

SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2025



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Dear fellow Vincentians.

As we enter the New Year of 2025 and look around our world it can be very intimidating when wondering what this year may bring. There are still parts of the world at war or facing the uncertainty in the political structure of Canada and other nations.



The cost of living will rise with higher food prices and cost of adequate housing still being a major concern in most locations. Homelessness is on the rise with many cities seeing encampments of homeless people who are living a daily life with little hope for a better future. The number of people living in poverty and experiencing homelessness may also cause apprehension and even fear in many of us. The void between the rich, the middle class and those living in poverty seems to be widening rather than shrinking.

I am reminded of a speech Frederic Ozanam gave in the 1830's about this void between the haves and the have nots and his fear that it could lead to division and discord. His advice was for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and others to step in between these two and take action and advocate for systemic changes that would alleviate the causes of this situation.

2025 is a time for hope and a time for action

We can see systemic changes that seek to relieve poverty and homelessness. There is a real effort in many cities to address the need for more affordable housing. The cost of food remains high with many foodbanks reporting much higher use. Food insecurity is a major concern. It is a time for us to act, to advocate for systemic change that will restore hope for so many that live month to month, even day to day.

Where do we start?



**Society of
Saint Vincent de Paul**

We start with our own Vincentian sisters and brothers. We need to be open to allowing ourselves to undergo the same personal transformation that Vincent took centuries ago. It is by looking beyond all the programs and efforts to address poverty and simply seek to find Jesus in the face of those we serve. If we do this we will be inspired to have hope and take actions that do more than provide emergency assistance to our neighbours in need but also give them, and ourselves, a sense of hope for a life that includes the right to basic human dignity for all. Let us also work to give everyone a voice.

Let us be active advocates for systemic change. Let us be tempered radicals for effective systemic change. Let us be true Vincentians.

Action

Hope

Systemic Change

Action leads to renewed Hope for our members and our neighbours in need. Hope comes with an expectation that things will improve, changes will occur, and support will grow at all levels of government and society which address the root causes of poverty that affect the human dignity of our neighbours and friends.

There has never been a time more in need of people and organizations like our Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to speak out, to advocate for affective and effective systemic change as well as being open to personal change in our old attitudes and beliefs about poverty related issues.

Please consider joining our efforts by promoting social justice and the need to advocate for systemic change at your next conference meeting. The ONRC website (www.ssvp.on.ca) has a social justice section with several sub headings which contain valuable information and resources which we encourage you to read and use at your conference.

Let us make 2025 a year of action, hope and systemic change by starting with our own personal transformation and trying to always consider the human dignity of every person and family which we are in contact with. We possess the ability and opportunity to get to know those we serve better and in a more personal manner. Over 190 years ago Frederic and Rosalie had it right in going out to visit those in need in their humble homes. We go to those in need, to see and hear about their challenges and barriers living in poverty. Listen to their experiences simply trying to live day to day and then consider how we might transform our actions.

Invite someone we have helped to consider joining our conference

Why not offer this opportunity and in doing so, give a voice to those who no one listens to? If you have been or plan to be active in inviting our neighbours in need to join us, please share your experiences with this unique concept. (ssvpjp@gmail.com)



Updates

Public Policy Dialogue & Development (PPDD)

Our 2025 plans include looking at how we can become a more effective advocacy voice on various issues. We shall develop an action plan at our January meeting which will be shared in the February newsletter. While we shall continue to gather, create, and share valuable resources and links to our members, it is crucial to us achieving any success if it has local support across Ontario. Please share our actions and consider supporting us in your community.

Indigenous Sharing Circle (ISC): The ISC shall also develop a 2025 action plan at their January meeting which will be shared in the February newsletter. Once again, there is so much we can accomplish at the local council/conference level, but we need local support and involvement. There are many things we can learn from the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples. One example is the Indigenous Poverty Definition as written by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). They define poverty as, "Not having the elements needed for quality of life such as mental, physical, emotional and spiritual fulfillment, and the basic physical/material necessities such as access to adequate, affordable housing; clean water for drinking and sanitation; affordable healthy food; lifelong education; gainful employment; integrated health care; accessible transportation; and adequate financial means to achieve basic financial goals and manage emergencies".

Prison Ministry/Restorative Justice (PMRJ): The PMRJ has made some positive steps this past year with more members either getting involved locally or being interested in learning more and joining us. You need not be visiting inmates to be active in this area. We can provide support and ideas on how you may become informed and active.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI): DEI should be discussed across Ontario as there are stats that clearly demonstrate the effect systemic racism or indifference to DEI has on many who are living in poverty. While also facing the added barriers of racism can negatively affect any hope of gaining a life for their families that are desired. Perhaps Equity is the more important word in DEI as equity means giving everyone equal access to all the resources and opportunities that enable each person to a life of dignity.

Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI): The National Advocacy Circle will be emphasizing the GBI as an excellent solution to alleviating poverty in Ontario and Canada. There is information on our ONRC website which you can use to educate yourself and fellow members.

Homelessness: The topic homelessness is relevant to all of us with the issue of encampments in many cities of assorted sizes being a very real concern for everyone. It is how our communities address this issue and the broader one of the numbers of our fellow citizens who are either homeless or living in jeopardy of being homeless. There is real need for us to learn more about the issues and consider how we can have a positive effect both locally and provincially. There is also resource material and useful links to homelessness on the ONRC website.

Seeds of Hope (SOH): The Seeds of Hope was started here in Ontario when I was ONRC president. It is a highly effective systemic change project any conference member can join as active local champion. This program has expanded to a national level and continues to provide families a terrific way to save for their children's post secondary education. Please consider learning more about the Seeds of Hope in 2025 and be part of a rewarding option for our neighbours in need.