



Accessibility as a Social Justice Issue

A Vincentian Call to Inclusion, Dignity
& Systemic Reform

Presented by Jenna Goldsack

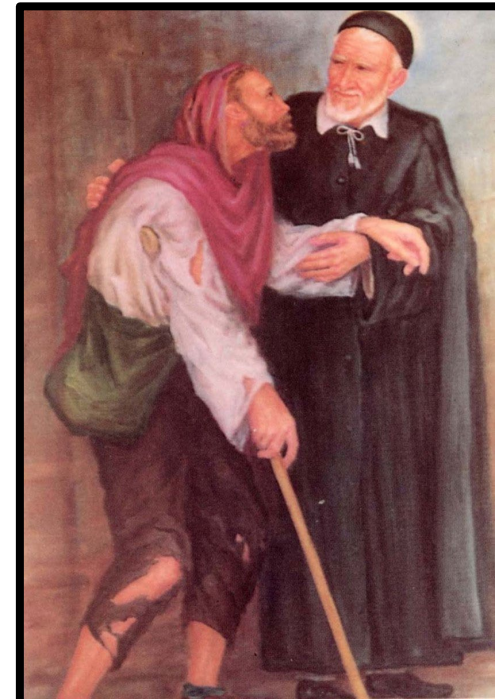
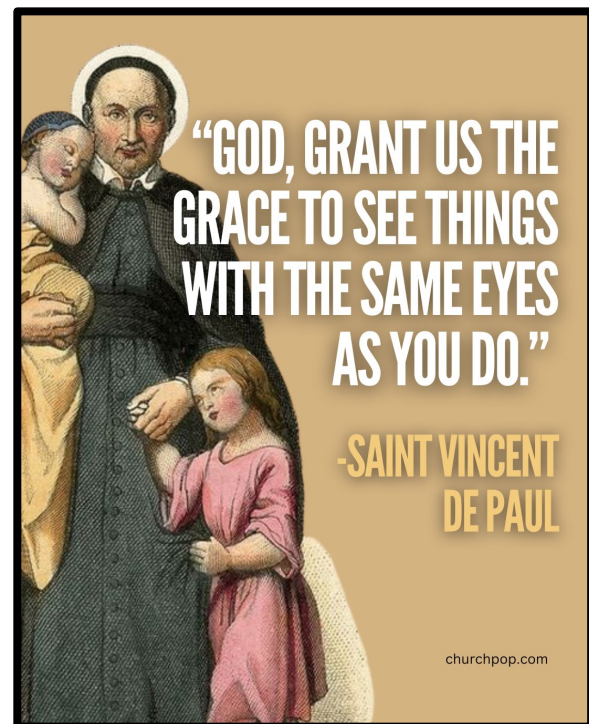
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
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Through the eyes of St. Vincent De Paul...

- St. Vincent De Paul challenged us not only to meet people's immediate needs, but to remove the barriers that keep them from living with dignity
- This social justice topic highlights this perfectly. We must recognize the barriers that exist, even if they may not personally affect us
- It is our duty as Vincentians to identify and address the barriers that exist that make it hard for our brothers and sisters to live with the dignity Christ gives us all

Let us reflect on the words of our patron, St. Vincent De Paul, as we walk through this presentation. May we see things through God's eyes.



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"Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."
PHILIPPIANS 2:4

Prioritize the vulnerable: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Speak Up for the Silent: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Proverbs 31:8–9)

Bear with One Another: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Romans 15:1)

Restoration to Community: Jesus' healing miracles were never just about physical cure—they were profound acts of restoring excluded individuals to full community belonging.



“TRULY I TELL YOU,
WHATEVER
YOU DID FOR
ONE OF THE LEAST OF
THESE BROTHERS
AND SISTERS OF MINE,
YOU DID FOR ME.”
MATTHEW 25:40

Disabilities are more common than most people think...

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Despite these numbers, many areas of Ontario remain **physically, structurally, and socially inaccessible**, limiting people's ability to move, participate, and belong in their communities.

