



## ONTARIO ELECTION JUNE 2, 2022

# OPENING THE DOOR TO A JUST CONVERSATION

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**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada



**ANGLICAN  
DIOCESE OF  
NIAGARA**

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### OPENING THE DOOR TO A JUST CONVERSATION

As Anglicans, we understand that to care for our neighbours and the earth is help prepare the way of God's kingdom. Just as God called the exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of the city where they had been sent, we too are called to seek the welfare of the communities in which God has placed us (Jeremiah 29.7.) In baptism, we promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons", to "respect the dignity of every human being", and to "safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth."

Anglicans across Ontario live out this calling in many ways through their actions and advocacy. The provincial election campaign provides us with yet another opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges facing our province — precarious work, deep poverty, unaffordable housing and threats to our environment — and to help choose leaders who will make policy decisions for the common good, so that everyone can share in the abundant life which is God's desire for all of us.

### Here are a few things we can all do as we prepare to cast our votes:

- **Learn more about the issues.** Read the background information in this resource and visit the websites of our diocesan and our justice partners, for more information.
- **Pray** that all candidates and voters may be guided, not by self-interest, but by a genuine care for God's people, and concern for the needs of our neighbours. Prayerfully consider the issues at stake, and keep the leaders and candidates seeking office, along with all citizens, in your prayers during the election campaign. Churches may wish to use a form of the prayers provided in the BAS (p.678) and BCP (p.50) in an upcoming liturgy.
- **Open the door to a just conversation.** Discuss the issues with candidates. Use the list of questions and topics in this resource to engage with candidates at your doorstep, on the phone, or through social media.
  - Get in touch with the politicians in your riding and invite them to respond to your concerns.
  - Attend all-candidates meetings in your community and ask questions. Why not organize such a meeting at your parish, or co-sponsor one with other churches in your community?
  - Talk with your neighbours, friends, family, and fellow parishioners about your concerns and how your values are informing your vote.

## PART 1: JUSTICE FOR WORKERS

Over the past four years, the minimum wage in Ontario has increased from \$14 to \$15 per hour, while the cost of living has increased by 9.84%. A 50-cent increase is scheduled for October 2022. However, this still leaves the minimum wage well below the living wage, which is estimated to range between \$16.20 in Sault Ste. Marie and \$22.08 in Toronto.

Many low-waged workers in Ontario also experience precarious working conditions, including uncertain work schedules and job security, lack of paid sick days and other benefits, and lack of access to justice when treated unfairly. Precarious work has a harmful effect on the physical, mental, and emotional health of workers, and their families, with repercussions felt in the wider community. This was demonstrated during the pandemic, when lack of paid sick days led to many workplaces becoming hubs of COVID-19 transmission, threatening both public health and the ability of those businesses to operate.

Currently, Ontario employment legislation allows for different rates of pay and benefits between full-time workers and those who are part-time, temporary, or contract workers. This provides an incentive for to create precarious job positions. It can even create situations where workers earn less than minimum wage, because of the amount that is withheld by the temp organization or subcontractor.

People employed in precarious work are predominantly those who are already vulnerable due to gender, racialization, immigration status, and disability. They are more likely to experience workplace harassment and have fewer avenues to assert their rights in the workplace. Migrant workers and those without permanent residency status are at risk of deportation if they speak up about dangerous working conditions or unjust treatment. Ensuring decent work is thus not just a matter of economic justice, but a matter of gender and racial justice as well.

### QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- What is your party's plan to move the minimum wage toward \$20/hour for Ontario workers?
- What will your party do to ensure all workers in Ontario have access to at least 10 paid sick days?
- What will your party do to ensure pay equity for workers regardless of gender, racialization, immigration status or status as part-time, contract or temporary workers?
- What will your party do to protect app-based gig workers and end misclassification of employees?
- How will your party ensure all workers are able to assert their rights as workers?



## PART 2: LIFTING PEOPLE OUT OF DEEP POVERTY

While the cost of living has been going up drastically, the poorest Ontarians have not seen any increase in their incomes since 2018. As of February 2022, over 860,000 people in the province were relying on Ontario's social assistance programs, Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Even with all federal and provincial benefits and tax credits included (social assistance recipients are unable to benefit from LIFT - Low Income Individuals and Families Tax Credit), neither OW nor ODSP rates come close to approaching the official poverty line, as defined by the Market Basket Measure.

