

CHANGING TIMES – DECEMBER 2020

Safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right

As we near the end of 2020, there are many thoughts, memories, concerns and hopes we likely all have for 2021.

With 2020 came COVID-19, which has quickly grown into a global pandemic that has affected each of us in different ways, including the loss of relatives and friends for some.

Advent is a time of hope for all, a time of reconciliation, a time of enjoying family, a time to reflect on both the past year and the new year soon to be with us. We have seen remarkable examples of dignity and compassion in the efforts to relieve poverty in Canada by Vincentians, fellow Canadians and all levels of government alike. Let's remember these good things as we move into 2021.

Our national housing campaign launches on February 7, 2021, and we encourage all Vincentians to become engaged in the many issues surrounding housing and homelessness. I especially hope your conference will take some time to review the campaign and, if possible, decide on one or more such issues to take on. Your knowledge of housing and homelessness in your community, along with contacts you might have within your local government, would weigh heavily in the campaign's success.

Perhaps your conference can plan for action in one or two areas in 2021. Then, since the campaign will last two to three years, you can tackle other issues or needs in the following years. Please join us.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for all levels of government and for charitable organizations like ours. For instance, we've had to stop or rethink our most essential service, the personal home visit. Yet, it's inspiring to see how we have adapted to the circumstances and tried to continue serving our neighbours in need to the best of our capabilities.

So, let's remember what we learned during COVID-19, especially how we managed to maintain our personal relationship with those who, in addition to the daily challenges of living in poverty, must now weather the effects of the pandemic.

We have also seen how some local governments have found various options to temporarily alleviate homelessness. Why can't these be continued as longer-term solutions to homelessness?

Our national housing campaign is one way we can call on our political leaders to address not only the need for housing in general, but also the issue of homelessness. The campaign also provides all Vincentians with a channel to reform and strengthen the structures designed to alleviate homelessness. As the campaign theme states, safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right.

We can tap into our personal relationships with the most vulnerable to make a difference in every one of our communities, as these ties are how we'll remember those living in poverty as we all try to recover from COVID-19. Please join us.

Challenges aplenty await in 2021, but if we look at these challenges as opportunities, we can make 2021 successful. Take, for instance, the need to provide more and better educational resources and materials that clearly define the concept of social justice. What's more, *systemic* change is the driving force that will allow us to transform the day-to-day lives of one and all. In 2021, we'll strive to achieve these goals.

I sincerely thank all members of the Society here in Canada for their dedication to our mission and values. I have never been more honoured to be a Vincentian than during this time of uncertainty. In addition, I so value the efforts of our national social justice committee and of all social justice reps across Canada. You truly have made a difference.

May Christmas and Advent be a season to remember all those who have been affected by COVID-19, and to be thankful for our families and friends. May God bless our leaders here in Canada and around the world. May our prayers bring an end to COVID-19 in 2021 and help launch a recovery that breeds more compassion, less judgment and more joy as we pursue our work for justice and charity.

Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee