



Leave No Child Behind: Ending Child Poverty

**Strategy Development Paper
Anglican Diocese of Toronto**

**Social Justice & Advocacy Board
Anglican Diocese of Toronto**

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Introduction

Following a priority-setting event in January 2004, the Social Justice and Advocacy Board identified child poverty as a major focus for both advocacy and parish outreach work.

This led to the development of the current document, which sets out a proposed strategy for the Diocese with a plan for how we can work together to address this situation.

We have also developed a strategy paper on how to combat homelessness and promote affordable housing, which was adopted by Diocesan Council in October, 2004 (http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/images/Homelessness_Strategy_Paper_Oct7.doc). Some elements of that paper are also incorporated in this document, because many of the issues involved are similar.

Mission and Vision of the Diocese

The mission of our Diocese of Toronto is to worship God and proclaim Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and to embody – in word and action – God’s reconciling love, justice, and liberation, through which knowledge of God’s reign is extended.

This is our collective purpose, which we bring to life throughout our Diocese in many ways. In our baptismal covenant, each of us has vowed to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and to respect the dignity of every human being. Therefore, at the core of our Christian community is our ministry on behalf of those who are marginalized and in need. Christ tells us, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40).

In our diocese we are building communities of compassion and hope through three distinct but complementary strategies:

Making our Anglican life seeker friendly [Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 5:38, Luke 14:28-30]

- Being, and being seen to be, welcoming to and supportive of all individuals in our communities who seek spiritual, social and/or physical nurturing.
- Being seen as a beacon of light, of good news and celebration, of friendship and of caring, to all who look for a source of affirmation and joy amidst the noise of a modern world.

Creating distinct and supportive ministries which respond to and reflect the diversity of our society [Matthew 28.1, Galatians 3:28]

- Sponsoring and encouraging ministries which are, and are seen to be, supportive of diverse cultural communities
- Sponsoring and encouraging new ways of ministry which resonate with young people and speak to young seekers

- Renewing our ministry around that which is sacred to reflect the key segments of our society.

Advocating Christ's message to influence social policy and social realities [Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 4:17-19, Micah 6:8]

- Being, and being seen to be, a courageous and persuasive voice for the homeless, the poor and the marginalized.
- Creating and carrying out ministries which address the needs of the homeless and the poor across our Diocese as living examples of Christ working among us.

Our mission and our strategies are based on the recognition that as Christians, we are called to be Christ's hands and voice, working together to create a society which provides a decent standard of living and a healthy start in life to all members of our society. One of the primary tasks of the church (and of our Diocese, and the Social Justice and Advocacy Board) is to challenge our society about the way in which it treats the poor.

The reality of child poverty

Child poverty is a far more serious problem than many of us realize. Despite economic growth, the national child poverty rate increased in 2002, the most recent year for which statistics are available. The new rate is 15.6 percent, meaning another 129,000 poor children than in 2001.¹ More than a million children across Canada are growing up in poverty – one child in six. In Ontario 373,000 children are living in poverty, 35% of all the poor children in Canada. The number is up 97,000 from 1989, when Parliament resolved to end child poverty by 2000.

There is nothing inevitable about this sorry state of affairs. Child poverty is a product of the choices we have collectively made about allocating resources in our society, and about meeting the needs of children and their families. The record of other countries shows that when societies make different choices, the results are dramatically different. Our record is very poor compared with Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, where the child poverty rate is less than five percent. We are among the five worst industrialized nations in terms of high child poverty rates, with the U.S., Italy, the U.K. and Australia.

Many people believe that all poor families live on social assistance, or "welfare" as it is usually called. But that's not true. Most (87%) low-income children in Ontario live in families with some paid employment and almost half of low-income children have parents who work all year. Many of these families are trapped between low wages and rising rents. Ontario's minimum wage is just \$7.45 an hour, and about 250,000 Ontarians work at minimum wage jobs. Many others earn little more than the minimum wage; over a million workers in Ontario earn only \$10 an hour or less.

