

ISARC ANNUAL REPORT 2018



FAITH COMMUNITIES IN ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

Letter from the Chair

The year of 2018 was a turbulent one for ISARC, as it was for many advocacy groups working on anti-poverty and justice agendas.

The year began with energetic advocacy for a progressive provincial budget. A late March budget that promised new investments of \$20.3 billion over three years in health care, home care, mental health and child care, as well as minimum wage increases and improved dental care, while not providing all the hoped-for improvements, was seen as a progressive step in the right direction. As well, the budget promised 3% annual increases in Ontario Works and ODSP for three years, which, while much lower than was hoped for, at least kept these programs from losing ground.

The June election saw a change in government and an almost immediate reversal in programs and progressive legislation. Rollbacks of planned increases to minimum wage and social assistance left many frightened about their future well-being and that of their families.

With many new MPPs in the legislature and news of cutbacks happening on an almost weekly basis, it was a challenge to keep up with the changes in the Ontario social safety-net landscape – except to know that many people were worse off and facing even more dire circumstances.

The loss of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project before completion of the trial period means that proper assessment cannot happen and participants who trusted the government commitment are now in limbo about the future.

The November Forum brought together many long-time committed faith community members and launched the initiative to again hear and respond to the “on-the-ground” stories of the true impact of the recent provincial cutbacks.

As we finished 2018, it was with the belief that faith communities would need to work more actively and compassionately to help those voices for justice to be heard. This is not the time for us to be defeated or tired as we plan for the future.

As faith communities, the ISARC values of working to uphold human dignity and social and economic equity are an important focus for us as we continue to be active with others in advocating for change.

Rev. Susan Eagle
Chair

2018 was a year which saw major challenges for low-income people across Ontario, which are expected to deepen in 2019.

Religious Leaders' Forum 2018 "Ontario at a Crossroads"

Our fall Religious Leaders Forum was held at Queen's Park on November 1, 2018, attracting about 70 people from a range of faith communities. The Rev. David Pfrimmer offered the theological reflection, reminding attendees that empathy and charity are only the first step on the road to justice. Our keynote speaker, Judge George Thomson, past member of both the Social Assistance Review Committee and the panel that produced the Income Security Roadmap, spoke about the real needs for change to social assistance, in terms of adequate rates, simplified rate structure, and a collaborative, problem-solving approach. He was joined by Mary Marrone, Director of Advocacy for the Income Security Advocacy Centre and a fellow member of the Income Security Reform Working Group. She emphasized the need for advocates to engage new allies, particularly local MPPs, as well as to communicate the "return on investment" from investing in poverty reduction.

An afternoon panel featured Sarah Sabihuddin, director of community engagement at Halton Poverty Roundtable, Laura Cattari of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, and Jessie Golem, a Basic Income Pilot participant and the creator of the photography project "Humans of Basic Income." The panellists spoke of their experience of working multiple jobs to get by, having medical conditions that were exacerbated by lack of adequate income, and their frustration with finding affordable housing and accessible transit.

As always, all MPPs were invited to attend. A record seventeen MPPs, from all four parties represented at Queen's Park, attended over the lunch period, giving attendees the opportunity to express their concerns on income security directly.



Parliament of World Religions 2018

From November 1-8, 2018 the Parliament of World Religions was held in Toronto, with over 5000 attendees from around the globe. On November 5, ISARC members the Rev. Susan Eagle, the Rev. Alex Wilson, Rabbi Shalom Schachter and the Rev. David Pfrimmer led a workshop at the Parliament on "Effective Social Justice Advocacy." The workshop led to a stimulating conversation about how interfaith groups can work together to challenge and move policy makers.

2018 Provincial Election

ISARC activities in the first half of 2018 focussed primarily on the provincial election of June 7, 2018. ISARC prepared an election kit with background information on employment justice, income security and affordable housing, together with a "Candidates' Report Card" on these issues. The election kit also included tips for meeting with candidates, organizing all candidates' meetings, and encouraging fellow faith community members to vote. ISARC's election kit was sent out to some 1000 members on our mailing list, promoted on social media, and made available for download from ISARC's website.

