



SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

**SAFE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**  
National Advocacy Circle

# **ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

## **(ON POVERTY)**

An Introduction to Advocacy

# **LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!**

Many of our neighbours in need are caught in the cycle of poverty because of the way our Society works. We call it Systemic Poverty. Canada is a country that is rich enough to provide all its citizens with a dignified standard of living.

**Poverty is not a failure of the individual, but of the Society we live in.**

As a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and by the teachings of our Catholic faith in CST (Catholic Social Teachings) we each have a part to play in addressing the issue of Systemic Poverty through Advocacy.

February, 2022

**INTRODUCTION:**

The purposes of this Advocacy Toolkit document is to introduce and comment on the following topics:

- Charity and Justice
  - Advocacy
  - Advocacy – SSVP Rule 71
  - The Language of Advocacy
  - What is Social Advocacy
  - Conclusion
- Appendix A: Social Activism and Being A Social Activist  
 Appendix B: CST (Catholic Social Teaching)

**CHARITY AND JUSTICE:**

Charity and justice are two distinct components within a social ministry that answers the call for new order in the world. Both charity and justice call for a compassionate caring for the oppressed, those in need and the vulnerable. Both define our call to live out the Gospel of God’s love and reconciliation.

Yet they differ in scope, in methods and in goals.

**Charity, or outreach, responds to an immediate need.** It provides a direct service such as food, clothing, or shelter to meet the person’s immediate needs. It is a private or organized act of caring and is directed towards alleviating the effects of social injustice. Charity is satisfying and is generally non-controversial.

**Social Justice addresses long-term conditions, promoting social change in various types of institutions, policies, and systems.** Justice is public, political, and oriented to collective action for change to happen. It is directed towards the causes of social injustice.

To move from Charity to Social Justice we need:



"The conscience is called by this social teaching to recognize and fulfill the obligations of justice and charity in society." (Compendium of the Soc/a/ Doctrine of the Church, no. 83)

Social justice. . . concerns the social, political and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions." (Compendium, no. 201)

"The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. . . Those who are able make offerings in accordance with their means to support orphans, widows, the sick and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners." (Pope Benedict XVI Deus Caritas Est, no. 22)

"The best way to fight inequality is by spreading equality around."  
 Unknown

## ADVOCACY – SSVP Rule 71:

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

## ADVOCACY:

To put it in the simplest of terms, Advocacy means fighting for our basic rights as citizens of Canada. Those basic rights include the most basic human rights of food, clothing, and shelter.

Advocacy also includes figuring out how governments and their systems work, and challenging those decisions that deny us rights that we are legally entitled to.

Such Social Justice rights as:



- Mental and physical health needs
- Protection from any forms of racism
- Protection from any forms of social exclusion and inequality
- Protection from mental, physical, and sexual abuse
- Safe, secure and affordable housing
- Food security
- Protection from bullying and family violence
- Protection from violence in any other form
- Protection from discrimination in any form

Advocacy also includes the influencing of organizations, institutions, and the various levels of governments to change their rules and regulations that can deny people their full economic, political, and legal rights.

Why do we use Advocacy?

- To achieve widespread and sustainable change
- To defend individuals, communities, and programs from adverse policy changes
- To strengthen civil society and expand democratic space by:
  - encouraging the participation of citizens in all levels of policy making
  - build and strengthen cooperation between NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) and other civil groups
  - establish through interactions with decision makers the legitimacy and credibility of civil groups

But before we go further and deeper in this discussion of the topic of Advocacy, let us review a few terms that you may or may not be familiar with.

## THE LANGUAGE OF ADVOCACY:

Advocacy – public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Catholic Social Teaching – commonly abbreviated as CST, is a Catholic doctrine on matters of human dignity and the common good in society. The teachings address:

- The Principle of the Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- The Principle of the Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- The Principle of the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Principle of the Dignity of Work and Rights of the Worker
- The Principle of Solidarity
- The Principle of The Care of God’s Creation

(See Appendix B for more details on these Catholic Social Teaching principals)

Charity – finds short term solutions to people in need needs, but basically maintains the status quo of their situation.

Justice – takes longer, digs for the root problem of the particular social issue.

Poverty – Poverty is the state of not having enough material possessions or income for a person's basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. It is also the inability to participate in the social, economic and political activities of Society.

Racism – prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people based on their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized

Social Justice – justice in terms of the fair distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Social Justice is process of shifting minds and hearts.

Subsidiarity - is a principle of social organization that holds that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution.

Stewardship – is the sharing of your Time, Talents, and Treasure with others.

Systemic Racism - is a term that refers to a form of racism that is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or an organization.

**“Charity does not evoke change.”**

(For lasting change to take effect, people must be invested in their own transformation. So consistent charity or free services can harm service users by encouraging dependence and thus defeating the purposes of the intended help – independence and self-reliance.)

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## WHAT IS A SOCIAL ADVOCACY?

