

# Diocese of Toronto

## Policy Paper on Poverty Reduction

### Preamble/Background

In 2003-2004 the Social Justice and Advocacy Board, which had developed out of the Community Ministries Board, was asked to develop priorities for advocacy for the Diocesan Bishop and others as they interact with government officials and those who influence social realities in our Diocese. In January 2004, the Board gathered input from many across the Diocese, and, with the approval of Diocesan Council, identified Homelessness and Affordable Housing, as well as Child Poverty, as two priorities for both advocacy and parish outreach work. Over the ensuing decade and a half, we have come to see child poverty as only one aspect within the wider context of poverty and income inequality.

HIV/AIDS was also identified as a priority for outreach and advocacy at Diocesan Synod in 2005 and remained a social justice priority until 2015, when outreach in this area was subsumed under Chaplaincy. Environmental issues were added as another Diocesan social justice priority in 2010.

In January 2008 the Social Justice and Advocacy Board ceased to operate as a Canonical Board and became the Social Justice and Advocacy Committee. Currently the three priority areas for the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee remain:

- Affordable housing and homelessness
- Poverty reduction
- Environmental issues.

As we embark upon a new chapter in the history of the Diocese of Toronto with the installation of a new Diocesan Bishop, we have been asked to prepare updated policy statements on these three priority areas. The Social Justice and Advocacy Committee and Consultant look forward to working with our new Diocesan Bishop on these priorities and others that the Bishops and Diocesan Council may define.

### Social Justice and Advocacy within the context of Scripture and the Church's Mission

As members of Christ's Church, we are called into Christ's mission to the world (Matthew 28:18-20.) This mission, the good news of God in Christ, is described in our baptismal vows as well as in the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion.

In our baptismal vows, we promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our] neighbour as [ourselves]", to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being," and to "strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and respect, renew, and sustain the life of the earth."<sup>1</sup> These vows echo the third, fourth and fifth Marks of Mission: "to respond to human need with loving service", "to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every

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<sup>1</sup> General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services*, "Holy Baptism", including the additional text added by resolution C001 of Joint Assembly 2013, p. 159. (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1995)

kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation”, and “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, our Mission as a Diocese is to “build healthy, missional Anglican communities that engage faithfully with the world and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

A *missional* Anglican community does not occupy itself solely with its own internal well-being, but focuses outward on behalf of those beyond its doors.

To *engage faithfully with the world* has a number of aspects. Firstly, it involves understanding the world as created and loved by God, for the redemption of which Jesus died and rose again (Genesis 1:1, John 3:16-17, Colossians 1:15-20.)

Faithful engagement with the world also includes upholding the central confession of the Church since apostolic times – that Jesus is Lord. No earthly authority – whether a form of government, political party, or leader - can claim our ultimate allegiance or embody our ultimate hope. Our first loyalty is to Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God which he embodied and proclaimed. While we acknowledge that earthly authorities have a God-given role to preserve order for the public good (Romans 13:1-7), we also understand that these structures and institutions are ultimately subject to being disarmed, reconciled, and transformed in Christ (Colossians 2:15, Ephesians 6:12, 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Revelation 21:5.)

Accordingly, faithful engagement seeks the welfare of the place in which we find ourselves (Jeremiah 29:7), doing justly and loving mercy (Micah 6:8.) It is to uphold, in our public witness as well as our private charity, the Gospel values of loving one’s neighbour as oneself, honouring the dignity of each person as made in the image of God, and welcoming and serving “the least” in our society as brothers and sisters of Christ (Matthew 22:39, Genesis 1:26-27, James 3:9, Matthew 25:31-45.)

### Poverty: Realities within our Diocese

Canada is overall a wealthy country, and Ontario a wealthy province. Even so, 16.8% of Canadians, and 17% of Ontarians – more than 1 in every 6 people - live in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Poverty rates are even higher for children, especially children in single-parent families: 47.4% of Canadian children in lone-parent families live in poverty compared to 19.6% of Canadian children overall. Thirty of the fifty-nine federal ridings in the Diocese of Toronto have child poverty rates above the national average. Nine of these are among the thirty federal ridings with the highest child poverty rates in Canada: Toronto Centre (40.0%); Humber River-Black Creek and Scarborough – Guildwood (both at 32.9%); Etobicoke North (30.8%); York South – Weston (29.9%); Scarborough Centre and Scarborough Southwest (29.3); Scarborough – Agincourt (29.1) and Don Valley East (28.7) <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.anglican.ca/marks/about/>

<sup>3</sup> *Poverty Trends 2018*, Citizens for Public Justice, October 15, 2018. Source: Statistics Canada: After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low Income Measure, by family type and family type composition, 2016 income year.

