https://cpj.ca/writing-a-letter-to-your-mp/> )**



March 1, 2015

Always include the date for reference and accountability.

Mr. John Smith, M.P.  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Include name and address of MP with the appropriate style of address.



### SAMPLE: LETTER

Dear Mr. Smith,

State your purpose for writing the letter.

I am writing concerning the development of a federal poverty reduction strategy. In 2013, according to the lowest commonly accepted measure, 2.96 million people in Canada were living in poverty. A comprehensive federal strategy could significantly reduce this number and change the lives of many poor Canadians. I hope that you will do everything you can to bring about positive change in this area.

I have volunteered at a local food bank for six years. While it is rewarding to be a part of this work, it saddens me to see more and more people in our community in need of this type of assistance just to live day-to-day. Many of our clients could be lifted out of poverty through the implementation of a federal poverty reduction strategy.

Your party has committed to many actions to address poverty in Canada, insurance, offering affordable housing and childcare, and seeking justice for aboriginal peoples. Your party has also called for Parliamentary hearings to address a federal poverty reduction strategy. Please now adopt an **official federal poverty reduction strategy**, which would include:

Add personal and relevant experience.

- Creating a comprehensive, integrated federal plan for poverty elimination
- Passing a federal Act to eliminate poverty, promote social inclusion and strengthen social security
- Collecting and allocating sufficient federal revenue to invest in social security

Include clear requests.

Ask questions.

Thank you for your commitment in the past to justice and combating poverty. Will you now work towards a federal poverty reduction strategy to be announced by your party? What specific actions will you take towards this goal? Please respond with answers to these key questions.

Thank the MP for actions they have taken.

Sincerely,

Request a response.

Signature

Jane Anderson  
321 Justice St.  
Edmonton, AB A1B 2C3

Include your name and address at the end of the letter. Your postal code is very important as it shows that you are a member of your MP's constituency.

cc: other MPs, ministers, and organizations who also received the letter

"cc" (carbon copy) other MPs, ministers, and organizations who have received the same letter. The recipient will know that others are aware of this issue.

## **Actions to help create Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing for All**

*In conjunction with the National Housing Campaign to work toward establishing safe, secure and affordable housing for all, we ask your conference or council to consider these following action items. Each of them, in their own way, contributes to the creation of safe secure and affordable housing in our communities.*

*Chose one you feel passionate about, or that might especially be pertinent to your community. See the “How To” section at the end of the document to help you get started.*

**Housing allowance:** Housing allowances that are part of social assistance benefits are far too low. People have to spend large portions of their basic needs allowances to pay for their shelter. Social assistance rates are the responsibility of the provinces and territories and should include a reasonable allowance for safe, secure and affordable housing.

**Action:** Contact provincial representatives to demand social assistance rates that allow people the ability to afford decent housing. Find other groups in your area advocating for decent housing allowances and add your voice.

**Build Public / Social Housing.** We need to build dedicated affordable public housing as there has been no substantial investment in the building of social housing in Canada since the 1990's. Purpose built affordable public housing is permanent and not subject to market fluctuations.

**Action:** The national housing strategy proposes the construction of social housing. Realizing this goal takes the coordinated efforts of municipal, provincial and local governments. Organize a letter writing or email campaign asking your representatives at each level what they are doing to promote the building of social housing.

**Rent controls:** Rent controls can help keep the cost of housing stable but often there are loopholes that let landlords impose unreasonable rent increases. Rent increases should be in line with inflation and allowed annually, not when there is a change of tenants or another random event. Landlords should have to justify rent increases based on property improvements.

**Action:** Provincial governments regulate rent controls through Landlord and Tenant legislation. Are there rent controls in your area? Are there avenues of appeal where tenants can complain

about increases? What protections exist for tenants? If not, ask your provincial representative to act on behalf of tenants.

**Reno-victions.** In some areas with low vacancy rates, landlords are evicting tenants under the excuse 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.

**Action:** Landlord and Tenant legislation needs to address this and provide for protection for the tenant. The provincial government regulates these matters. Check out rules in your area.

**Encourage development of secondary suites in existing properties:** Many Canadians are “over-housed”, living in properties that are too large for their own immediate needs. Local regulations and codes can be adapted to encourage the development of legal secondary suites in existing properties.

**Action:** Advocate for regulations in your community that allow landlords to easily convert unused space into legal, safe and affordable housing. Talk to your local municipal representatives to find out how this might be facilitated in your area.

**Inclusionary Zoning.** This regulation calls for a certain percentage of new residential development to be designated as ‘affordable’. The government could offer incentives for builders to have a certain percentage of units in apartment buildings made available at affordable rents. Mixed income communities are healthy communities.

**Action:** Find out if there is inclusionary zoning in your municipality. Do measures exist at the municipal, provincial or territorial levels to provide incentives to builders and developers to provide affordable units?

**Support and Promote Alternative Housing Units.** Several jurisdictions are looking at prefab, modular, stackable housing units to provide quick housing for the homeless. Laneway housing or small units built on existing residential lots can also provide homes more quickly. Public support for creative ways to create affordable housing at lower cost can encourage municipalities and builders to be creative about providing more housing.

**Action:** This campaign can be directed at the municipal and provincial levels of government. Do any of the levels of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in your area own property that might accommodate this type of housing?