### Social Advocacy is:

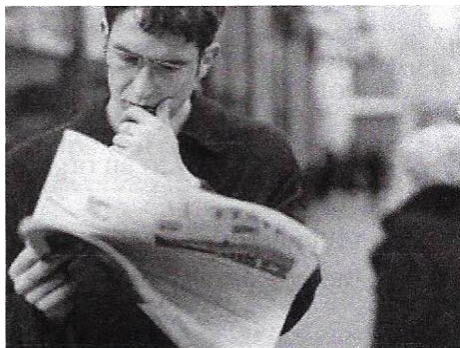
The representation done by anyone committed to the concerns of any group in Society. Such concerns maybe rights based or needs based for the benefit of the underprivileged, oppressed, or disadvantaged.

Social Advocacy questions and challenges the status quo.

### WHAT SHOULD I START ADVOCATING ABOUT?

You may have any number of issues that concern you regarding the wellbeing of others, and you may be ready to jump in right away on something that you already have strong feelings about. But if you are a little unsure of what would be a good use of your time and energy, a quick and effective way to become aware of important social issues in your city is to read your daily newspaper.

This is a very accessible way for anyone to become educated on the issues of the day.



- Over the course of a week the paper will undoubtedly touch on a wide range of concerns, not only local but also national or international in scope. There may be feature articles written by local reporters, or reprints of stories from a national service, and letters to the editor from other members of the public highlighting issues of concern to them.
- In this age of the internet, you don't even need to have a subscription to the actual paper itself - you can check out most their websites for free online.

- You can also learn about issues by becoming a member of an organization and receiving their newsletters and going to meetings or conferences that they may host with guest speakers.
- Most organizations will also have their own websites and they will usually have copies of articles or reports posted on their sites that you can review online or download to your own computer for review at your convenience.
- You can listen to radio shows or news reports, watch TV. Broadcasts, take books out from the library, surf the net, and finally, talk to your friends.

After undertaking this learning process, you will likely begin to focus in on one or two issues that are of primary concern to you.

#### **As Vincentians, have we ever thought as poverty as a “social sin?”**

This notion is a powerful concept in Catholic thought and justice and a spiritually enriching way for us to view our work with those in need and marginalized that stemming the tide of exclusion and indifference that Pope Francis rails against.

famvin, Jan.29, 2016

## I HAVE DECIDED, BUT WHAT DO I WANT TO ADVOCATE ABOUT AND HOW DO I GO ABOUT DOING IT?

You need to become a **Social Activist**.

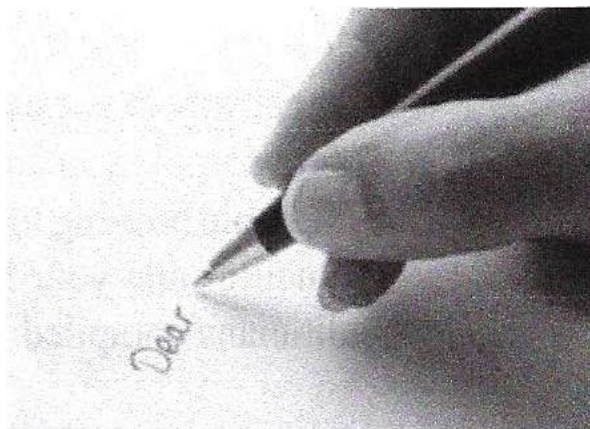
### A **Social Activist** is

a fearless individual who will stand for what they believe in for the benefit of the underprivileged, oppressed, or disadvantaged. They question and challenge the status quo.

There are a great many ways that you can become a Social Activist. You can start by engaging on your own in your initial efforts.

Here are some examples of how to do that:

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on an issue of concern.
- Post comments online on the websites of newspapers on articles of interest to you on the message boards that follow most articles.
- Phone in to radio talk shows when they involve social issues of concern.
- Write letters to your city councillors, MLA or MP about things that concern you about existing government laws or upcoming pieces of legislation that are being discussed and debated.
- Join in the Social Advocacy issues sponsored by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul at your local level or at the National level.
- Talk with family members, friends and parishioners about Social Justice issues.
- Share your stories of your own Social Justice activities to inspire others into action.
- Defend our neighbours in need in conversations with friends, parishioners and acquaintances so that we might change their minds and hearts through a better understanding of the challenges faced by those who live in poverty.



## CONCLUSION:

**“With political will” it is possible to end centuries of entrenched inequality and move from “fate to opportunity.”**

According to Statistics Canada in 2020, 1 in 7 or 4,900,000 Canadians dealt with the various issues related to poverty, being in need in some way(s) in their daily life. That number will certainly grow as we, as a Canadian Society, deal with various political, economic, and social issues and of course the new realities of living with the COVID pandemic.

As we try to move to a post-COVID recovery many politicians and business leaders are talking of **“building back better”**. But the message is clear from those living in poverty, that they do not want to return to the past nor to build back what it was before. They do not want a return to the pre-COVID structural disadvantages and inequalities.

Instead, people living in poverty propose **“building forward”**.\*\*\*

**Building forward**\*\*\* means transforming our relationship with nature, dismantling structures of discrimination that affect people living in poverty, and building on the moral and legal framework of human rights that places human dignity at the heart of policy and action.