<sup>4</sup> *Riding by Riding Analysis Shows Child Poverty in Canada Knows No Boundaries*, Campaign 2000, June 18, 2018. Based on Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) for 2016. Please note that the overall child poverty rate in Canada based on the LIM-AT is actually lower (17.4%) than the CFLIM-AT measure (19.6%) for the same year.

Women, who are much more likely to head single-parent families, and who tend to have higher employment precarity and wage disparity, are particularly vulnerable. Poverty also disproportionately affects Indigenous and racialized people as well as persons with disabilities. And, as is described below, the poverty rate among seniors is growing.

Across Ontario, income levels for the most vulnerable have not kept pace with inflation, much less with rising housing costs. Housing is the single largest expense for most low-income households, and communities across the Diocese of Toronto are experiencing a crisis in affordability of housing. (For more information on the need for affordable housing and what Anglicans are doing to address it, please see the Diocesan policy paper on affordable housing & homelessness.) Social assistance rates remain between 30% and 50% below the poverty line. Planned increases to social assistance and changes to social assistance rules that would have begun to ease the burden for the most vulnerable people in our province have been cut following the 2018 provincial election. The most recent rate increase of 1.5% does not even match the rate of inflation, while an increase in exempted earnings is only half of what was planned by the previous government, and more than undercut by increased clawbacks for earnings above the exemption limit. The provincial government has also announced its intention to change the eligibility for new applicants to the Ontario Disability Support Program to align with a more restrictive federal definition of disability, which would force more people onto the much lower rates of Ontario Works. A three-year pilot project to offer Basic Income to low-income individuals in four Ontario communities – including Lindsay, in our Diocese – was cancelled by the current provincial government.

Ideally, employment would provide a pathway out of poverty for most people, but the rise of precarious (part-time, temporary and casual) employment has trapped many workers in poverty, which is exacerbated by lack of access to affordable childcare for working families. While the increase of the minimum wage to \$14/hr in 2018 represented a significant gain for low-wage workers, the freezing of this wage until 2020 and the repeal of key protections for precarious workers, including pay equity, two paid sick days per year, and scheduling provisions, will make it harder for low-wage workers to escape poverty, particularly if they have to choose between taking a sick day and being paid, or making childcare arrangements and keeping their job.

When people are squeezed between low incomes and the high cost of living, especially fixed costs such as housing, hydro, and transit, there are few areas in which they can reduce expenditures. Unfortunately, food is one of these areas. The Ontario Association of Food Banks reports that over 500,000 Ontarians relied on food banks between April 2017 and March 2018.<sup>5</sup> Even in a relatively affluent area like Barrie, the number of people living in poverty has increased significantly, with food bank use up by 36% since 2011.<sup>6</sup> While children make up one-third of food bank users in Ontario, the fastest-growing sector of the population experiencing food insecurity is seniors, with the number of Ontario seniors using food banks growing by more than 10% over the past year.<sup>7</sup> In Mississauga, food bank use by seniors has risen by 52% in the past two years.<sup>8</sup> This worrying trend reflects a growing gap between stagnating pension benefits and the cost of living.

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<sup>5</sup> *Hunger Report 2018*, Ontario Association of Food Banks, December 3, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/8382666-why-the-number-of-low-income-residents-has-grown-in-barrie-since-2006/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.themississaugafoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Face-of-Hunger-Report.pdf>

Poverty is not just about money. Poverty makes people sick, when they cannot afford dental care or prescription medications, cannot afford to take a day off to recover from an illness or injury, or must choose between nutritious groceries and paying the rent. People living below the poverty line have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, chronic bronchitis and other ailments compared with those of higher incomes<sup>9</sup>. Lack of access to healthy food further creates and exacerbates health issues. Low-wage workers also have much lower rates of insurance coverage for prescription drugs, vision, and dental care. In 2016, over 8% Canadians did not fill a doctor's prescription because of cost, while nearly a million skimped on necessities such as food or heat in order to afford their prescriptions.<sup>10</sup>

Poverty costs us all. A 2008 report found that poverty in Ontario costs the provincial and federal governments up to \$13 billion per year (\$15.1 billion when indexed to inflation), not only in burdens on the medical and justice systems but in terms of lost productivity, while investments in poverty reduction have the potential to save all levels of government billions of dollars annually<sup>11</sup>. In a similar vein, a study released in January of 2018 found that provincial investment in the social determinants of health, such as housing and income security, had a greater impact on reducing overall mortality than direct investment in health care<sup>12</sup>.