**Free up publically owned surplus properties:** Unused surplus land and buildings owned by various levels of government should be offered up to be redeveloped as affordable housing.

**Action:** Letter writing campaigns and/or visits to elected representatives at every level of government to demand that, in view of the affordable housing crisis, any properties declared surplus in the public realm should be first considered for affordable housing.

**Free up Diocesan owned land for affordable housing.** Many Religious groups and other non-profit agencies that own property could look at how the land might be better utilized to benefit the community. The construction of affordable housing would a meaningful investment in the community.

**Action:** Begin a dialogue with your diocese. Does your SSVP own any property that is underutilized or be could better repurposed to afford an opportunity for affordable housing?

**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.

**Action:** Find out if the province or municipality has a tax policy designed to keep residential buildings occupied. If not, contact representatives at both levels to encourage them to adopt such policies, as other municipalities across Canada are doing.

**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. Housing advocates demand that local jurisdictions put restrictions and limits on these types of rentals.

**Action:** Does your municipality have reasonable restrictions and rules governing short term rentals? If not, ask tour local municipal representative to work towards implementing them.

**Support affordable housing initiatives in your neighbourhood:** At times non-profit agencies secure the necessary funding to establish supportive housing for homeless people, people with disabilities or other marginalized groups.

**Action:** Fulfill your Vincentian mission of charity by championing these initiatives in your community. Monitor when local meetings (virtual or otherwise) to discuss proposed affordable housing applications are scheduled so that you might voice your support by attending or writing a letter.

### SSVP campaign prayer for

#### Safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right

Gracious and loving God, we come to you out of care and concern for especially the persons in need and those struggling to find adequate shelter.

Though he was divine, Your Son Jesus did not cling to his divinity, but humbled himself to pitch his tent among us. He was loved and cared for by Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. He invited the first disciples to spend time with him in his home, yet often had no place to lay his head during his ministry.

He taught us to love you above all, then others, ourselves, and all of creation which he often used in his parables to convey his message of new life. Help us to love and serve him in the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and especially persons in need.

Grant us wisdom to make good decisions in our ministry to persons in need, strength to carry out those decisions, humility to accept the ideas of others, and joy in striving to alleviate poverty in our society and to provide adequate housing as a basic human right for all.

Inspire landlords to devote greater care and attention to the maintenance of their facilities, making life better for their renters. Fill the minds and hearts of the wealthy with an openness to be partners with us in finding and creating adequate housing for those most in need.

United with our Blessed Mother, and relying on the intercession of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederick Ozanam, we ask this of you through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

*Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI*

## Deepening Our Vincentian Spirituality

### 1. Organize a prayer circle.

\*As part of the conference efforts, suggest saying a special prayer after the opening prayer for the homeless and those in need of safe, secure and affordable housing. (Use national campaign prayer).

\*Include the names of individuals or families (first names only) who are struggling as part of this prayer.

\*Form a prayer circle of conference members who would commit to saying prayers for the homeless and needy on a regular basis.

\*Expand prayer circle by inviting parishioners to sign up to pray.

\*Have regular in person or virtual prayer meetings.

### 2. Prayer circle actions

\*As part of prayer circle introduce ways members can advocate for housing/homelessness solutions. This could include writing letters to local government and related agencies.

\*Organize an inter faith prayer coalition with other faith traditions in your community.

\*Prayer circle members could also offer to call families in need to pray with them for housing solutions. This could include a brief conversation with an emphasis on listening to the person in need.

### 3. Prayer circle results

\*Conference members make housing and homelessness a spiritual journey..

\*A community wide faith-based reaction to housing/homelessness.

\*Advocacy actions based on our common faith beliefs in human dignity.

\*Include a reflective faithful response to the issues related to housing/homelessness.

\*Enable conference members to make housing/homelessness a very personal issue.

\*Enable members who are older or unable to take other actions to become part of the solution and be an active advocate.

## 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<sup>x</sup>

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<sup>xi</sup>

“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):

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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?

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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.)

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

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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](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](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=IwAR2Gffr\\_ou5bgQSRcvWHkF\\_J4JvpN\\_9ajm2wh4lNMIbtwlsIjm41RPDL854](https://scoop.me/housing-first-finland-homelessness/?fbclid=IwAR2Gffr_ou5bgQSRcvWHkF_J4JvpN_9ajm2wh4lNMIbtwlsIjm41RPDL854)

## **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](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, <https://outlook.live.com/mail/deeplink?version=2020030202.14&popoutv2=1&leanbootstrap=1>

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<sup>i</sup> “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>

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

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

<sup>iv</sup> Pope Francis, “On care for our common home”, paragraph 152

<sup>v</sup> Albert Lozier, “Position Paper on Housing”, SSVP-Canada, October 2009.

<sup>vi</sup> The Right to Adequate Housing, Fact Sheet No. 21, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 2014. Page 6

<sup>vii</sup> “Poverty in Canada: Ensuring safe, secure and affordable housing”, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2019. Page 6.

<sup>viii</sup> See the *Rules and Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Canada*, Article 3.22

<sup>ix</sup> Pope Francis, “Address at the Patriarchal Church of St. George”, Istanbul, Nov. 30, 2014.

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

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