Hundreds of election signs with the message "Let's Vote for a Poverty-Free Ontario" were distributed in communities across the province.

In April 2018 ISARC co-hosted a Public Interfaith Forum on "Voting to End Poverty" at Eglinton-St. George's United Church in north Toronto. Attendees heard from Dr. Gary Bloch, a member of Health Care Providers against Poverty and contributor to the report "Income Security: A Roadmap for Change," as well as from Patricia Huculak, who shared her personal experience of life on a low income in Ontario. Provincial candidates from the three major parties were invited to respond.

After the election, ISARC sent out a letter inviting our faith community members to welcome newly elected and returning MPPs, while orienting them to their local faith communities and the social justice and outreach activities with which our member communities are involved.



Long-Term Care

Given that ISARC's advocacy for sufficient, affordable and secure housing includes the approximately 75,000 residents of Ontario's long-term care homes, ISARC was granted authority to be a participant in the Public Inquiry into the Safety and Security of Residents in the Long-Term Care Home System. On July 31, 2018, ISARC Executive member Rabbi Shalom Schachter attended the hearing in Woodstock and cross-examined the lead witness for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. In respect of the ministry's policies and practices for regulating and funding long term care in Ontario. In September 2018, Rabbi Schachter filed ISARC's closing submission to Phase 1 of the Inquiry, which included recommendations on identifying and funding the hours of care required by long-term care home residents, public transparency on staffing, changes to the inspection and review process, penalties for non-compliance, and enhanced whistleblower protection. Rabbi Schachter also participated in Phase 2 consultations.

Social Assistance and Basic Income

On July 31, 2018, the new provincial government announced the cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot program, halfway through the project's three-year period. The decision was hugely disappointing to the low-income people affected and their allies, including ISARC. The government also cut the planned increase to social assistance rates in half, from 3% to 1.5%. ISARC issued a statement urging the government to reverse the cuts, urging them to build on the substantial work of the panel that produced *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, and expressing dismay at the cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot. The statement concluded: "We need to ensure that social assistance provides a hand up and out of poverty rather than a bureaucratic bludgeon that keeps people in complete destitution before they become eligible for help and on social assistance indefinitely."

On November 22, 2018, Community and Social Services Minister Lisa McLeod announced the results of her department's 100-day review of social assistance in Ontario. The Rev. Susan Eagle, ISARC Chair, and the Rev. Alex Wilson attended at Queen's Park on behalf of ISARC. However, the Minister chose instead to make a press release behind closed doors, which only one member of the Official Opposition, and no advocacy groups, were permitted to attend. This speaks volumes about the current government's lack of transparency and accountability to the province as a whole.

In response to the Minister's announcement, ISARC released a statement in December 2018 outlining our concerns with the effect of the increased clawback on income earned by so-

-cial assistance recipients, the proposed changes to the definition of disability, and the ongoing problem of inadequate social assistance rates, especially when coupled with Bill 47's deepening of precarious employment. "Taken together, these developments make it harder, not easier, for vulnerable Ontarians to leave social assistance and support themselves by employment. It is difficult to understand how these changes demonstrate compassion or dignity towards people living in poverty." It is clear that the challenges faced by low-income Ontarians are far from over, and the need for solidarity and advocacy is greater than ever. Through our work and that of our member faith communities, ISARC continues to press for policies that allow all members of our province to share in and contribute to our society.

Fair Wage Policy, Minimum Wage, and Employment Standards

In April 2018 the former provincial government tabled Bill 53 to implement improvements to its Fair Wage Policy. That policy governs working conditions for employees of companies doing business with the government. ISARC had participated in the prior consultations on how to improve the policy and continued its submissions on how to improve the Bill. Bill 53 received Royal Assent in May 2018.

