

CHANGING TIMES, MARCH 2020

Safe, Secure And Affordable Housing Is A Human Right

As we continue to discuss the national campaign theme of safe, secure and affordable housing being a human right, I'd like to focus on the topic of systemic change as it relates to the campaign theme. The systemic change concept is based on the understanding that there is a relationship among many factors which all contribute to a result.

Regarding poverty, we must take a holistic approach and consider all the relative factors that lead to an individual experiencing poverty. If we only address one or two of these factors, the result will likely be that the person continues living in poverty with little or no hope of escaping his or her situation. Our charitable works can address immediate needs such as short-term supply of food but fails to offer any sustainable assistance.

However, if we use this personal contact with our neighbours in need to listen and understand what their barriers and challenges are, we may be able to discover how we can do more, either by referring them to other community services, or developing new ways we can better serve their needs. In addition, there could be a level of advocacy for changes to the structures and systems that tend to keep people living in poverty. This is systemic change, which is an important component of social justice.

As our national housing/homelessness campaign moves forward, we shall also see how there are many factors that prevent people from finding and affording safe and secure accommodations. These factors include unemployment, or having work that does not provide a decent living wage, lack of education, health concerns, substance abuse, physical and emotional abuse, mental illness, new immigrants/refugees and racial prejudice. If we consider housing as a major factor, then by focusing on this issue, we can improve the opportunity of escaping the cycle of poverty.

Every member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has the ability and opportunity to make a positive difference during this campaign, whether at the national, provincial or municipal level. I would encourage every council and conference to review the campaign resource material, which will be available once the campaign is approved and launched later this year. The campaign will measure its success through various methods, but the one major component will be the number of councils/conferences that actively support it.

Campaign news and updates:

The national campaign committee (NAC) currently consists of the following members:

Chair: Jim Paddon,

National council: Richard Pommainville

Quebec Region: Claude Laflèche

Ontario Region: Corry Wink and Margaret Flynn

BC-Yukon Region: Elaine McMurray.

The NAC has developed an extensive draft action plan which we distributed to each regional president in early January, as well as the national social justice committee and several selected councils in each region. We asked for their feedback and comments on the plan, with the end goal being the final draft of the action plan being presented to the national board of directors April 4-5, 2020. The action plan will also be presented to the general membership during the Calgary Annual National Formation in June. There will be an official launch of the campaign later in 2020 and it will run for two years.

The NAC conducts monthly online Teams meetings, but we will hold a one-day in-person meeting on April 16 in Toronto, during which we will develop a strategic plan with various steps required to launch, promote and distribute the action plan to all members. One of the major topics we will discuss is developing a communications plan that will include methods for members to share their comments and recommendations as well as how they will support the campaign in their region and community. This will be a key factor in the success of the campaign. There will be resource information on the national website (www.ssvp.ca) as well as the action plan itself.

The action plan is an extensive document to be used as a guide on how you may become involved. It is meant as a guide and a source of information on the various ways to be involved and actions you can take. If you read the campaign action plan and consider housing and homelessness to be the single most important factor when we discuss poverty, every Vincentian should clearly see the need to actively support the campaign in whatever way you determine to be the best fit for your time and ability.

Please join us.

BECOME AGENTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE!

*Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee*