



Diocese of Toronto

Anglican Church of Canada

“A Healthy and Resilient Ontario”

Pre-budget Submission to the Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy and the Budget Secretariat,
Government of Ontario

From Bishop Andrew J. Asbil and the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee

Anglican Diocese of Toronto

135 Adelaide St. E., Toronto, Ontario M5C 1L8

February 2, 2021

The Anglican Diocese of Toronto extends over 26,000 square kilometres of south-central Ontario, from Mississauga to Brighton along Lake Ontario and from Collingwood to Haliburton along its northern border. This area includes not only the City of Toronto but 5 of the 10 largest cities in Ontario as well as suburban, small town and rural communities. The Diocese is made up of 230 congregations in 183 parishes, which serve the spiritual and physical needs of hundreds of thousands of Ontarians.

The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought enormous changes to us, as they have to other Ontarians. For most of the past year our church buildings have been closed for worship, or at most open with restricted numbers and strict protocols on masking and distancing. Yet while Anglicans throughout our Diocese have gone above and beyond government guidelines to preserve the health and safety of our parishioners and those in the wider community, we have also gone above and beyond to find ways to serve the even greater needs of our neighbours. Community meal programs have pivoted from indoor to take-away service; food banks have stepped up their offerings; in some communities a monthly meal became a weekly one to meet the increased need, while in our cities church-run drop-ins continued reaching out even when other non-profit programs shut down. The generosity and dedication of Anglicans has risen to the challenge of the pandemic, but we cannot meet the needs of Ontarians alone.

Here are our ten recommendations for the 2021 provincial budget, based on our social justice priorities of poverty reduction, affordable housing, and environmental stewardship:

Poverty Reduction:

In December 2020, this government released its first Poverty Reduction Strategy, Building A Strong Foundation for Success: Reducing Poverty in Ontario (2020-2025). The strategy has a laudable vision of “an Ontario where everyone can participate in their communities and achieve greater independence, stability, and wherever possible, long-term job success to support themselves and their families.” Unfortunately, the primary target of the new Strategy is merely to “increase the number of social assistance recipients moving to employment each year from 35,000 in 2019 to 60,000 in 2024.”¹ This target fails to address the fact that employment in itself is no guarantee of escape from poverty nor that those who continue to rely on social assistance find themselves in ever deeper poverty in Ontario.

Employment:

In its new Poverty Reduction Strategy, this government has stated that its goal is to “get more social assistance recipients to move into meaningful employment and financial stability” and identifies “connecting people to good jobs” as a key part of Ontario’s economic recovery. However, what constitutes “meaningful employment” or a “good job” is not defined. We believe that at a minimum, a good job should provide sufficient remuneration to lift workers and their families out of poverty and food insecurity. Yet, as the 2020 Hunger Report points out, more than 10% of food bank users in Ontario get their primary income from employment, and the proportion of employed people accessing food banks has risen by 44% in the past 4 years.²

Minimum wage workers have only seen a raise of 25 cents per hour in the last two years. Employers can legally pay part-time, temporary and casual workers less than full-time, permanent workers, creating an

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/building-strong-foundation-success-reducing-poverty-ontario-2020-2025>

² <https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Hunger-Report-2020-Feed-Ontario-Digital.pdf>

incentive for businesses to rely on staffing their workplaces with lower-paid workers. In addition, the lack of paid sick days forces lower-paid workers to choose between losing pay and going to work sick. This is bad enough at any time, but during the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is unconscionable and a threat to the health of workers and the public in general.

Many of the people working minimum wage, precarious jobs without paid sick days are “essential workers” in the service and retail sectors who do not have the luxury of working from home during the current pandemic, and on whose labour our whole society depends. Not only that, but those who work in these jobs are disproportionately women, migrant and racialized workers – contributing to even greater inequities faced by people in these categories. They deserve better.

