

CHANGING TIMES - January 2020

Safe, Secure And Affordable Housing Is A Human Right

A 2016 report by the United Nations committee on Economics, 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% of their income on shelter costs, which is the marker for affordability. New purpose-built rental housing are not keeping up with demand and vacancy rates are continuing to decline across the country.

As Vincentians we constantly witness the devastation the lack of safe, secure and affordable housing has on our neighbours in need. We have seen how families are often forced to choose between paying the rent or buying decent food or medications. Others put up with sub-standard or even dangerous accommodations that are somewhat affordable rather than seek out more expensive but safe housing so that they can pay for their 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 with and on behalf of our neighbours in need.

The campaign theme of safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right means that governments at all levels and society in general 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.”

By advocating and working to have governments and society recognize housing as a human right, we are ultimately honouring Catholic social teachings about the dignity of the human person, our rights and responsibilities toward one another, and the preferential option for the poor.

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

During this coming year, *Changing Times* will maintain a focus on our 3 -year national campaign with informative updates, information and stories from across Canada about how this housing crisis affects us all, but especially the most vulnerable.

If we are to achieve any level of success with this campaign, we need the help and participation of Vincentians from across Canada and at every level. The grass roots conference will be the most important component of our success. While we will count on our leadership at the national, regional and council levels, it will be our conference members who really lead this effort. You know your communities, your local government, and the needs of those we serve. You are likely aware of any community -based groups or organizations that may share our goals and with whom we can collaborate. You know your parish and pastor which gives you the ability to inform and recruit support for this campaign from within your faith community.

Our campaign committee, the national social justice committee and our network of social justice committees and reps across Canada are committed to taking on the challenges of this campaign. The national campaign committee will provide supportive resource material through various social media sources. Our goal is to develop an effective communications plan to both educate and inform all Vincentians about this campaign but to also provide ways and means for your comments, input and suggestions on how we can make the campaign more effective. One other goal of this campaign is to demonstrate what social justice in action looks like by choosing a theme such as this one.

One final comment is to remind everyone that the theme of safe, secure and affordable housing being a human right is a global issue. There are several Vincentian initiatives related to housing and homelessness which we shall include in future *Changing Times* editions.

The United Nations is also working on actions to address homelessness on the global level. There is currently a working group of NGOs' (non-governmental organizations) at the United Nations which includes several branches of the Vincentian family, one of which is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

We cannot leave this topic without also recognizing the support of Pope Francis, who has stated... *"lack of housing is a grave problem.... since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand..."*

Please support us during this campaign with your words, actions and prayers.

National Action Committee for Safe, Secure and Affordable housing.
National Social Justice Committee