

Vincentian Advocacy – “A Search for Justice” Conference Input Survey

KEY ISSUES

Our Rule states that one of our fundamental Vincentian principles is to “discover and help redress situations of social injustice that cause poverty, suffering and need” (1.1). The Advocacy Committee of Toronto Central Council works on putting this fundamental principle into action, as the Rule allows for Central Councils to speak out on behalf of our neighbours in need.

The Advocacy Committee feels that our advocacy efforts should flow from the work we do as Vincentians, in our home visits and in our Special Works. We think that the following issues especially deserve our attention; **affordable housing** (for individuals, families and populations with special needs) and **social assistance** programs (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Child Benefits, etc.).

In reflecting on your experience as a Vincentian, suggest which particular aspects of the two key issues we should concentrate our efforts on in order to improve the lives of our neighbours in need.

- **Affordable Housing**

- **Social Assistance**

Are there any other broad issues we should consider in order to better serve our neighbours in need?

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PREPARING THE WAY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Our Rule states that as Vincentians we should strive “... to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice...to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak...” (7.7). We feel that the Advocacy Committee can play an important role in fulfilling this objective by educating our Vincentians, our parishioners, and the general public about the challenges and realities faced by our neighbours in need.

We think that an effective way of doing this would be to create flyers, newsletters, bulletin inserts and other types of handouts that tell the stories of people who struggle daily to cope with poverty, sickness, and homelessness.

What ways and means could be utilized to get this type of information into the hands of our parishioners and the general public? Do you see a role for your conference in this endeavour?

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MAKING CHANGES

The Rule states that “Where injustice, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements” (7.6). Revenue Canada also allows registered charities to promote specific policies and legislation, as long as they do not support a specific candidate or party, and do not devote more than 10% of their resources to such endeavours.

The Advocacy Committee has submitted reports to provincial legislative committees dealing with poverty reduction as well as housing and social assistance reform in Ontario. These reports are available on the TCC website. In addition we are members of:

- MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH) (Catholic Charities also a member)
- Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC). (Regional Council SSVP and the Assembly of Ontario Bishops are also members).

We will continue to keep our members informed as to when decision makers are seeking input to help them fashion public policy that affects our neighbours in need.

Do you feel it is worthwhile to inform our Vincentian’s and parishioners of policies and issues that impact, either positively or negatively, upon our neighbours in need?

Our Rule states that “The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored” (7.5).

How can we, as Vincentians, help our neighbours in need speak out for themselves?