Recommendations:

- 1. We join with the Decent Work and Health Network in calling for 7 paid sick days on a permanent basis and 14 additional paid sick days during public health emergencies.**
- 2. Immediately bring the minimum wage up to \$15/hour.**
- 3. Require employers to pay part-time, temporary and casual workers the same rate as their permanent, full-time employees doing the same work.**

Social Assistance:

We believe that any approach to poverty reduction cannot solely rely on moving people off social assistance but must address the insufficiency of social assistance rates for those who must rely on income supports. Recent Welfare in Canada report shows that all family types (single people considered disabled or employable, single parents with children and couples with children) on social assistance in Ontario fall below the Market Basket Measure, Canada’s official poverty line. Single people considered employable (on Ontario Works) fall the lowest beneath the poverty line, at 40% of the Market Basket Measure for Toronto, but all family types receive less than 75% of the Market Basket Measure for Toronto, putting them in the definition of “deep poverty”.³

Recommendations:

- 4. In the short term, re-instate the Emergency Benefit for Social Assistance Recipients to raise social assistance by \$100/month for single individuals and \$200/month for families.**
- 5. Over the long term, align social assistance rates with the Market Basket Measure (MBM) for each community and index them to inflation so that people on social assistance are able to meet their basic needs.**

Housing:

Following our 2020 provincial pre-budget submission and its calls for greater investment in community and non-profit housing, and protection against “renovictions,” we are encouraged to see your government introduce the Community Housing Renewal Strategy as well as greater penalties for landlords who evict tenants in bad faith. We are also glad to see that the province has frozen rent increases for 2021 and reinstated the moratorium on the enforcement of eviction orders during the

³ <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/ontario/>

current state of emergency. However, much more needs to be done to make housing affordable for Ontarians. As your government acknowledges, 56% of renter households in Ontario cannot afford the rent on an average two-bedroom apartment in their community.⁴ Lack of vacancy controls still allow landlords to raise rents without limitation between tenants. And, as we saw when the spring eviction moratorium was lifted at the end of July 2020, a temporary moratorium on enforcement of residential eviction does nothing to address the tsunami of evictions to be enforced as soon as the moratorium is lifted. In fact, with the “streamlining” of the evictions process through Bill 184, it is now easier than ever for tenants in Ontario to lose their housing due to an inability to pay their rent. In order for low-income Ontarians not to be made homeless as a result of the economic dislocation of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need rent relief that will help bridge the gap. A program that would distribute the arrears between renters, landlords and the government, such as that proposed by the Federation of Rental Housing Providers of Ontario last fall, would help to ease the burden on landlords and tenants alike while preventing a spike in evictions and subsequent homelessness.

Recommendations:

- 1. Establish a program for rent relief that distributes the burden of residential rental arrears between landlords, tenants and the provincial government.**
- 2. After the 2021 rent freeze, institute rent control for all residential rental units in Ontario.**
- 3. Institute vacancy controls to limit the amount by which landlords can raise the rent on a unit between tenants.**

Environment:

The boundaries of the Diocese of Toronto encompass 26,000 square kilometres of south-central Ontario from Georgian Bay to Haliburton and along Lake Ontario from Mississauga to Brighton, overlapping with much of Ontario’s Greenbelt. We are concerned about the increased use of Ministerial Zoning Orders to override environmental protections for these lands and waters, particularly wetlands surrounding the Great Lakes. Wetlands not only provide essential wildlife habitat and opportunities for public recreation; they play an important role in preserving water quality, sequestering carbon, and preventing flooding, key natural processes that help to mitigate the effects of climate change and extreme weather. A 2009 study commissioned by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry conservatively valued the benefits of in urban settings at over \$161,000 per hectare per year.⁵ Eroding Ontario’s environmental protections during the COVID-19 pandemic is a short-sighted move that will result in greater costs and harm to Ontarians in the long run. Rather, now is the time to make sure the health of the land on which millions of Ontarians depend for food, water, and sustainable recreational use, is adequately protected.

Recommendations:

- 4. Resist the use of Ministerial Zoning Orders that circumvent protections for environmentally significant areas and that bypass public consultation.**

⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/community-housing-renewal-strategy>

⁵ <https://alus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/estimation-of-ecosystem.pdf>

5. Support expansion of the Greenbelt to protect more of Ontario's farmland, water sources and natural areas.

All of us have a stake in building a healthier, more resilient Ontario. We urge your government to include these recommended measures in your 2021 Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Andrew J. Asbil

Bishop of Toronto

and

The Social Justice & Advocacy Committee, Diocese of Toronto