***The Term Social Justice is Nothing to Fear***

There are many ways to define Social Justice and each has its specific spin and context. The topic of Social Justice becomes a huge mass of words, actions, and opinions that can put fear in a person causing them to avoid the topic completely.

As Catholics and Vincentians we are called to be involved in bringing Social Justice to our brothers and sisters. Social Justice is NOT socialism. The Social Justice topic is so easily wrapped around the political landscape, be it the left or right side of politics, based on viewpoints, or who is in control at the time. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, social justice takes its meaning from Catholic Social Teaching. The Catholic Church believes that through words, prayers and deeds one must show solidarity with, and compassion for, the poor. People are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.

If we take a very basic definition of Social Justice such as “all people should have the respect and opportunities to contribute to our society in a way to benefit themselves and our towns,” the context is focused on respectfulness of the person and the benefit to both the person and society. We want to fight poverty and injustice NOT the poor. So many times, we find ourselves stereotyping a person or group in need that we lose sight of the social injustice that can cause the person or group to be in a specific situation or hamper their ability to get out of a specific situation. The Voice of the Poor (VOP) Committee asks you to think of Social Justice as a virtue. As part of the seven virtues, Social Justice would align with Charity and Diligence. We can help by providing Charity to those in need. However, we also need Diligence to help eliminate social injustices that inhibit those living in poverty from receiving the same opportunities as others.

Ways you might be Diligent are:

* Educate yourself on a particular issue
* Work on your own habits and beliefs
* Research the local issues around you
* Take action in your community
* Go to a protest or informational meetings
* Use social media to gather information
* Volunteer your time
* Contact your legislator on bills or policies that impact social justice

Voice of the Poor (VOP) works with Catholic Charities and Missouri Catholic Conference to look at upcoming legislation and review potential impacts to Social Justice. VOP sends out notices to Vincentians on specific issues and ask for those that wish to contact their legislators to make known their position in order to bring justice to those in need.

We as Catholics have a duty to take action to help our brothers and sisters.

*Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17).*

*“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” He will reply: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:34–35, 40).*

**Do not fear Social Justice** or stand by idly talking about injustices you see. Be bold and act by providing your voice and support on the direction of society and policy practices that will benefit our brothers and sisters and our communities. One can remove the word ‘social’ because what it really boils down to is ‘**justice**’.