What is a Disability?

Share with the people at your table.

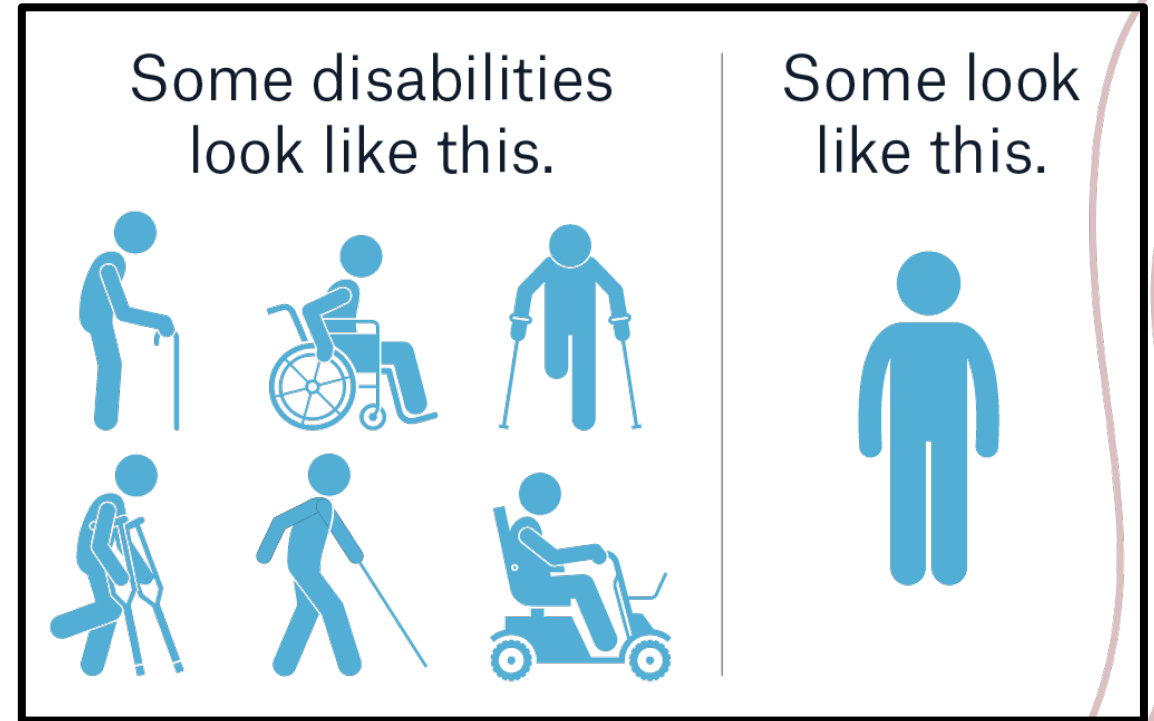


Compassion in Action



Visible vs. Invisible Disabilities

- Not every disability is easily identified from the outside
- We are never fully aware what other people are suffering with
- Some disabilities may appear quite clear immediately, while others you may be entirely unaware of
- Both visible and invisible disabilities are quite common



Disabilities: Diverse & Sometimes Overlooked



Physical Mobility

Conditions like cerebral palsy, arthritis, or spinal injuries require conscious, physical structural design to prevent isolation.



Blindness, low vision, and deafness

alter communication pathways. We must adapt our media and space to enable everyone to interact.