On October 23, 2018, the new provincial government introduced Bill 47, which rolled back many of the fair labour regulations of Bill 148 as well as cancelling the minimum wage increase scheduled for January 1, 2019. On October 31, 2018, ISARC Chair Rev. Susan Eagle and ISARC's Employment Working Group along with ISARC Chair Rev. Susan Eagle met with the new Conservative Minister of Labour, the Hon. Laurie Scott and her Parliamentary Assistant, Ms Gila Martow, MPP, to communicate our support for the minimum wage increase and fair work provisions of Bill 148.

ISARC prepared a statement calling on MPPs to oppose the rollbacks contained in Bill 47, copies of which were made available for attendees to sign at the Religious Leaders' Forum on November 1, and sent to the signatories' MPPs.

On November 15, 2018, ISARC made a written submission on Bill 47 to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. The brief outlined ISARC's concerns about the provisions of the Bill, urging the government to be guided instead by three overarching values: treating workers equally and with dignity, enhancing the democratic process, and applying effective administrative processes.

Notwithstanding the advocacy of ISARC and other groups such as The Fight for \$15 and Fairness, Bill 47 received Royal Assent on November 21, 2018 and came into effect January 1, 2019.

Financial Highlights

January 1, 2018 – Dec. 31, 2018

Revenue			
Membership Fees and Donations		\$	17,593.00
Grants		\$	7,636.00
GST/HST		\$	279.05
Registrations		\$	1,900.00
Total Revenue for 2018			\$ 27,408.05
Expenses			
Programme Support		\$	15,952.05
Programmes		\$	11,519.20
GST/HST		\$	2,042.62
Office expenses		\$	326.00
Total Expenses for 2018			\$ 29,839.87
Net Operating Surplus (Deficit)			-\$2,431.82

How YOU can support ISARC

1. Make a tax-deductible donation quickly and easily, by clicking on the Donate button of our home page, www.isarc.ca. On the donation page, in the top box where there is a choice of funds, choose ISARC from the drop-down menu.
2. Encourage your faith community to donate, or to increase their current donation. Contact coordinator@isarc.ca for assistance.
3. Subscribe to our mailing list to find out about upcoming activities. Contact coordinator@isarc.ca for assistance.
4. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @ISARCaction

ISARC Values

Human Dignity

The right of all people and their communities to be treated with justice, love, compassion, and respect, and their responsibility to treat others likewise.

Mutual Responsibility

The obligation of communities to care and share with their people, ensuring that basic needs are met.

Social Equity

The right of all people to adequate access to basic resources, to full participation in the life and decision-making of their communities.

Economic Equity

The right of all people and communities to adequate access to the resources necessary for full lives, including access to worthwhile work, fair employment considerations, and our communal responsibilities to use such resources responsibly.

Fiscal Fairness

The right of all people, communities, and institutions to fair fiscal treatment and the responsibility of all to contribute fairly for the well-being of all.

Ecological Sustainability

The obligation of communities to practice responsible stewardship of the earth and its environment, so that creation might be preserved for generations to come.

ISARC Member Faith Groups

The Anglican Diocese of Toronto
 The Anglican Diocese of Niagara
 The Anglican Provincial Synod of Ontario
 The Association of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
 The Canadian Unitarian Council
 Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto
 Congregation Darchei Noam
 Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph
 Dicle Islamic Society
 The Canadian Council of Imams
 The Council of Canadian Hindus
 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Eastern Synod
 Western Ontario District, Pentecostal
 Assemblies of Canada
 Islamic Humanitarian Service
 Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
 North American Muslim Foundation
 The Presbyterian Church in Canada
 The Redemptorists in Canada
 The Sisters of Providence of St.
 Vincent de Paul
 The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
 The Toronto Board of Rabbis
 The United Church of Canada

isarc

FAITH COMMUNITIES IN
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
 Rev. Dr. Susan Eagle, Chair
 Tel: (647) 563-5203
coordinator@isarc.ca
www.isarc.ca
 Facebook: [facebook.com/ISARCaction](https://www.facebook.com/ISARCaction)
 Twitter: @ISARCaction