Child poverty has long-lasting impacts, which cost all of us. Poor children lead shorter lives because they are more likely to be sick and to have chronic diseases. A report called *The Health of Canada's Children* documents how poor children show greater incidence of illness and death, hospital stays, accidental injuries, poor mental health, low school

¹ "Our poor record fighting child poverty just got worse", by Ed Broadbent, The Globe and Mail, Nov.24, 2004.

achievement, and other negative impacts linked to poverty.² These impacts, and other effects of poverty such as overcrowded housing, make it harder for them to learn and do well at school. They tend to get low-wage jobs and go on to have children who are also poor. Thus the cycle of poverty repeats itself.

In contrast, ensuring that all children have a decent start in life pays off in many ways. As Campaign 2000 notes, “Building a nation in which children thrive is the surest basis for giving all Canadians the best chance of achieving their highest level of health and well-being, and assuring a strong foundation for sustainable economic prosperity.”³

In human terms, what does poverty actually mean for those most affected, namely children? Here’s what children in North Bay said:

Poverty is...

*Wishing you could go to McDonald's
getting a basket from the Santa Fund
feeling ashamed when my dad can't get a job
not buying books at the book fair
not getting to go to birthday parties
hearing my mom and dad fight over money
not ever getting a pet because it costs too much
wishing you had a nice house
not being able to go camping
not getting a hot dog on hot dog day
not getting pizza on pizza day
not going to Canada's Wonderland
not being able to have your friends sleep over
pretending that you forgot your lunch
being afraid to tell your mom that you need gym shoes
not having any breakfast sometimes
not being able to play hockey
sometimes really hard because my mom gets scared and she cries
hiding your feet so the teacher won't get cross when you don't have boots
not being able to go to Cubs or play soccer
not being able to take swimming lessons
not being able to take the electives at school (downhill skiing)
not being able to afford a holiday
not having pretty barrettes for your hair
not having your own private backyard
being teased for the way you are dressed
not getting to go on school trips⁴*

² Canadian Institute on Children's Health, *The Health of Canada's Children* (3rd edition). Ottawa: CICH, 2000.

³ *Pathways to Progress: Structural Solutions to Address Child Poverty*, Campaign 2000, May 2004, pg.13.

⁴ *Our Neighbours' Voices Will We Listen?*, Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, Toronto: James Lorimer, 1998, pg.107.

A scriptural context for understanding how to respond

*“Is this not the sort of fast that pleases me,
to break unjust fetters
and undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
to share your bread with the hungry,
and shelter the homeless poor.”*
-- Isaiah 58:6-7 (JV)

A central message of Christianity is to love our neighbour and thus care for the most vulnerable among us. The brutal reality of more than a million children growing up poor in our enormously wealthy country runs totally contrary to the spirit and teachings of Jesus and his message of abundant life for all. Old Testament prophets such as Micah were harsh in their condemnation of the wealthy, and of rulers who oppressed the people. Does this not speak to the situation in our own diocese, where the rich-poor gap is widening into a vast chasm? The median income in Toronto’s 12 poorest neighbourhoods plunged 8 percent from 1995 to 2001, from \$32,651 to \$29,950, while those in the 12 wealthiest neighbourhoods enjoyed a 25% rise in income, from \$129,000 to \$161,625⁵.

A society which allows child poverty amidst great wealth is inconsistent with basic Christian values, Bishop Colin Johnson told a press conference on child poverty on November 24, 2004. “It [child poverty] offends against the basic theological principles of faith, hope and charity. It offends against charity and the love of neighbour. It offends against hope, by taking away the possibility of a different sort of existence. And it offends against faith — that one is integrally linked to neighbour and to God, so what you do to your neighbour reflects how you feel about God. As the Apostle John says, those who do not show they love their neighbour cannot love God.” (1 John 4:20)

Jesus points us toward a different way of ordering our lives together. By lifting up the poor, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) turn the priorities of our world upside down and open up to us what it really means to live as a follower of Jesus. It’s not simply a question of ensuring that the poor receive their fair share of the community’s income. As Mother Teresa said, “We meet with Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor.” (see Matthew 25:40).

Turning the situation around

The existence of widespread poverty in our affluent society reflects our societal values, and the fact that the value of individualism is seen as more important than the common good. Indeed, the concept of the common good has taken a pounding in our society during recent years. The common good affirms the role of social and public policy in creating conditions providing for the dignity of everyone. But North American society seems to have lost sight of this essential value. We increasingly focus on our lives as individuals and on our private pursuits, paying less attention to our roles as citizens and on what we can do together to promote the common good.