Poverty exacerbates mental and emotional stress on individuals, couples, and families. Children who experience hunger have a higher risk of negative academic and mental and physical health outcomes, all of which can follow them through life.<sup>13</sup> Poverty erodes people's dignity and their sense of belonging to and participating in the wider society, as these quotes from people across Ontario attest:

- "Because of financial problems I face just to survive, I don't feel part of the community."
- "I am diabetic... what do I do? Do I pay for my meds, rent, or food? I can't pay for everything, so I have to choose."
- "The OW [Ontario Works] application process was the most degrading thing I have ever experienced."
- "I live in a dump. I would like to move... But I can't get the money for other housing."
- "I have to limit the food [my children] can eat to make sure it lasts to the end of the month. This is painful to me."
- "My son could not go to his friend's birthday party because I could not afford to buy a present."
- School requirements for each child to have both indoor and outdoor pairs of shoes can put a strain on family food budgets. "Many of us have no way of providing this."
- "Children pay a price growing up in poverty. 'You don't have a computer? You don't have Internet?'"<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Sick and Tired: The Compromised Health of Social Assistance Recipients and the Working Poor in Ontario*, <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/sickandtiredfinal.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/02/13/canadians-with-prescriptions-are-cutting-back-on-food-electricity-to-afford-drugs-study.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Hunger Report 2018*, Ontario Association of Food Banks

<sup>12</sup> *Effect of provincial spending on social services and health care on health outcomes in Canada: an observational longitudinal study*, Daniel J. Dutton, Pierre-Gerlier Forest, Ronald D. Kneebone and Jennifer D. Zwicker  
Canadian Medical Association Journal, January 22, 2018 <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/190/3/E66>

<sup>13</sup> *Hunger Report 2018*, Ontario Association of Food Banks

<sup>14</sup> All quotes taken from participants in the 2010 Social Audit carried out by ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Commission) and reported in *Persistent Poverty: Voices from the Margins*, by Jamie Swift, Brice Balmer and Mira Dineen (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010).

As the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy states, poverty “can be understood as the condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.”<sup>15</sup>

The language used to deny and erode protections for the most vulnerable exacerbates this loss of dignity. People on social assistance and in minimum wage work are often publicly derided as lazy, lacking in ambition, and fraudulent. The reality is that people go on social assistance because of employment, family, or health emergencies – the kind of misfortune to which none of us is immune. Many minimum wage workers work long hours, often at multiple jobs and in demanding conditions, to make ends meet. And the rate of fraud among social assistance recipients has been found to be much less - about 20 times lower - than that of income tax fraud in general.<sup>16</sup>

People living in poverty are not abstractions removed from the life of the Church. They include our friends, family members, and fellow parishioners. As followers of Jesus, we are called by the Gospel to love our neighbours as ourselves and to treat the most vulnerable in our society as Christ himself. Our baptismal vows commit us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. We must, therefore, protect and stand with our neighbours living in poverty, not only by reaching out to meet their immediate needs but by resisting public discourse that bears false witness against them and calling for public policies that enable them to live in dignity.

### What Anglicans Have been Doing:

#### Meeting Direct Needs:

Almost all Anglican parishes in our Diocese are involved in meeting the direct needs of people in poverty in some way.

- A 2018 survey of parishes in the Diocese of Toronto found that more than 86% of responding parishes host or contribute to food banks or Deacon’s Cupboards, making this the single most common outreach activity among Diocesan parishes. More than half of all parishes sponsor community meal programs, where people in the parish and wider community can gather for a meal at no or nominal cost. Nearly a third of parishes in our Diocese also address food insecurity through community vegetable gardens. Grace Church, Scarborough serves as a distribution hub for the Good Food Box, which provides fruit and vegetables at a low cost, while the Church of the Messiah hosts a Good Food Market to bring affordable produce to the community. Many parishes also provide Christmas hampers and gifts for low-income households.
- Drop-in programs, such as The Common Table at Church of the Redeemer or the Tuesday morning drop-in at St. James’ Cathedral, not only provide meals and foster social inclusion through games, art and music, but provide access to services such as counselling, nursing, harm reduction and even haircuts.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>

