

CHANGING TIMES - NOVEMBER 2020

Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing Is a Human Right

Our national housing campaign committee has met every month to fine-tune and finalize the action plan, which many of you have seen in its earlier drafts.

The final version of the plan was presented to and approved by our national board of directors on October 17, 2020, allowing us to move forward with the campaign. Also approved was the official launch date of February 7, 2021, which is also the feast day of Sister Rosalie Rendu.

In the months leading up to the launch, the campaign committee will craft strategic plans for both the launch date and the promotion of the campaign itself. As we stated previously, the success of the entire project depends on how strongly our grass roots conferences embrace it in their own communities and dioceses.

On that note, can you raise the issue with your mayor or your city councillors? Or are you familiar with or part of community collaboration on housing and homelessness? These are both examples of effective local action, so please consider supporting the campaign at your council/conference level. In fact, the recruitment of local champions who can work with us on the national and regional fronts is a priority: if you or other members are interested, contact us for more information.

Without a doubt, having safe, secure and affordable housing is beyond important. It's a human right and a key factor in giving every person and family the opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty.

An intrinsic part of this effort is the need to address homelessness and help those living from couch to couch, shelter to shelter and street to street. Yes, usually many factors contribute to a person's homelessness, but it may also be a matter of not having any support in the struggle with social structures that block the way to success. Our Society of Saint Vincent de Paul can make a difference!

Here's another weighty factor in the incidence of poverty and homelessness: the challenge of systemic racism faced by so many individuals. This underscores the need to listen to the experiences of those we serve, especially if they belong to a racialized group. We must also tackle housing issues specific to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, along with other factors affecting Indigenous People in Canada.

Again, our first task is to listen to those wrestling with housing challenges; then, we can team up with other services to push for fundamental changes to the structures that may themselves prevent solutions. And that push will need to target all levels of government.

We may also be able to work with other organizations to help solve the housing dilemma. Ultimately, by becoming agents of positive change, we not only give hope

to those we serve, but also demonstrate to fellow Vincentians that we *do* have a role to play in this critical cause.

What's more, the campaign may well deepen our own Vincentian spirituality and our Christian belief in the dignity of every human being, as well as promote our mission of charity and justice to the larger Catholic population, which in turn may prompt more members to join our efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led many cities to provide temporary housing to those most in need. This measure should become a longer-term solution, in fact. And now is our chance to convince all governments that they need to maintain temporary housing while crafting other solutions during the COVID-19 recovery.

This is where our local conferences can have a huge impact. In many cases, we know our mayor or city councillors and can plead with them for further action. We may even know local builders who would like to join affordable-housing initiatives. Finally, let's pool our efforts with those of other organizations to fight homelessness and inadequate housing.

We need you! Please consider joining the housing campaign as a local champion.

Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee