Building the Road Out of Poverty – 2018

By: Sheila K. Gilbert

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January is Poverty Awareness Month. As Vincentians we see poverty in the faces and hear it in the voices of those we serve. Poverty is not about statistics, poverty is about people. Each one special in God's eyes. Each one unique. Each with their own story.

We have come to know that there are many roads into poverty, but few and difficult roads out. And we have tried lovingly and skillfully to serve our friends in need struggling with the everyday realities of poverty or near poverty. In our service we have helped many to survive another day. We provide hope - often temporary - and when we choose, we can provide hope that is lasting. Hope that tomorrow really can be better.

This is a hope based in the truth of God's love, our on-going support and their own effort and dreams for the future.

I invite you to consider those you have served recently. Is there someone who touched you? Whose courage and faith you admired? Who seemed to need just a bit more help or encouragement to make change? Is there someone God has marked indelibly on your heart as a soul in need?

As a Vincentian Conference do you choose to go beyond the bag of food or the utility bill and join yourselves to the hopes and dreams of those God has sent to you?

Poverty Awareness Month is the time to go deeper, to look into your own hearts and to listen to what the Spirit might be inviting you to dare to begin. We can end poverty! One person, one neighborhood, one community at a time.

I hope that 2018 is the year that you and your Conference and Council decide to walk the journey out of poverty with those you serve. To get started or to take the next step, here are some suggestions to better build that road out of poverty:

Take the one-minute, eye-popping Poverty Quiz – “Could You Survive in Poverty?” For contrast, proceed to the companion quizzes “Could You Survive in Wealth?” and “Could you survive in the Middle Class.”

Learn about Poverty at the Poverty USA website of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and check-out the site’s interactive map about poverty in your state.

Stage a Poverty Simulation for your Council or Conference, perhaps even opening it to the community at large. It’s a consciousness-raising exercise into the daily realities faced by those in poverty as they navigate the mind-numbing world of welfare agencies, pawn shops, jails, courts, cops on the beat, food pantries, schools, low-paying jobs and unreliable transportation.
The SVdP website has all the needed resources.

Do an inside-out study of poverty as a Conference or Council using two resources the Society makes available in partnership with others:

- **Bridges Out of Poverty Handbook** coupled with either an accompanying **DVD series** or **free online videos** from the aha! Process.

- **If Not Me, Then Who: Empowering Our Neighbors** (a curriculum kit) by Dr. Donna M. Beegle, or via three free Internet-based resources: 1) **YouTube Video Series**; 2) **downloadable Facilitator Guide**; and 3) **downloadable Participant Manual**.

Re-acquaint yourself and your Conference or Council with the preferential option for the poor theme of Catholic Social Teaching. Start with the four (4) minute U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)/Catholic Relief Services (CRS) video on the option for the poor and vulnerable. After checking that out, look at the other USCCB/CRS YouTube videos, collectively called **Catholic Social Teaching 101**, on the six other themes. And, as you view these, remember that no less an authority than Pope John Paul II in his homily at Frederic Ozanam’s beatification characterized Frederic’s work in Paris with the poor as a precursor of Catholic Social Teaching.

For further assistance, contact **Tom Dwyer**, National Chair of the Society’s Voice of the Poor Program, or **Tom Mulloy**, Director of National Poverty Programs, SVdPUSA.

And may 2018 be a blessed year for you and our friends in need as we continue our fight against the scourge of poverty.

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