<sup>16</sup> [https://incomesecurity.org/publications/pay-the-rent-and-feed-the-kids/Pay\\_the\\_Rent\\_&\\_Feed\\_the\\_Kids\\_-\\_Backgrounder\\_-\\_Welfare\\_Myth\\_and\\_Reality\\_-\\_2003.pdf](https://incomesecurity.org/publications/pay-the-rent-and-feed-the-kids/Pay_the_Rent_&_Feed_the_Kids_-_Backgrounder_-_Welfare_Myth_and_Reality_-_2003.pdf)

- Many parishes hold regular collections of new and/or gently-used clothing for people in need. Some parishes, such as St. Paul's, Minden and Church of the Evangelists, New Tecumseth, host regular thrift stores to provide second-hand clothing to the community at a low cost.
- Diocesan supported FaithWorks ministries are involved in meeting the immediate needs of people living in, or especially vulnerable to poverty, including ex-offenders (The Bridge Prison Ministry), youth at risk (The Dam, Downsview Youth Covenant), urban Indigenous peoples (Toronto Urban Native Ministry), street-involved individuals (All Saints Church and Community Centre, Toronto; David Busby Centre, Barrie; Warming Room Community Ministry, Peterborough) and newcomers (Flemingdon Park Ministry). Donations through FaithWorks to the Anglican Church of Canada's Giving With Grace appeal and the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund address poverty outside of the Diocese as well, from improving access to clean water in remote First Nations communities to providing health care and food security to poor communities in the Global South.
- 60% of Diocesan parishes are currently or have recently been involved in refugee sponsorship. The outcomes for privately sponsored refugees in Canada tend to be better than for government-sponsored ones, not only because of the generosity of private sponsors, but because they are surrounded by a supportive community from their arrival in Canada who can connect them to local supports and facilitate their integration into Canadian life. This helps reduce the vulnerability of newly-arrived refugees to poverty.

#### Advocacy:

In addition to our direct outreach efforts, Anglicans in the Diocese of Toronto have been at the forefront of advocacy efforts which have had an impact at the federal, provincial and municipal level.

- The Diocese of Toronto was a key member of the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction which successfully urged the provincial government to adopt its first-ever long-term Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2009, and provided feedback and input into the second Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2014.
- In the fall of 2010, Archbishop Colin Johnson and more than 400 Anglicans in the Diocese lived on the contents of a typical food bank hamper for at least three days as part of Put Food in the Budget's "Do the Math" campaign. Participants reported that while the quantity of food was sufficient, the concentration of bland, processed, and starchy food not only lacked flavour but left them feeling sluggish and ill. This exercise led to widespread support for a Vestry Motion in early 2011 calling on the provincial government to add a \$100 Healthy Food Supplement to social assistance rates and a rally outside the Finance Minister's office in March 2011.
- Every year, as part of the provincial budget process, the Diocesan Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant prepares a pre-budget submission on behalf of the Diocesan Bishop and the Social Justice and Advocacy Committee. The Diocesan Bishop also presents an annual response to the provincial budget after its release.
- Since 2013, Toronto Anglicans have participated in the annual Chew On This! campaign from Citizens for Public Justice, handing out brown bags with apples and a postcard to raise public awareness of poverty in Canada and call on the Federal government to implement a National Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Federal government ultimately released its first Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2018.

- In 2014 nearly 70 parishes in the Diocese passed a Vestry Motion calling on the provincial minimum wage to be raised to \$14.50 by 2015 and thereafter to keep the minimum wage indexed to the rate of inflation. Participation in this campaign led to the endorsement of the \$15 and Fairness Campaign: Archbishop Colin Johnson was one of the first signatories of the Faith Leaders' Statement in support of \$15 and Fairness in 2016, and Area Bishop Kevin Robertson participated in a panel discussion at Queen's Park in October 2018 to speak in favour of the minimum wage increase and worker protections contained in Bill 148.
- Members of the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee and Poverty Reduction Subcommittee joined other faith leaders in the Faith in the City coalition to call on Toronto City Council to adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy, called Prosperity TO, was unanimously adopted by Toronto City Council in November 2015. Members of both committees have continued to speak out at deputations during the city budget process to ensure funding for the city's poverty-reduction measures.
- The Rev. Christian Harvey, deacon at St. John the Evangelist, Peterborough and director of the Warming Room Community Ministry, has likewise advocated for the Peterborough City Council to make greater investments in poverty reduction and support for the homeless in that city.
- On behalf of the Diocesan Bishop, the Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant regularly provides resources to Anglicans for considering poverty issues and asking questions of candidates during municipal and provincial election campaigns, and assists General Synod staff in providing similar resources for federal election campaigns. These non-partisan resources help Anglicans to ask questions of candidates and their policies and can help frame discussions at all-candidates meetings, such as the one hosted by St. George, Pickering Village during the October 2018 municipal election.

