



## Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

### News Release – March 2, 2009

#### **We pray that you have mercy on the poor**

Ontario's faith communities will pray for the poor at Queen's Park during a series of pre-budget vigils outside the provincial legislature in March.

Provincial politicians will also be in the prayers of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and representatives of other faiths during the seven-hour vigils.

Multifaith participants will be praying for the integrity, courage and spiritual strength of MPPs. And they'll be praying for compassion to be directed to the poor in the provincial budget expected to be presented in the legislature on March 26.

The first vigil is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Subsequent vigils will be held during the same hours throughout March, Mondays to Thursdays. Each day at noon, a religious leader will guide participants in prayer and reflection under a prayer canopy outside the legislature.

The vigils are being organized by the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) and include coalition members and other persons of faith. ISARC has provided a religious voice for Ontario's marginalized people for 23 years.

The vigils are being held as a public witness to the collective concern of faith communities about the swelling ranks of the poor during Ontario's deepening recession and the need for a strong response, says the coalition.

Vigil participants want Premier Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government to act now on its plans for a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

"The budget will be a litmus test of their commitment to the strategy," says coalition spokesperson Brice Balmer. "Recent statements by Premier McGuinty hint at tight purse strings as the long-awaited budget draws nears."

For more information, contact:

Brice Balmer, ISARC Secretary, (519) 635-4242 cell or  
Susan Eagle, ISARC Chair, (519) 636-3402 cell.

**MEDIA CONFERENCE at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, March 3, 2009, at the Interfaith Prayer Vigil tent in front of the legislative building at Queen's Park. This is where the prayer vigil will be held from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Thursday until March 26, 2009, when the 2009 provincial budget will be released.**

## **Support for the Interfaith Prayer Vigil has come from many leaders in the faith communities:**

"Praying in the public square... this is a powerful opportunity to stand solidly alongside our sisters and brothers in Ontario who struggle daily with the very real impact of poverty, and also the opportunity to invite our leaders to listen to holy nudgings toward justice and fairness in Ontario." - Rick Cober Bauman, Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

"In these challenging economic times our government leaders are called to make difficult decisions that impact different sectors of the province both positively and negatively. The church prays weekly for our leaders in the decisions they make and particularly that they do not neglect the poor and vulnerable. Working in partnership church and government can make a real difference." - Bishop Philip Poole, Anglican Diocese of Toronto

"An obligation of every Muslim is to be concerned about the plight of those less fortunate. They are always in our prayers." - Imam Shafiq Hudda, Executive Director of the Islamic Humanitarian Service, Kitchener

"I am participating in this event because my faith compels me to both pray and act in support of the most vulnerable in society. Although people can be vulnerable for many reasons, what is common to most of them is the added weight and scourge of poverty." - Bishop Michael Pryse, Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

"This prayer vigil embodies the spirit of Psalm 102: 'A prayer for the poor when he is faint and pours forth his plea.' This is a prayer in which all Ontarians of faith and conscience should get involved." - Rabbi Aaron Levy, Toronto

"May the rains come in good season! May the harvest be rich and bountiful! May the world be happy and contented! May our rulers be righteous!" - Bhante Saranapala, Mississauga Buddhist Temple

"Jesus said that when we care for the poor we are caring for him. As one of his followers I believe that it is not 'like' caring for Jesus but actually caring for him when we advocate for justice for the poor." - David Giuliano, Moderator, The United Church of Canada

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.' (Romans 12:12) Prayer vigils are a crucial visible way we as Christians can say prayer matters and prayer makes a difference. Praying together for social justice issues puts our faith in action. When we join with those of other denominations and other faiths to pray it is an opportunity to live our commitment to work together for social change." - Rev. Susan Cameron, President of London Conference of the United Church of Canada

"It is our hope that this Interfaith Prayer Vigil will: be a source of inspiration and guidance for our legislators in their crafting and releasing of our 2009 provincial budget; provide consolation and support to our brothers and sisters living in poverty; and remind all Ontarians of our moral obligation to recognize and serve God in each other, especially in those most in need." - Bishop Peter Hundt, Chair, Social Affairs Commission, Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops

"One of the early things I learned when I got into our Justice Ministry was that it is not by chance, for the most part, that people are poor. Poverty is political; so the solution also must be political. That was a great learning for me. And it needs to be a learning for our politicians. Connections must be made. And a Poverty Strategy must be brought forth to be implemented." - Sister Pauline Lally, Superior General of the Sisters of Providence of St Vincent de Paul

### **Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition Interfaith Prayer Vigil**

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**Website:** [www.isarc.ca](http://www.isarc.ca)