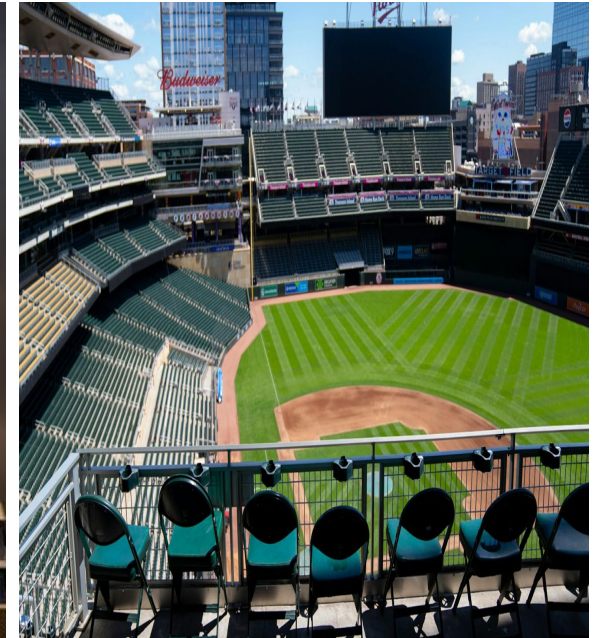
Invisible & Cognitive

ADHD, learning differences, memory issues, neurological and mental illnesses are heavily invisible but require gentle, patient structural design.



What is Accessibility?

Accessibility means ensuring that every person — regardless of disability — can participate fully in community life. It's about removing barriers that prevent people from living with dignity, independence, and belonging. For Vincentians, this aligns directly with our call to serve the whole person.



Let's Look at Some Examples of Barriers to Accessibility



Uneven sidewalks

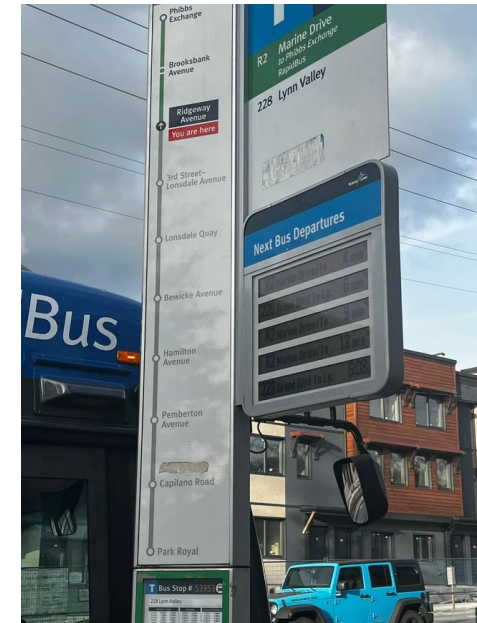


Blocked Pathways



Transportation Accessibility

63% of Canadians with disabilities encounter one or more barriers with accessing transportation.



