

# SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CORPUS CHRISTI CONFERENCE

250-765-0800

[vincentcorpus@gmail.com](mailto:vincentcorpus@gmail.com)

## WORLD DAY OF THE POOR NOVEMBER 15, 2020



Pope

### Francis' message for 2020 World Day of the Poor

This year the *World Day of the Poor* enters more directly into each of our homes. The awareness of the fragility experienced in the months of lockdown helps us rediscover the need of those who, on a daily basis, live next to us and carry permanently imprinted on their bodies what we have experienced for only a few days. We cannot forget. Pope Francis' *Message* helps a lot in this sense because it brings to the fore the concreteness of the gestures that enriched the poverty of those moments. “The outstretched hands of physicians who cared about each patient and tried to find the right cure. The outstretched hands of nurses who worked overtime, for hours on end to look after the sick. The outstretched hands of administrators who procured the means to save as many lives as possible. The outstretched hands of pharmacists who at personal risk responded to people’s pressing needs. The outstretched hands of priests whose hearts broke as they offered a blessing. The outstretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home but with nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation” (n. 6).

The “outstretched hand” is an invitation to take responsibility for making one's own contribution. This is evident in gestures of daily life capable of alleviating the fate of those who live in hardship and lack the dignity of the children of God. Pope Francis is not afraid to identify these people as true saints, “those next door” who simply, without fanfare and publicity, offer genuine witness of Christian love. The massive presence of so many faces of the poor demands that Christians always be at the forefront, and feel the need to know that they lack something essential when a poor person comes before them. “We cannot feel “alright” when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows” (n. 4), writes Pope Francis in his *Message*. It is as though he has invited us to make the “restless heart” of Saint Augustine our own. Remain restless until God is found imprinted on the face of the poor. <http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/gmdp/2020/messaggio.html>

## **Solving the Homeless Issue with the Expertise of People with Lived Experience**

In Kelowna, we have a Circle of Experts leading the Journey Home Strategy to End Homelessness. The circle is aptly called **LECoH (Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness)**. This article will review who the members are, how they were chosen, how they do their work, how they recruit and retain members, payment for services, etc.

Kelowna City Council established a task force in 2017 to find solutions to homelessness as we had become a hub for the homeless and we had a real problem. The problem was not the unsightliness or other common factors but rather the frustration that nothing was working to alleviate the problem. A group of city leaders began discussions and immediately decided that a **LIVED EXPERIENCE CIRCLE** was critical. A convenor was hired, word was spread throughout the existing shelter system, and on the streets that **their voices were needed**. To entice folks, lunch was provided, along with gift cards. We began with about 15 to 20 but within six months we had over 100 people attending every two weeks. The locations were always neutral, generally the public library. Questions were asked about types of housing, demographics in a housing complex, meals, drug and alcohol use, safety, programs, staffing, curfews, and more.

Through this process, BC Housing, the funder of affordable and supportive Housing in BC, was engaged and was asked to listen and learn. A group of the Lived Experience attendees were asked to form a circle of 12 to continue the process, to advocate, to work with the community and to stay in constant touch with the newly housed and also those continuing to sleep rough. In the past three years, just in our city, we have added 300 new supportive housing spaces (not repurposed, but new) and over 100 scattered sites. LECoH members visit all areas every two to three weeks, listen and bring the information to the people who can make decisions. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this has become even more crucial. LECoH members are part of a weekly ZOOM meeting and our voices are heard. Community engagement is a critical function as NIMBYISM is alive and well in Kelowna, just as in all cities. Being called “Those People” is not easy but LECoH members know it is important. A strong bond has developed among the members to help cope with the challenges.

*Elaine McMurray, SSVP National Social Justice Committee BC/Yukon Regional*

## **PRAYER FOR THE WORLD DAY OF THE POOR**

God of Abraham,  
Everywhere we go we see Lazarus.  
But we also see so many doors,  
doors that separate us from Lazarus.  
Lord, teach us to open those doors  
To Lazarus, to the poor,  
to help them find  
a just share of your bounty.  
This World Day of the Poor,  
help us all turn to those outside our door,  
to bless, heal and comfort them.  
Help us to build a world together,  
where the poor are strangers to none,  
and the very chains of poverty are broken.  
Amen.

(Adapted from Catholic Relief Services)