

Safe, Secure And Affordable Housing Is A Human Right

In March 2019, the SSVP National Council of Canada approved the National Action Committee's recommendation to conduct a 3-year national housing campaign. The overarching goal of this campaign will be to educate Vincentians, our parishes, and the community at large about housing issues. By working towards this goal, we hope to deepen our Vincentian spirituality, rejuvenate the membership of the Society, and thereby enhance our service to those living in poverty.

The campaign theme of "*Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing is a Human Right*" can be briefly explained.

- **Safe** means that the shelter is appropriate to the household's needs, meets minimum building and safety standards and is not a threat to the health of the residents.
- **Secure** means that the cost of the housing and security of the tenancy are reasonably guaranteed.
- **Affordable** refers to the concept that the cost of housing does not preclude the ability to clothe and feed the residents. The standard in Canada is that the cost of adequate housing should not exceed 30% of the household income.

By saying that safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right, we mean that governments and society are compelled to act with respect to housing and homelessness. To quote Leilani Farha, executive director of Canada Without Poverty, 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."

Vincentians are uniquely qualified to talk about safe, secure and affordable housing through our visits and interactions with people coping with poverty, as we can witness how access to decent affordable housing is a challenge to those we serve. In addition to the issues related to housing, Vincentians are also committed to combating homelessness. The Vincentian family recently celebrated the 400th anniversary of its charism with a new global commitment to end homelessness.

Anticipated outcomes of this campaign are

- a. Engage in broader and more meaningful Vincentian works,
- b. Deepen our Vincentian spirituality,
- c. Promote Vincentian activity, and
- d. Develop the Society and its members

Housing is one of the most important issues related to enabling every Canadian to achieve the goal of living with a true sense of human dignity in solidarity with others. If the SSVP is to realize success during this national campaign, we need the support of every council and conference across Canada. Housing and homelessness are issues that are national, provincial and municipal in nature. However, it is our belief that the most important component of this campaign is at the grass roots conference level. Vincentians across Canada are best equipped to address housing and homelessness in their own communities. Therefore, the development of this campaign will include opportunities for your input, comments and suggestions in the action plans we shall develop.

We would also recommend Vincentians use their existing relationships with our neighbours in need in the following ways.

Listen. Use the home visit or any other method of activity to listen to the challenges they may face regarding safe, secure and affordable housing. Invite an open sharing of these challenges from which we can learn what needs to be addressed.

Connect. In response to what has been shared with us, Vincentians can connect neighbours in need with programs and services that already exist, like legal, social, medical and other support centres and government programs. The national action committee shall endeavour to coordinate and distribute a housing and services list, with input from councils and conferences.

Navigate. Vincentians can walk alongside neighbours in need as they make connections with outside resources, to ensure that they are able to access and benefit from the resources. We would suggest an effort to make our referrals more effective. This may include gathering information about a program or service. It could mean a simple check-in with their neighbour to see if they have made contact or have faced any barriers.

Advocate. Vincentians can work in partnership with our neighbours in need to encourage government and other service providers to create needed services or remove barriers they may face.

One result that we hope this campaign will achieve is to assist all Vincentians to better understand what social justice is about and how it is defined when put into a specific action plan with goals, measurements and results. Any success this campaign has will be enhanced by the support and involvement of every council, conference and fellow Vincentian.

Jim Paddon, Chair

National Social Justice Committee