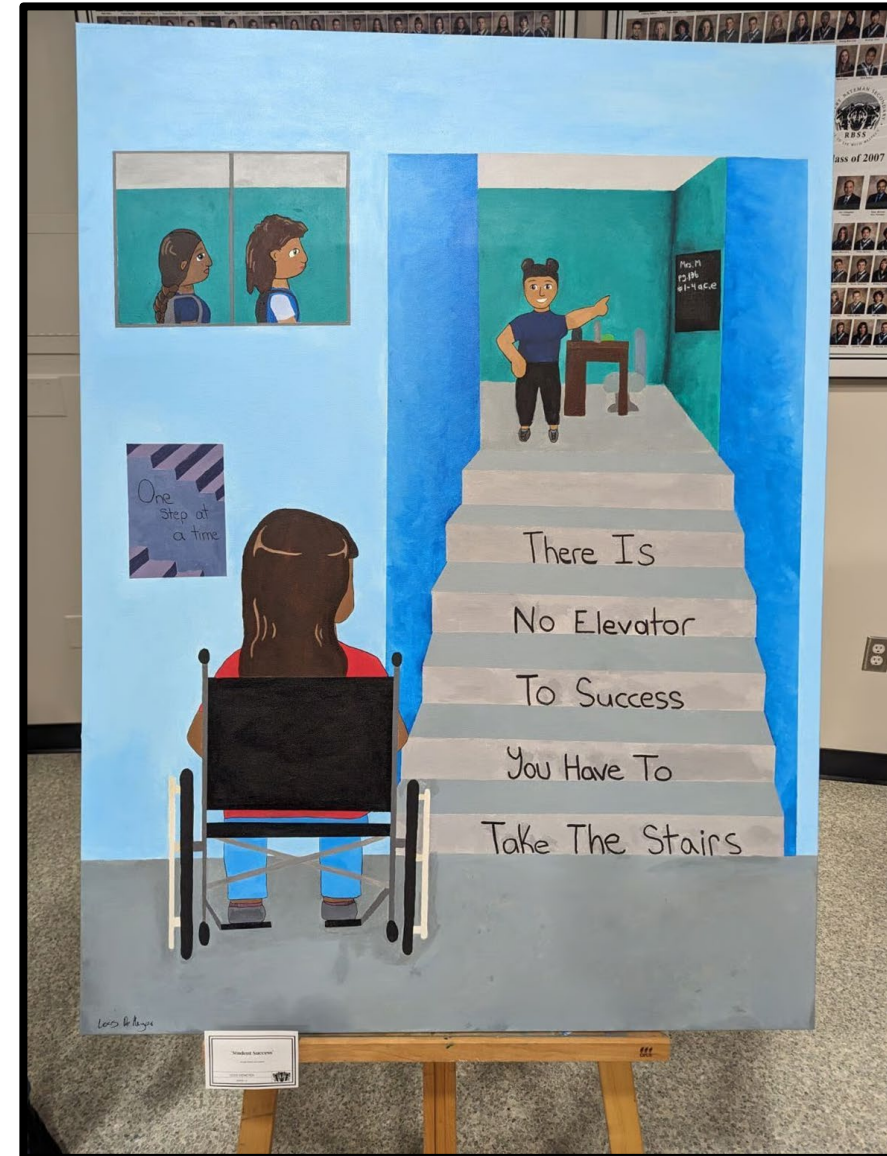
Winter Barriers to Accessibility

Mobility & Isolation

- Uncleared sidewalks
- Ice-covered surfaces
- Narrowed pathways
- Blocked transit stops
- Reduced Amount of Accessible Parking Spots



Building Accessibility: through a school lens



Even housing can be inaccessible!



Inaccessibility leads to:

- Isolation
- Lost independence
- Exclusion

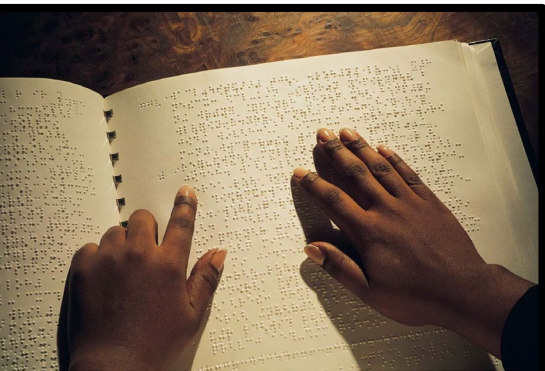


As Vincentians, we
must help our
brothers and sisters
in need.

Communication Barriers

Accessibility is not only physical. Many Ontario systems fail to provide:

- Documents in plain language
- Captioned videos
- ASL interpreters
- Accessible websites
- Braille or large print options



Many Disabilities are Overlooked

People with chronic pain, fatigue, and Autism Spectrum Disorders also face barriers such as:

- Lack of benches and resting places
- Long walking distances between services
- Standing- only areas
- No quiet spaces for sensory overload
- Noise sensitivity
- Visual overstimulation



★ Ontario Made a Promise... ★

In 2005, Ontario voted in favour to make Ontario accessible ALL by 2025.

Now that we are in 2026, this goal has still not been achieved. Though we have seen big improvements to accessibility in 20 years, there is still a long way to go in order to make Ontario completely accessible.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqiBfKSndSo&t=61s>



Let us reflect on these barriers to help our brothers and sisters in our country, province, and city!