⁵ *Lives in the Balance*, Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004, pg.3.

While society may exalt individualism, the business of the Church is to call society into the Kingdom of God. The scriptural model for society, in both the Old and New Testaments, is that of a family: “If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him.” (Leviticus 25:35) “If any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17) A good family works together to help its members.

Most of us believe that the best way to respond to issues such as child poverty is through individual charity, not by a collective response through government. The rise in individualism has been matched by a decline in active citizenship. The decline in voter turnouts during recent elections is one example of this.

Archbishop Michael Peers lamented this trend in his last public address before retiring as primate in 2004. He noted that public discourse on citizenship “has been degraded almost to the point of extinction, replaced by the language of “taxpayers.”⁶

Charity does, of course, play an essential role in our society. We need to respond to neighbours in need through charitable giving, and volunteer work.

However, the individualistic response of personal charity, vital as it is, is not enough. Given the complexity of our society, many of the challenges we face – like child poverty – are simply too large in scale to be resolved adequately by individuals and voluntary organizations. We need to tackle these issues together, through adequate public policy. Government has a positive role to play in this regard.

Yet our governments have been falling short in playing their part. Reflecting our society’s rampant individualism, we do not see our governments making child poverty a top priority, such as through a comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty or by the setting of targets for assessing the effectiveness of such a strategy. Our various levels of government need to work together in the planning and carrying out of co-ordinated measures that could make a difference for children and families in poverty.

Ultimately, this is a question of choices and of the values which we see as important as a society, of the common good versus individualism. What kind of policies might arise if we, as a society, chose to affirm that our well-being as a community requires that we ensure that every child gets a decent start in life, through adequate food, housing and other necessities?

A wide range of measures could come into play to achieve this goal. Here are a few examples of what they might include:

- Increased social assistance rates, which Ontario cut by 21.6% in 1995, with only a 3% increase since then;
- Tax incentives to companies who hire hard-to-employ individuals such as single mothers;
- An increase in the federal government’s Child Tax Benefit program;
- Improved early childhood development programs and child care;
- Action to counter the housing crisis and provide more affordable housing, so that low-income families are not spending so much of their income on rent and have more money for their children’s other needs. For example, cramped housing makes it difficult for many children to do their homework and thus do well in school. For more on this

⁶Primate laments ‘diehard secularism’, The Anglican Journal, http://www.anglicanjournal.com/extra/news.php?newsItem=2004-01-26_ms.news

topic see our housing strategy paper,
http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/images/Homelessness_Strategy_Paper_Oct7.doc

An excellent starting point for government action in Ontario would be to end the “clawback” of the National Child Benefit Supplement. This single measure would make a huge difference, and the Ontario government has promised to carry it out. The federal government introduced a National Child Benefit in 1997 to prevent and reduce child poverty. The National Child Benefit Supplement is an additional benefit intended to help Canada’s poorest families. Through the supplement, the federal government provides about \$125 per month per child.

But in Ontario, only working families are allowed to keep this money; the provincial government “claws back” (deducts) this money from the cheques of parents on social assistance or a disability pension by the same amount as the federal supplement. So these families — and their children — are no better off. A recent survey by Toronto’s Daily Bread Food Bank found that close to half of food bank clients with children on social assistance believe that they would not have to rely on food bank handouts if they received the Child Benefit Supplement.

It would cost Ontario \$200 million a year to end the clawback, although the net cost would be less since low-income families would spend their extra income in local food stores, clothing stores and the like, thus increasing provincial tax revenues. The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition urged Prime Minister Martin in a January 2005 letter to help Ontario and other provinces end the clawback, through an increase in the Canada Social Transfer.

Sometimes it seems as if advocacy efforts with government towards steps to alleviate poverty have little or no impact. We can draw inspiration from the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:2-8). The widow keeps asking the unscrupulous judge for justice and eventually she succeeds because the judge thinks: “Since she (the widow) keeps pestering me I must give just rights to her, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death.” (Luke 18:5). We need to incorporate into our thinking this willingness to be prepared to work for the long haul.

