



18 October 2019

Mr. Richard Pommainville
Executive Director
National Council of Canada
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
2463 Innes Road
Ottawa, ON
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Dear Mr. Pommainville,

I pray this letter finds you well.

Further to my acknowledgement by email to you on 16 July 2019 in which I had indicated that your letter of 15 July would be on the agenda of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCBC) for its meeting of 12-13 August, I wish first of all on the part of the Executive Committee to thank you for the proposed draft which you had submitted for the consideration of the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace to assist it in preparing resource material to mark the 2019 World Day of the Poor, 17 November, the 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Executive Committee as well as the Commission appreciate the cooperation of the National Council of the Society of Saint Paul in this effort. You will note how the CCCBC statement will focus largely on how poverty in Canada affects the availability of safe, secure and affordable housing.

Similarly, the members of the Executive Committee, as Bishops of four Canadian dioceses, are deeply grateful for the mission, generosity and devotion of Vincentians across this country and throughout the world in their fundraising and other activities to assist people living with poverty. These efforts, as you indicate in your letter, will again be particularly visible among the Canadian public in the work that Vincentians will be doing to mark the World Day of the Poor and in the annual preparations leading up to Christmas and New Year's, but are likewise sustained throughout the year in raising non-perishable food, clothing, accessories, and furniture for those in need, providing assistance to refugees and immigrants, visiting homes, working with prisoners, and providing outreach to Northern communities in this country through the "North of 60" project.

For all these important reasons, the Executive Committee strongly encourages the National and Regional Councils of your Society to urge all Vincentian diocesan councils and parish conferences to establish regular and ongoing lines of contact with their respective Bishops. This will be much more effective than, as you had proposed in your letter, that this Conference issue a message of support on behalf of all Bishops or even suggest to diocesan and eparchial Bishops that they issue messages of support for the upcoming local Vincentian fundraising projects. Further to the vision of Saint Vincent de Paul that foresaw "Confraternities of Charity", Blessed Frédéric Ozanam too recognized the importance of furthering charity by means of a network, but

no diocesan or parish network of charity can be strong or effective if it does not include and engage the parish pastor and the local Bishop as part of that network. This is a prevailing concern too of Pope Francis, as for example in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* when he reminds Church institutions, movements and associations (no. 29) “not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church” (that is, the diocesan/eparchial Church -- and, at the national level, with the Episcopal Conference one might add).

On a final point, although noting that the CCCB text for the upcoming World Day of Poverty will include a link to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, as well as to other pertinent parish and national Church agencies involved in the area of poverty, I would like to explain that the Executive Committee wishes to avoid as much as possible any misunderstanding or misperception that the World Day of Poverty, or any other celebration of the faith or ecclesial event on the Church’s calendar of life, is somehow and thereby the occasion to give focus to or for increasing the visibility of a Church or non-ecclesial organization or to promote its activities and mission, as might seem to be suggested in the possible tools offered to Saint Vincent de Paul members (see <https://www.ssvp.ca/world-day-poor-tools-members>), even though these specific secondary goals are praise-worthy in their own right.

On behalf of Bishop Gendron, now Past President of the CCCB, and Archbishop Richard Gagnon its new President, I wish again to thank the Society for its mission to the poor, its witness as a Catholic organization, and its cooperation with this Conference, and especially to encourage you and your members, “given the complexity and rapid evolution of our globalized society,” to respond to what Pope Francis calls the “necessity” of “reflecting on [the] practice of charity, developing new ways of drawing near to those in need, and investing [...] efforts in formation” (Message to the Vincentian Family on the Fourth Centenary of the Charism, Memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul, 27 September 2017).

Sincerely yours in Jesus with Mary,



Msgr. Frank Leo
General Secretary