**Accessibility for
Ontarians with
Disabilities Act
(AODA)**

Why It Matters to Vincentians



Mission of Accompaniment

As Vincentians, we do not simply manage programs. We are called to actively walk with those who are marginalized. Accessibility is central to our core mission of justice, charity, and true accompaniment.

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Person-to-Person Service

Our Society operates on direct personal encounter. Accessibility means ensuring that physical, sensory, or mental differences never stand in the way of a genuine, comfortable human connection during our home visits.



Dignity & Social Justice

Charity responds to immediate needs, but justice demands we look at the systemic structures of our communities. Removing physical and social barriers is an act of restoring justice to marginalized neighbours.

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Obstacles to Full Participation

Neighbours encounter obstacles in multiple distinct dimensions:

- **Physical:** Concrete stairs without ramp alternatives, heavy entrance doors, or narrow corridors.
- **Attitudinal:** Unconscious assumptions, pity, or speaking about disabled individuals instead of directly with them.
- **Systemic:** Inaccessible online signup systems and rigid, inflexible scheduling.



What Can We Do?

In our conferences and councils, accessibility can mean:

- Clear signage and accessible entrances
- Quiet spaces for sensory needs
- Forms available in plain language
- Training volunteers in inclusive communication
- Ensuring home visits respect mobility and sensory needs

These small changes can transform someone's experience.



Accessibility in Practice

Communication



Provide our registration forms in plain language. Add captions to videos and coordinate ASL support for meetings.

Physical Space



Ensure wide aisles in food banks and stores, clear directional signage, and barrier-free entryways with safe ramps.

Sensory Care



Create designated quiet spaces during events. Limit loud noises or visual clutter that causes stress.

Crucial Questions to Ask

- Food Pantries: Are entrances and aisles wide enough for walkers or wheelchairs to turn comfortably?
- Deliveries: Do we offer home drop offs for neighbours with chronic fatigue or pain?
- Signage: Are materials printed in large, high-contrast, easily scannable text?

Discussion Questions



Grounding in Experience: Think of someone you've served who faced physical, sensory, or attitudinal barriers. How did it affect their human dignity?



Poverty Intersection: Where do you see accessibility issues directly intersecting with systemic financial poverty in your local Canadian community?



Overlooked Needs: How would our approach to home visits change if we proactively assumed every neighbour had an invisible cognitive or sensory disability?

Scenario Activity Cards

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A neighbour using a walker struggles with narrow aisles, long lines and small print forms.

Scenario B: Conference Meetings

A potential volunteer with a hearing disability struggles to follow discussion.

Scenario C: Thrift Store

A customer with sensory sensitivities becomes overwhelmed with noise and clutter.

Discussion Questions

1. Identify the Barriers: What physical, communication, attitudinal, or systemic barriers are present in this scenario?
2. Connect to Vincentian Values: How does this situation relate to dignity, accompaniment, and seeing Christ in those we serve?
3. What are 2–3 realistic changes your conference could make to address these barriers?

A Vincentian Prayer for Accessibility & Inclusion

*Loving God, You created each person in Your image,
with dignity, purpose, and infinite worth.*

*Open our eyes to see the barriers —
both visible and invisible —
that prevent our neighbours from living fully and freely.*

*Open our ears to hear the voices
of those who are too often unheard.
Open our hearts to welcome each person
as Christ Himself,
with gentleness, respect, and compassion.*

*Strengthen us as Vincentians
to be builders of justice,
removers of barriers,
and companions on the journey.*

*May our conferences, our programs,
and our hearts
be places where everyone belongs.*

*Bless our work,
guide our steps,
and help us to serve with humility, courage,
and love. Amen*



References

[Accessibility and Persons with disabilities - Canada at a Glance, 2023](#)

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<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/consultation/key-concepts.html>

Thank you, **merci**, *Wela'lioq*

**Voice your
opinion, rate
this
workshop**



**Exprimez
votre opinion,
évaluez cet
atelier**





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