What Anglicans are doing

Individual Anglicans and parishes are heavily involved in trying to alleviate the effects of child poverty in various ways. The most common way involves front-line assistance for children and families who need immediate help, especially with that most basic of needs, food. The 2004 Parish Outreach Survey carried out by the Social Justice and Advocacy Board, with the Anglican Church Women, found that 139 parishes in our diocese run foodbanks themselves or are involved with other foodbanks. Some parishes provide used clothing either free or at low cost. Many run special programs around Christmas, such as gift boxes or food hampers.

These charitable efforts are essential and reflect a compassionate response to people in need. Yet in and of themselves, they cannot make up for inadequate public programs. As Bishop Colin Johnson noted at the November 24, 2004 press conference on child poverty, “We’re working with volunteers, and a fairly small volunteer base, which is leading to burnout.” We need to move from charity to advocacy.

Beyond all the immediate relief work, Anglicans are involved with advocacy efforts through three significant coalitions:

Campaign 2000: A national network of over 90 national, provincial and community organizations working to end child and family poverty in Canada. Campaign 2000's members include the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition and the Kairos justice coalition, both of which include the Anglican Church. The work of Campaign 2000 includes education, lobbying and detailed research on the issue, including annual "report cards" on child poverty in each province. The organization's name reminds us of the 1989 House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

www.campaign2000.ca

Campaign Against Child Poverty: A coalition of citizens from faith groups (including the Diocese of Toronto), social justice groups, charities, child welfare organizations and others who are concerned about child poverty and working to end it. CACP has run full-page newspaper advertisements which have publicized the issue to large numbers of Canadians, and its members have met with Prime Minister Paul Martin. www.childpoverty.com.

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC): A coalition made up of Ontario's major faith communities (Christian, Jewish and Muslim) which works to counter hunger, homelessness and poverty through education among people of faith and by advocacy efforts with the provincial government. www.isarc.ca.

Further steps by the Diocese of Toronto to strengthen our response

As diocesan organizations (both Diocesan Council and the Social Justice and Advocacy Board), we need to focus on those things that we do best at the diocesan level of our church and ensure that our parishes and congregations are supported and enabled to carry out active and caring ministry in every community across our Diocese where the need exists.

We propose that Diocesan Council, through its Social Justice and Advocacy Board, should:

- Increase awareness and focus on this issue through communications and relationship building across the Diocese.
 - Broaden understanding amongst Anglicans of the root causes of child poverty, and how each of us makes choices which help or hurt.
 - Raise awareness about the different steps individual Anglicans and Anglican parishes are taking to alleviate child poverty, thus informing Anglicans about the different ways in which they and their parishes can choose to respond. (See Action Suggestions in the Appendix)
 - Give voice to child poverty issues and solutions at various meetings across the Diocese including deanery and area meetings. Council members and Board members can become champions to keep this issue in front of people in a meaningful way.

- Develop support networks for Anglicans who are active on child poverty issues, so that they can learn from and support each other.
- Strengthen the voice of the Anglican Church in advocacy with government on issues of child poverty.
 - Support the role of the Bishops in taking Christ's message to business, community and political leaders.
 - Develop an understanding with our provincial and national church of how we can work together for maximum impact and change.
 - Build collaborative lobbying programs with other Dioceses, other churches and other like-minded social action groups.
 - Take every opportunity to raise this issue with the media, government officials and politicians.

As mentioned, changes in public policy that increase incomes and opportunities for low-income families are essential to make a meaningful difference for the hundreds of thousands of children involved. We are keen to work with governments, at all levels, for positive solutions.

Our diocese has already begun this work. In 2004 Archbishop Terence Finlay met with two key Ontario Cabinet Ministers, Children's Issues Minister Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, and Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello, urging them to increase social assistance rates and to end the clawback. Bishop Colin Johnson made ending the clawback the focus of his remarks at a November 2004 press conference sponsored by Campaign 2000. Social Justice and Advocacy Board members can assist in mobilizing Anglicans in support of advocacy campaigns, and working with child poverty action groups on specific campaigns.

Milestones and measures of progress

Our criteria for success for this work would be developed annually by the Social Justice and Advocacy Board for approval by Diocesan Council. These would then become the milestones and measures through which the Board will be accountable to Council for bringing this strategy to life.

