

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CIRCLE  
SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Dear Circle Members:

As the representative of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Canada on this coalition I would like to express our gratitude to be part of the effort to improve relationships between the Catholic Church and Indigenous peoples in Canada. I have been asked to share some comments from our organization's social justice committee as well as some of the positive actions we have undertaken related to poverty amongst Indigenous peoples.

While we understand the main focus of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle is to develop a response and action plan to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we also believe we need to undertake more action above and beyond these recommendations. These further actions may not be part of our mandate but we believe they can certainly enhance our ability to strengthen future relationships with Indigenous peoples.

In addition, as an organization founded on the example set by our patron, Saint Vincent de Paul and our founder Frederic Ozanam, we place an emphasis on actions rather than words alone. While we certainly support the need for this coalition to develop an action plan that includes immediate steps to achieve the goal of addressing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we do not believe this completes our obligation. The Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle has the opportunity to use our response and actions related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to lead towards the development of a viable collaborative partnership with Indigenous peoples.

I would like to briefly review our current work with Indigenous communities that include the Inuit peoples of the Far North as well as First Nations communities. I would like to say that in all of our efforts we have started by developing a strong working relationship with the local priest or religious sister. We have found these representatives of our Church to be deeply devoted to helping their parishioners and in so doing have certainly developed a sound and experienced base from which we can begin our efforts.

North of 60 –This work was started in our Western Region in 2014 in response to a request for help from one of the communities .....see attachment

In 2015 it was decided our Ontario Region would take on the Nunavut Region as part of the North of 60 project .....see attachment

First Nations –While we have tried for years to develop stronger relations with First Nations communities we have only recently been able to make the proper contacts which will enable us to work as partners...

Cadotte Lake-see attachment

James Bay-see attachment

We have also had meetings and discussion with Catholic missions on possible ways we can collaborate as well as with several bishops and dioceses. In our work in the Far North with the Inuit peoples, we have established some very strong relations with Bishop Krotki and a number of his parish priests. We are developing a high level of interest amongst our membership and invite other member organizations of this circle to consider ways in which we can collaborate on future efforts. We have over 800 parish based

Conferences in Canada with about 10,000 members. Our efforts must not be considered as only a far northern issue as I have also received pleas for help from First Nations communities in southwestern Ontario.

We also believe we need to collaborate with existing Indigenous organizations such the Assembly of First Nations, Indigenous friendship centres as well as the leadership at various First Nations.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul also realizes the need to inform and educate our own members on the many issues and injustices that challenge Indigenous peoples in Canada. Safe drinking water, education, racial prejudice and the criminal justice system are some of the more important issues we face.

One of the major challenges we face as a lay Catholic organization are the barriers that have existed for years between the Catholic Church and Indigenous peoples. As we take actions that address various needs the emphasis is always on being in a sharing partnership, not charity. This concept has led to developing a strong and trusting relationship between our Society and Indigenous peoples which has resulted in building bridges between our Catholic faith and Indigenous peoples. In our experience working with Indigenous communities and peoples, we have found there is a real need to first win their trust by listening to them as we seek to find ways that we can collaboratively work towards a better future. When we begin such a relationship our commitment has to be one that will last as long as we are needed. Our actions speak much louder than any words. We also believe the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul can play a role in the education of both our membership and the larger Catholic population in regards to understanding the culture and traditions of Indigenous peoples.

Our National website ([www.ssvp.ca](http://www.ssvp.ca)) contains news and updates about our activities and the social justice edition of Vincenpaul, our National online monthly magazine also contains articles about these actions. The social justice edition is published in February, June and October of each year. We encourage our member Councils and Conferences to consider inviting representatives from nearby First Nations to attend a meeting to speak about their community and people. Our 2017 AGA in Quebec included a moving and informative presentation by Graydon Nicholas about Our Lady of Guadalupe and this Circle.

Our goal in this relationship is the same as our goals for all those living in poverty. To engage, encourage and enable these fellow citizens to have a voice in determining what they need and how it can be achieved. We are not perfect in this endeavour but we do continue to make the effort, which is not one of charity but rather one of sharing, caring and compassion.

In closing, I would again like to express the appreciation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to be invited to be a member of this important coalition.

Sincerely,

Jim Paddon, Chair  
National Social Justice Committee  
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Canada