

National Social Justice and Advocacy Committee Policy Statement



St Vincent de Paul Society | 2018



The question agitating the world today is ... a social question. It is the struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much, it is a clash between wealth and poverty, which is shaking the ground at our feet.

– Frederic Ozanam

Preamble

Social Justice refers to the right for all members of a society to have equal opportunity to access the resources and services offered by society. The ways in which Conference members carry out their volunteer work, assisting those in need, embodies the essence of social justice.

Catholic Social Teaching refers to “the preferential option for the poor” and bases this in the Gospels which describe Christ’s special concern for the poor and the powerless. For example, Luke (4:18-19) refers to Jesus’ mission as bringing good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind and freedom to the downtrodden. Pope Francis links a preferential option for the poor to key principles of Catholic Social Teaching, stating that in the current global context “where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable”, the principle of the common good is “a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (Laudato Si).

Statement of Purpose

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it.

– The Rule (2012, p. 26: 7.1)

St Vincent de Paul Society members cannot see injustice and let it go unchallenged. We are concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. We want a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted. We feel compelled to “raise our voice” – to advocate on behalf of the people we assist and speak out on the barriers that keep people in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage. We call for solutions to injustice by engaging government, working with other agencies and raising awareness across the community.

Our Social Justice work is not a recent innovation. Social justice has been with our organisation from its inception. Our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, wrote in the 1800’s:

You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. You must study their injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long term improvement.

It is with such long-term improvement of the poor of Australia that we have set a number of priorities for the Society in Australia over the next two years, focusing on four key issues:

1. **Affordable housing and homelessness**
2. **Lack of adequate income and access to employment for all**
3. **Public policy to eliminate poverty and inequality**
4. **Issues affecting particular groups, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and refugees and asylum seekers.**

Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

– *The Rule (7.2)*

The role of the Social Justice Committee is to:

- provide the Society's members with the information that assists in the recognition, understanding, and appreciation of social justice issues in the day-to-day work which they undertake;
- be an effective advocate at all levels for the promotion of social justice in Australia.

The Social Justice Policy Objectives are to:

- increase the understanding by Members of the Society of broad social policy issues and the impact they have on the lives of the people in our communities;
- encourage the Members of the Society to actively critique social justice issues experienced in their work for the Society and their daily activities and to express the consequences of these to the broader community.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, protect the rights of those who are helpless. Speak out and pronounce a sentence of justice, defend the cause of the wretched and the poor.

– *(Proverbs 31:8-9)*

- carry out the work of the Society in the spirit of Christian values set out in the Gospels, as mentioned in Luke (4:18-19): "to preach the good news to the poor, ... to proclaim release to the captives, ... and to set a liberty those who are oppressed."

The strongest hand of true friendship is charity; the exercise of charity is the practice of good works

– *Frederic Ozanam*