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THE ADVOCACY VOICE

Advocacy is a topic which is often confused with lobbying or becoming too political, resulting in the fear it may affect our charitable status. Advocacy is simply speaking out and acting in an informative manner on the various issues we see our neighbours in need facing every day.

Another myth is that advocacy should be left to our national and regional councils to address. You only need to look at our strength which is found in our community and parish-based conferences. The need to advocate for systemic change can be conducted at National and Regional levels, but each of municipalities are also capable of addressing these changes locally.

There is no better advocacy voice at this level than our councils and conferences.

A knowledge and understanding of how poverty affects your fellow residents is an area every conference can be engaged. You may know local politicians as well as existing services and organizations whom you can work with in your advocacy effort. There are a number of educational pamphlets and articles regarding advocacy which can be accessed on our ONRC website. Please consider joining us as local advocates for systemic change.



While our focus this month is on social justice and advocacy, please don't forget the other equally important social justice issues we continue to work on. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has a long history of charitable work but we also possess the ability and obligation to take social justice actions and advocacy with and on behalf of our neighbours in need.

Social justice can also be an effective tool for recruitment of new members.

THE ADVOCACY VOICE

The Advocacy Voice is a working group of the PPDD which represents our renewed emphasis on the importance of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul having an active and informative voice which advocates for the systemic changes to current structures that tend to keep our neighbours in need living in poverty. As this working group evolves, we shall provide further information in the December and January 2025 social justice newsletters.

Systemic change is simply the action and overarching theme of our advocacy efforts. While this systemic change is certainly needed externally, we must also be open to the understanding that it also requires internal change which starts with every Vincentian accepting the fact that Justice and Charity are the Two Feet of Love of our Society. This understanding requires a personal change in the way we look at both Justice and Charity.

Our goal will be to research, gather existing material, and prepare information and guidance for every council and conference which will enable their active participation in our advocacy efforts. You will find valuable information on the ONRC website (www.ssvp.on.ca) by clicking on social justice, then advocacy and resource section.

There is a need to also give a voice to our neighbours in need. Who knows more about the challenges and barriers our neighbours in need face every day in their efforts to house, clothe and feed their families? Who has a more trusting relationship with our neighbours in need than our own Society and members? We shall provide some ideas that will assist conference members in engaging with our neighbours in need in a dialogue that can give them a voice as well as educate us on how we can advocate effectively for needed change. Please consider supporting our advocacy and social justice efforts by including it as an agenda item for all meetings and sharing material we provide with your membership.

What does Advocacy have to do with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul?

Advocacy is defined as follows: Advocacy is the act of speaking in support of human concerns and needs. Where people have their own voice, advocacy means making sure they are heard; when they have difficulty speaking, it means providing help; where they have no voice, it means speaking for them (from Making Changes: A place to Start, Ministry for Christians and Families).

Advocacy is not a political activity, but by the nature of many of the issues addressed, much of the correspondence would be directed to politicians. It does however address issues and not politicians or political parties.

Advocacy and the Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Our Rule states: "*Once they had made personal contact with the poor, they saw that charity is inseparable from the demands of justice. To the best of their ability, they claimed justice for the poor.*" (Preamble to the Rule, - 1 Recall to Sources)

So how do we "Claim Justice for the Poor"?

We, as Cause Advocates, (also known as systems advocates) can speak on behalf of the poor.

A Cause Advocate is defined as one who:

- works to influence social and economic systems to bring about positive change for the poor.
- Using the voice and good name of the Society, speaks out on justice and social conditions.
- Address these concerns to both political and social institutions to effect change.
- Present information in a positive, non-confrontational manner
- Respects the dignity of the other person.

We will continue to identify national issues affecting the poor, and speak out on their behalf. We will be contacting national politicians, as well as writing letters to the editors of national Catholic publications and major newspapers. This initiative is seen as a long- term project. We will, as the nature of the Society dictates, approach this initiative slowly and carefully. The requirement for research on issues will also suggest a time-consuming process. We are interested in receiving input from the membership as well as suggested issues, topics and background information.