

INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION



NEWSLETTER

September 2008

Making Thanksgiving Count



25 in 5, a major coalition working toward the reduction of poverty in Ontario, has scheduled October 12-19, as a time for action around the province to demonstrate that more and more people want action against poverty.

This period follows Thanksgiving, a time of compassion and charity. ISARC is asking that faith groups speak out over Thanksgiving to protect the dignity of all humans by calling for justice and equity. As we are grateful for all

the blessings we have as Canadians, we ask that these blessings be extended to all others in this province.

Watch for letters coming to temples, synagogues, mosques, and churches from ISARC or provincial organizations urging support of the 25 in 5 platform for poverty reduction. Ask your religious leader to remember marginalized peoples in Ontario in the prayers, announcements, and sermon on Thanksgiving Sunday. Letters also have suggestions of ways your community can be involved. You can watch for local events and alert your faith group. Information is posted on our

website www.isarc.ca

Immediately following Thanksgiving are two important events:

Thursday 16 October 2008 The U.N. Day to Eliminate Hunger

Friday, 17 October 2008 The U.N. Day to Eliminate Poverty

How is your community using these days to highlight the residents of your area who do not have enough food nor adequate incomes? Canada has signed U.N. resolutions to stop hunger and end poverty; our country now has more poor and hungry people than when we signed the resolutions. KAIROS

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INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION



Federal Election – *Raise poverty issues in all candidate meetings!*

“ISARC
ALONG WITH
25 IN 5 IS
CALLING FOR
A REVIEW OF
EMPLOYMENT
INSURANCE
(EI)”

ISARC and other coalitions are well aware that this minority Conservative federal government has not been helpful to persons and families on low wages. Child care funds were cut back, important agreements with Native Canadians were rescinded, and tax cuts were implemented for the affluent. Instead of looking at the cause of crime, the Conservative Party pushed an agenda to increase punishment – when crime was decreasing. The Conservative government did re-instate the homeless program funds.

Yet cities, provinces and housing advocates are alarmed because most federal funds for affordable housing and the prevention of homelessness will disappear at the end of March 2009. A federal-provincial summit on housing was called for mid-October, but will be cancelled because of the election. Will housing programs be renewed or new programs implemented?

The federal government can do so much to alleviate poverty. The Na-

tional Child Benefit can be increased significantly: it is a universal benefit, so all families receive. ISARC along with 25 in 5 is calling for a review of Employment Insurance (EI). Why do only 22% of people in Toronto receive benefits when laid off or fired? For Ontario, the average is 35%. There are too many unnecessary hurdles for an employee benefit that has been paid for.

Questions about poverty reduction need to be raised at all MP candi-

Religious Leaders' Forum on 5 November 2008 at Queen's Park

Plan to attend! The agenda is full. The morning is devoted to poverty reduction and the afternoon to affordable housing. Peter Clutterbuck of the Social Planning Network of

Ontario will be the morning speaker followed by a theological reflection ISARC is checking with Lt Gov Onley and Hon. Deb Matthews to speak before and after lunch. Michael Shapcott will be

addressing crucial issues of affordable housing in the afternoon.

Participants find these forums inspirational and informative.

Regis-



community Conversations
in Waterloo Region is





Bring Faith Communities Together for Social Justice

Most religions have strong mandates to work for the most marginalized in their communities. A Sikh gurdwara is always a place where one may find food and sometimes shelter. “Engaged Buddhism” works toward establishing better societies, even as help is given to relieve suffering. Burma’s monks have served as an example of engaged Buddhism pushing for better living conditions for all. The Abrahamic faiths reach out in compassion through offerings, gifts of food and other necessities, volunteerism, and actions for justice.

The ISARC web site www.isarc.ca will contain different faith responses to social justice and poverty elimination after mid-October 2008. These could provide openings for discussion in your congregation or an inter-faith group.

Are there other faith communities in your city or neighbourhood who could

join together to discuss justice and the elimination of poverty? Could each group present its theology as well as what their group is doing to relieve suffering in the area? How might the gathering speak to the Members of the Provincial Parliament on issues of poverty and marginalization? Might this gathering plan for an all candidates meeting or another meeting to raise important justice issues?

A moral and ethical voice needs to be heard in Ontario, both because of the recession and because many lower income families are dehumanized by the current social welfare system. Many MPPs chose to go into politics to make positive changes; they come from a variety of religious traditions. Though the faith communities feel powerless, their voices come through.

Interfaith discussion is important in Ontario so that people learn to know their neighbours, break

down stereotypes and prejudices, and work together on projects. Currently there is a multifaith affordable housing coalition in Toronto; an inter-faith social housing organization is beginning a project for persistently homeless in Waterloo. Many food banks are supported by peoples from several religions. Habitat for Humanity now has different faith groups on their “builds”. The Cambridge Social Planning Council brought faith leaders together and organized an evening to learn more about social and neighbourhood services in their area.

Are groups already meeting in your city? Can you or your faith group join? Investigate!

Many faith groups are also joining other coalitions in the area. Some faith leaders have begun participating in Vibrant Community projects in Hamilton, Niagara, and Waterloo regions. Com-

a forum that brings together health care and social services, labour, business, and now faith groups. A regional poverty agenda has been discussed. This broad-based advocacy brings together many perspectives and then provides a strong voice to staff and politicians of all levels of government.

Interfaith action starts with two or three leaders getting together and inviting others.

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INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION (ISARC)



SEPTEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Web Site for Ontario Interfaith

Scarboro Missions has an excellent e-newsletter of interfaith events in Ontario. You may subscribe by e-mailing info@interfaithunity.ca or visit www.interfaithunity.ca Editor Terry Weller covers a wide variety of

Contact for ISARC:
Brice Balmer, Secretary

ISARC,
P.O. Box 43011, 120
Ottawa Street North,
Kitchener N2H 6S9
isarc@gto.net
(519) 744-5868

Pre-budget Hearings Coming for Ontario

One important way for your voice to be heard in Ontario is the pre-budget process. Last year provincial finance minister Hon. Dwight Duncan visited a number of cities and held an open forum on issues that were important to Ontario leaders. Invitations

were extended through the offices of the local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP).

The legislative committee on finance and economic affairs will hold hearings throughout the delegations as well as written submissions.

You may check with your MPP about the hearings and ask to be informed when the committee starts accepting requests for appointments. The report of the committee is tabled before the provincial budget.

The Recession: No Excuse for Inaction

John Stapleton, a former Ministry of Community and Social Services policy analyst, is now working with 25 in 5 and assisting various groups working to eliminate poverty.

His research shows that important social legislation is often adopted during a recession. The Great De-

pression is a good example as employment programs, construction of public facilities, and better social assistance were funded. As lower income persons and families have more money, they spend it locally which then benefits local business. Merchants then spend more money to buy products and/or hire staff.

More money circulates in the economy.

Affordable housing has been used as much to stimulate the economy and provide jobs as it has to provide these desperately needed apartments and town houses. Construction provides jobs; workers spend money in the local economy.

Lives Still in the Balance is a key

Get the background you need to meet with your MPP, speak to an all candidates meeting, or have conversations with others about poverty. Lives Still in the Balance from ISARC is still up-to-date and gives background information on many issues: housing, social assistance, disability, low wage work, children in poverty, health care, etc. At the end of the book are the proposals which would most effectively help those who live with the lowest incomes in Ontario. If you want to begin to understand poverty in Ontario, read and discuss Lives Still in the Balance.