#### Priorities for poverty reduction:

The Social Justice and Advocacy Committee, together with the Poverty Reduction Sub-committee of the Diocese of Toronto, has identified the following priorities for advocacy to address poverty. We recognize that poverty is a multi-faceted issue whose elimination requires income supports and social investment in many areas, including the following.

- **Adequate social assistance rates.** People living on social assistance should receive enough to meet their basic needs, including food, clothing, shelter, heat and hydro, health, hygiene, and transportation.
- **Reform of social assistance regulations.** Requiring people to liquidate all their assets before being eligible for social assistance and imposing punitive clawbacks on the earnings of social assistance recipients makes it harder for people to leave the welfare system once they've entered it. If a social assistance recipient moves in with a partner, that person is expected to contribute financial support after only three months of cohabitation, compared to three years under family law provisions.
- **A minimum wage set above the poverty line and indexed to inflation.** Work should be a pathway out of poverty. The minimum wage should be set at a level that allows a person working full-time hours, year-round, to live above the poverty line, and it should keep pace with the rate of inflation.

- **Robust employment standards** are all the more important with the rise of precarious work (temporary, casual, part-time, and contract work, often without access to employer benefits.). Ensuring that different classes of workers doing the same work are paid at the same rate as permanent employees helps avoid the creation of a low-income underclass of workers. A minimum amount of paid personal leave, including sick leave, promotes both individual and public health and allows workers to engage in preventive care without losing their job or much-needed income. Giving workers adequate notice of schedule changes would allow them greater ability to find needed transportation and childcare in time for their shift. Several key gains in this area under the previous provincial government have recently been eliminated by new provincial legislation.
- **Affordable transportation.** Without transportation, people find it hard to access food, healthcare and support services, not to mention work or school. A current pilot program in Mississauga allows residents with income below the Low Income Measure (LIM) thresholds to apply for a transit pass at a 50% discount. People in rural areas, where public transportation is sporadic or non-existent, face even steeper challenges.
- **Access to affordable childcare and early childhood education** encourages parents' participation in the workforce and helps buffer low-income children from the negative impacts of poverty. Campaign 2000, a national coalition to end child and family poverty, calls universal childcare "the missing puzzle piece" in Canada's anti-poverty strategy<sup>17</sup>
- **Access to extended health benefits.** Canada is the only industrialized nation that has a universal health care plan without universal drug coverage. Access to prescription medication, vision care and dental care are all missing components of a truly universal health care system, particularly for precarious workers and self-employed individuals not covered by employer health benefits.
- **Affordable housing.** No poverty reduction strategy can be complete without addressing the cost of housing, usually the largest single cost for Canadian households. For more on this topic, please see the Diocesan Policy Paper on Affordable Housing and Homelessness.

### Strategies for action and advocacy

Over the past decade, the Diocese of Toronto has built a reputation for advocacy and action on poverty reduction. Building on past success, and the priorities identified above, we propose that Diocesan Council, through the Social Justice and Advocacy Committee, should do the following:

#### 1. Continue to build awareness, empathy, and solidarity among Anglicans in the Diocese

- 2019 Vestry Motion – encourage parishes to report on actions they are doing to reach out and stand in solidarity with people experiencing poverty. Have an opportunity to report back at the 2019 Outreach Conference.
- By May 2019, create resources for youth leaders to build awareness and solidarity among youth about poverty issues in the Diocese.
- By June 2020, convene events/workshops in each area of the Diocese on the root causes of poverty and how Anglicans can respond.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/C2000NationalEnglishReportCardNov2018.pdf>

**2. Continue advocacy at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.**

We will continue to support our Diocesan and Area Bishops, clergy and laypeople to make our voices heard in the public square.

**Measures of progress:**

- Make poverty reduction an issue in the 2019 federal election and equip Anglicans to speak out on what the federal government could do to support poverty reduction in Canada.
- By the end of 2019, convene a meeting with the Diocesan Bishop and the provincial minister responsible for poverty reduction (or the Minister of Community and Social Services), and involve Anglicans in at least ten provincial ridings to meet with their MPP on poverty issues.

We look forward to working together with Anglicans across the Diocese, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, non-profit organizations, all levels of government, and the private sector, so that all in our communities can meet their basic needs with dignity.

*“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” – 1 John 3:17-18*