



## The Ontario Provincial Synod

### The Anglican Church of Canada

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May 30, 2017

Kathleen Wynne, Premier  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

I am writing on behalf of Anglicans throughout Ontario to express our support for several of the new commitments made by your government to address poverty in our province in your most recent budget. As you know, Anglicans have a longstanding commitment to reducing, and ultimately eliminating, poverty in communities across Ontario. In meetings with you and other representatives of your government, you have encouraged us to keep pressing you to make poverty reduction a priority, and it is in that spirit that I write to you today.

During the Minister of Finance's pre-budget consultations this year, we joined our voice with many of our ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners to call for government action on key poverty issues in Ontario. While some of our specific requests remain unaddressed, we do see several encouraging signs.

We are pleased to see several measures in the 2017 budget that will lighten the burden for people living on low incomes in Ontario. The provision of prescription drug coverage to all Ontarians under 25 will alleviate extra health care costs for low income families. As well, the lowering of household electricity bills by an average of 25 percent (and even more for low income Ontarians and those living in eligible rural, remote and First Nations reserve communities), and holding increases to the rate of inflation over the next four years, will help make life more affordable for people already struggling to afford food and shelter. At the same time, however, we recognize that continued investments in electricity generation and infrastructure, and prudent financing of those investments, are needed to ensure that the costs lowered today will not merely be added to a bill to be paid by future generations.

Among the most welcome news in this budget is this government's commitment to improving educational opportunities for Ontarians. Investments in early childhood education will help 24,000 more children get affordable, quality licensed childcare this year, approximately 60 percent of which will be subsidized. This is welcome news for many parents struggling to balance the needs of their families with the demands of the workforce. The continued rollout of the Ontario Student Assistance Program will provide more than 210,000 Ontarian students with free tuition for post-secondary education this fall. As well, the investment of \$190 million over three years in creating work-related opportunities for students and recent graduates will help give young people the skills and experience they need to succeed. We recognize that these investments in early childhood and post-secondary education will give children and young people from low income families greater opportunities to find better paying, more secure employment and to reach their full potential.



The substantial increase in asset limits and gift exemptions for social assistance recipients will go a long way toward helping those who can make use of them to bounce back from temporary financial setbacks and to build a way out of poverty. As such, these measures are extremely welcome. However, for those who do not have these reserves, and cannot count on material assistance from family and friends, little has changed. The 2% rate increase for Ontario Works and ODSP merely keeps pace with the rate of inflation, while the real costs of housing, food, and other basic needs are rising faster than the inflation rate, and the previous government's cuts to assistance rates remain unaddressed since 2004, keeping most social assistance recipients mired in deep poverty.

We applaud your government's introduction of the Basic Income Pilot Project in the communities of Hamilton, Thunder Bay, and Lindsay and look forward to the results. At the same time, we recognize that most people living on social assistance in this province have waited a long time, and continue to wait, for material improvement in their standard of living.

We are pleased to note your government's announcement of the Fair Housing Plan to address housing affordability for home buyers and renters, by doubling the land-transfer tax refund for first time home-buyers, introducing a non-resident speculation tax, closing the post-1991 rent control loophole, creating standard leases and strengthening protections for tenants. These are important measures. We also note the government's continued support of the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, including investment in supportive housing, Community Homelessness Prevention Initiatives and the Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit. We are also encouraged by your government's plan to commit provincial land assets for the development of new housing units and to commit funding for construction and renovation of affordable housing units through the Social Infrastructure Fund, and look forward to seeing the impact of these measures. We were sorry, however, not to see a substantial investment in repairing existing social housing units, a growing problem which municipalities in Ontario cannot shoulder alone. We will continue to advocate for investment in affordable housing at all levels of government so that our shared goal of ending homelessness and ensuring safe, affordable housing for all can be realized.

As I said to you at the Ontario Prayer Breakfast, we strongly support many of the recommendations of the Changing Workplaces Review. We were especially pleased to see today's announcement of your government's plans for raising the minimum wage to \$14/hr by 2018 and \$15/hr by 2019, so that full-time workers on minimum wage can be lifted above the poverty line. We also welcome the announcement of provisions to extend equal pay to part-time, temporary, casual and seasonal workers doing the same work as full-time workers, expand access to personal emergency leave and vacation time, expand the definition of who is an employee, improve employee scheduling and provide for improved enforcement of employment standards. These are measures which we, together with our partners in the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition and the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, have been advocating for some time. Their implementation will help to protect the rights of working people in Ontario.



There remains much to be done to reduce poverty Ontario. Increased investments in affordable housing and a meaningful rise in social assistance rates continue to be pressing goals for which we advocate. At the same time, we acknowledge that this budget, together with today's announcement, makes real progress in several key areas to improving the lives of vulnerable people in this province. Please be assured of our commitment to working with you and all levels of government to build a more equitable and just society.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to poverty reduction. We remain hopeful that we can work together to realize a vision of Ontario in which all people can live in dignity.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Johnson", preceded by a small cross symbol.

The Most Rev'd Colin R. Johnson,  
Archbishop of Toronto  
and Metropolitan of Ontario