This year the Social Justice and Advocacy Board is focussing much of its efforts on issues of homelessness and affordable housing, so in 2005 our activities to combat child poverty focus on raising awareness of the clawback, and encouraging the government of Ontario to end it. A significant step in raising public awareness occurred on March 8, 2005, when The Toronto Star printed an article by Bishop Colin Johnson, June Callwood and Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld urging the Ontario government to end the clawback.

The following are current examples of milestones and measures that signify progress:

- By June 2005, establish a Social Justice and Advocacy Board taskforce working to end the clawback.
- By September 2005, convene a meeting, on our own or with a partner group such as ISARC, to discuss the clawback with a provincial or federal minister responsible for policies affecting child poverty or the welfare of families.

- Deepen the awareness of Anglicans on child poverty issues through articles, publicity about advocacy campaigns, and a child poverty workshop at our Outreach Networking Conference, to be held on October 1, 2005.
- By June 2006, implement an advocacy program that involves Anglicans from at least ten parishes in organizing meetings with their MPP or MP to discuss child poverty issues.

Appendix

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Each of us as individuals, and each of our parishes, can do a lot to combat child poverty. Each of us can be part of the solution. Here are some suggestions:

PRAY. Incorporate prayer about child poverty in your weekly parish intercessions, and at other church gatherings.

LEARN ABOUT THE ISSUE. Hold an educational event in your parish. The Social Justice and Advocacy Board can help provide a speaker and resources.

FIND A “CHAMPION” in your parish willing to mobilize others to work on this issue.

TALK about child poverty during election campaigns. Ask candidates what they plan to do to address the issues.

CALL, WRITE OR MEET with your municipal councillor, MPP or MP asking what they plan to do on this issue. Organize a delegation from your parish. If possible, include a low-income person in your group, or a person who has struggled with poverty in the past. To find out who your MPP is, call Elections Ontario toll-free: 1-800-677-8683 or go to <http://www.gov.on.ca/MBS/english/common/contact.html#con>. To find out who your MP is, call Elections Canada toll-free: 1-800-463-6868 or go to http://canada.gc.ca/directories/direct_e.html.

Remember that municipal politicians have the power to make positive change too, and that programs are often delivered at the local level. For example you might advocate with municipal councillors and your mayor for public health nutrition programs and for parenting programs for low-income mothers.

Perhaps you could invite your elected representative to tour a local foodbank. Or you could bring a foodbank volunteer with you to your meeting, so that your MPP, MP or municipal councillor gets a real sense of what it is like to live on social assistance and have to rely on handouts. Make sure that you provide information about the issue in their local constituency (e.g. the number of people going to the foodbank). Ask the elected representative to raise the issue of child poverty and possible policy alternatives with their party caucus.

Don't be discouraged if results from your efforts seem far off. Remember the persistent widow!

SUPPORT COMMUNITY MINISTRIES whose work can help break the cycle of poverty, such as the homework clubs supported by Flemington Park Community Ministry, and The Dam's work with troubled teens. Ask if a speaker from these ministries can come to your parish.

ATTEND OUR ANNUAL DIOCESAN OUTREACH NETWORKING CONFERENCE, which offers the opportunity to meet other Anglicans concerned about this issue and learn from each other. Workshops on child poverty include information and discussion about possible action responses. This year's conference takes place October 1, 2005, at Tyndale University, Toronto.

ORGANIZE AN EVENT around November 24, the date in 1989 when Parliament passed its resolution to end child poverty by 2000. Be creative! For example, “Danny, King of the Basement” is a powerful one-hour play by Toronto playwright David Craig that portrays the reality of child poverty, with three young people as main characters. It was performed at our diocesan Youth Synod in April 2005, as a way to introduce young Anglicans to child poverty and stimulate discussion and action in response.

Perhaps you could work with others to have the play held in your community, and have a forum afterwards.

CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE AND GROUPS in your community or region. Remember, you don’t need to do everything on your own!

JOIN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS TO URGE ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY. Government policies can have an enormous impact. See what campaigns are currently underway by Campaign 2000 (www.campaign2000.ca) and the Campaign Against Child Poverty (www.childpoverty.com). An Ontario-wide campaign to end the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement was launched in February 2005, by the Income Security Advocacy Centre (www.handsoffnow.ca).