Single adults on OW receive less than 50% of a poverty line income, while single adults on ODSP receive less than 75% of that amount, despite having higher expenses due to their disabilities. In either scenario, individuals are living in deep poverty, less than 75% below the official poverty line. At such an income level, people can barely meet their basic needs of food and shelter, much less have the resources to be able to look for employment. The increased numbers of Ontarians experiencing homelessness and depending on food banks attest to the inadequacy of social assistance rates to meet the most essential needs of existence. No Ontarian should have to live in such deep poverty, regardless of whether they are able to sustain full-time employment.

If social assistance rates had merely been adjusted for inflation over the past four years, a single adult on OW would have \$700 more per year and a single adult on ODSP would have \$1115 more per year. This would not raise them above the poverty line but would at least help mitigate the increased cost of living.

### QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- What will your party do to ensure that nobody in Ontario is living in deep poverty?
- Is your party willing to raise social assistance rates and to index the rates to inflation?
- Where does your party stand on the implementation of a Basic Income?



## PART 3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The cost of housing continues to soar well above the rate of inflation, placing an increasing burden on low-income households. According to Statistics Canada, 13.9% of all Ontario households were in core housing need in 2018 (defined as living in an unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable dwelling), and unable to afford alternative housing in their community. This figure rises to 26% for the 30% of Ontario households who rent their homes, and soars to 82.5% of Ontario tenants with incomes below \$20,000. Indeed, almost half of renters with incomes below \$20,000 spend 50% or more of their income on shelter, putting them at increased risk of homelessness. In a 2021 report, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) estimated that over 16,000 Ontarians are homeless on any given night, with between 40 and 60 per cent of them experiencing chronic homelessness. Shelter figures and homelessness counts for Ontario cities show that the number of people experiencing homelessness continues to rise, with rising rental costs making it increasingly harder for them to find housing.

Unfortunately, FAO also projected that based on current policies and spending, the number of Ontarians experiencing both core housing need and homelessness will continue to rise.

Building more affordable housing is one way to address the issue, but equally important is keeping people from losing their housing and keeping existing housing affordable and in good repair. Despite the implementation of modest financial penalties for landlords evicting tenants in bad faith, tenants continue to be subject to no-fault evictions such as “renovictions” or “demovictions,” particularly when they are unaware of their rights or have difficulty enforcing them. This is exacerbated by the recent decision to move the Landlord Tenant Board process permanently online presenting barriers to low-income tenants, those with language barriers and/or lack of access to reliable internet. Once tenants are evicted, vacancy decontrol means that landlords are free to charge new tenants whatever the market will bear, leaving an ever-shrinking supply of affordable rental housing available.

### QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- Will your party increase access to the Housing Stability Benefit so more people on social assistance and with low income will be able to maintain their housing?
- What will your party do to substantially reduce the number of Ontarians in core housing need?
- What policy measures would you implement to end chronic homelessness?
- How will your party help keep rental housing affordable for low-income tenants, and ensure tenants have access to legal remedies to be able to stay in their homes?





## PART 4: ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2021 report warned that the window of opportunity to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is closing fast, beyond which the world faces catastrophic impacts. Even now climate change is already driving extreme weather events and increasing the spread of pest species like the LDD moth. Because the processes which contribute to global warming will continue, even without further greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the IPCC urges all parties to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050. Yet a report from the Auditor General shows that Ontario is not currently on track to meet its original 30% greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets by 2030, much less doing its share toward achieving net zero GHG emissions by 2050.

Ontarians rely on local food and water sources, as well as on flourishing ecological spaces that help mitigate the effects of climate change by cleaning our air and water, reducing flooding, and providing crucial wildlife habitat. Yet, according to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 175 acres of farmland in the province are lost daily to development. Once prime agricultural and ecologically protected land is lost to development, it cannot be replaced, leaving future Ontarians less resilient, more dependent on sources outside the province for food and drinking water, and more vulnerable to climate change-related natural disasters. Moreover, the cost of infrastructure for greenfield development (development on former agricultural or natural lands) far exceeds costs related to intensified or infill development. The building of new mega-highway projects accelerates urban sprawl and leads to higher levels of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions without easing traffic congestion beyond the short-term.

### QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- Will your party proceed with or stop the development of new megahighways, such as the 413 and Bradford bypass?
- What will your party do to set binding provincial climate targets consistent with global efforts to limit planetary warming to 1.5 Celsius?
- What are your party's plans for moving Ontario to a thriving, regenerative, zero-emission economy?
- What will your party do to protect Ontario's drinking water and agricultural and food systems?
- What will your party do to protect Ontario's natural biodiversity, including key natural habitats and species at risk?