**Building forward**\*\*\* means that not only that no one is left behind, but that people living in poverty are actively encouraged and supported to be in front, engaging in informed and meaningful participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

In **building forward**\*\*\*, we need to let ourselves be enriched by the wealth of wisdom, energy, and resourcefulness that people living in poverty now can contribute to our communities, our societies, and our world.

\*\*\*Source: *United Nations News – Human Rights, Oct. 20, 2021*

Many people know the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul as a charitable organization helping people in need, they do not see us as an organization promoting, speaking out and taking positive action on Social Justice and Advocacy issues that affect us all, in one way or another, as citizens of Canada. We need to change that understanding of what SSVP is as an organization and become known as a catalyst for change.

*See Appendix A for more information on the topic of*  
**SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND BEING A SOCIAL ACTIVIST.**

*See Appendix B for more information on the*  
**PRINCIPLES OF CST (CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS)**

# APPENDIX A

## SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND BEING A SOCIAL ACTIVIST

### SOCIAL ACTIVISM:

**Social activism** is an instrument for social movements. It shows how people can organize themselves, how they can participate to protests, the degree of involvement in decisions and in social life. It reveals the degree of the participatory democracy.

**Social activism** is an intentional action with the goal of bringing about **social** change. If you feel strongly about a cause and are working towards a change, you could be considered an **activist**.

When we talk about social activism, we talk about social change.

Activism is about doing, acting, making an action that brings change in society. It provides mobilization, supporting leadership and bringing direction of the social action.

**Anyone can do it — here are seven ways that you can get involved in the causes you care about:**

1. Educate Yourself – the more you know the greater your confidence.
2. Engage the Power of social media – to reach as many people as possible.
3. Volunteer – to make a difference and learn more.
4. Find Like-Minded People – many voices together are heard and respected.
5. Get Creative and Have Fun – it makes your efforts more enjoyable.
6. Don't Stop – change does not happen overnight.
7. Live It and embrace it every moment of your life.

There are different types of activism:

- 1) "Demanding solutions to contemporary problems through the taking of oppositional stances to mainstream policies. These includes short- term actions like strikes, protests, demonstrations.
- 2) Undertaking activism through the creation of alternatives to the dominant system through the construction of new ways of social behaviour.
- 3) Revolutionary activism that is concerned with fundamental change of society and its major institutions"

"The more you can get out of yourself and reach out to others,  
the more meaningful and satisfying your life can be."

Bill Moyer



# APPENDIX B

## PRINCIPLES OF CST (CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING)

### 1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person:

The first social teaching proclaims the respect for human life, one of the most fundamental needs in a world distorted by greed and selfishness.

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred, and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation for all the social teachings. This theme challenges the issues of abortion, assisted suicide, human cloning, and the death penalty.

The Catholic Church holds the belief that every human life is precious and is a gift from God, and that every institution is measured by whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

### 2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The second social teaching proclaims that the human person is not only sacred, but also social. It stresses that how we organize society in economics, politics, and law or policy directly affects human dignity and community.

Society often proclaims the importance of individualism, but Catholic Social Teaching argues that human beings are fulfilled in community and family. The Catholic Church believes we have the responsibility to participate in society and to promote the common good, especially for the poor and vulnerable. Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity can only be protected if all human rights are protected, and responsibilities of all human beings are met.

Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to the basic needs of life. The Catholic Church teaches that every person has a duty and responsibility to help fulfill these rights for one another, for our families, and for the larger society.

Public debate in our nation is often divided between those who focus on personal responsibilities and those who focus on social responsibilities, but the Catholic tradition insists that both are necessary to respond to the basic and fundamental rights of every human being.

### 3. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:

This world is shaped by the division between growing prosperity for some and poverty for others. The Catholic Church proclaims that the basic moral test of a society is how the most vulnerable members are faring. Our society is marred by a deepening division between rich and poor.

From the Last Judgment reading (Mt 25:31-46), all people are instructed by God to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

#### 4. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:

The Catholic Church teaches that the economy must serve the people. Too often the marketplace takes precedence over the rights of workers. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

The rights to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative are all part of protecting the dignity of work by protecting the rights of the workers. Respecting these rights promotes an economy that protects human life, defends human rights, and advances the well-being of all.

#### 5. Solidarity:

Our society often stresses individualism, indifference, and sometimes isolationism in the face of international responsibilities. The Catholic Church proclaims that every human being has a responsibility to our brothers and sisters, wherever they live.

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity is about loving our neighbors locally, nationally, as well as internationally.

This virtue was described by John Paul II as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (Sollicitudo Rei Socialism, no. 38).

#### 6. Care for God's Creation:

The Catholic tradition insists that every human being show respect for the Creator by our stewardship of His creation.

We are called to protect people and the planet by living our faith with respect for God's creation. In a society with controversy over environmental issues, the Catholic Church believes it is a fundamental moral and ethical challenge that cannot be ignored.

To explore these themes in greater depth, consult the USCCB website [usccb.org](http://usccb.org), with sections on [Catholic Social Teaching](#) and [Faithful Citizenship](#).

Adapted from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities Peace and Justice website

"You don't need to be amazing to start,  
but you need to start to be amazing"

2020 Olympics Theme