

## Community Life Standing Chair



St. Joseph Vaz is the saint chosen for Community Life Standing Committee. St. Joseph was born on April 21, 1651 and became an Oratorian missionary priest. He arrived in Sri Lanka during the Dutch occupation. The Dutch had expelled the Portuguese and imposed Calvinism as the official religion in Sri Lanka. Fr. Vaz travelled throughout Sri Lanka, bringing the Sacraments and Eucharist to clandestine groups of Catholics. He would sometimes disguise himself as a beggar to live out his mission. Later he founded a shelter where he intensified his missionary work by ministering to both minority Tamil and Sinhalese ethnic groups. By the time of his death on January 16, 1711, he had managed to rebuild the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.

When Pope Francis approved his canonisation on September 17, 2014, he stated that St. Joseph Vaz was an example of religious tolerance who is still relevant to the world today. "Saint Joseph shows us the importance of transcending religious divisions in the service of peace," Pope Francis said in his homily during the canonisation Mass.

St. Joseph Vaz leads us to our beatitude beautifully: Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. This beatitude has been lived out and continues to be lived out through the Community Life Standing Committee. This standing committee through its areas of concern calls each of us to be merciful and to take part with compassionate action. All parish councils in Ontario are expressing mercy in many ways with their service in compassionate action for the community.

In Ontario over 100 parishes have taken on the work of mercy in sponsoring refugee families or individuals. They have raised funds, found and furnished homes, registered children for schools and assisted in gaining employment for the adult members of the family. It doesn't stop there. Refugees are different than someone who immigrates to Canada. Refugees had to flee for their safety and most have very little left of their world as they know it. It is a huge transition for them and that is where the CWL council members shine. Many councils have organized welcome showers or socials for the women of the families. This enables the new Canadians to meet the women in their community and get to know each other. It lets them feel the warmth and encouragement of the community. Council members assist in day to day activities as well—driving them for groceries, doctor and dentist appointments and job opportunities to name a few. Most importantly they are there to listen to their concerns and assist anyway they can to help adapt to our country and culture.

Through the refugee sponsorship program, we have changed so many lives and given them hope for a better future. What tremendous joy this gives us to be transforming for people in desperate need. In conclusion I quote Matthew Kelly, "there is only one type of person God has used powerfully throughout history: He does incredible things with the people who make themselves available to him."

Wilma Vanderzwaag, Community Life Chairperson