

Face of Poverty Annual Review, 2008-09

The Face of Poverty Consultation undertakes both on-going and “one-off” activities related to our mission - to be agents of healing and hope. We work with the marginalized and the vulnerable and with the powerful to deal with the economic, political, and social inequities in our society.

On-going Activities

The Face of Poverty holds an inter-faith service every November to remind our faith groups, the public, and our politicians of the unanimous 1989 Commons resolution calling on the Federal Government to work to end child poverty by 2000. Very little progress has been made. The 2008 service was held at St. Andrew’s United Church, Halifax. In addition to the general public, invitations were sent to the region’s members of parliament and of the legislature. The Halifax M.P. and 4 MLAs attended the service. In addition, members of the Face of Poverty Consultation are available to give sermons or presentations to faith and other groups.

We have a copy of “The Poverty Game” and members trained to facilitate its use by groups who wish to get a better sense of what living in poverty means. Each player takes on the role of an individual and has to deal with the issues involved in raising a family on a social assistance income. The “Game” and facilitators are free of charge. It takes at least 2 hours to play and discuss.

Members of the Face regularly attend sittings of the Legislature and the meetings of the Nova Scotia Standing Committee on Community Services. We meet occasionally with MPs and MLAs, some of whom come to Halifax to discuss issues related to poverty, such as the Roundtable on Poverty in March. We also correspond with cabinet ministers, for instance to support the recommendations of the Goss-Gilroy report on employment support services and of the Poverty Reduction Working Group. The Goss-Gilroy report recommendations included greater integration between Income Assistance and Employment Support Services. We called on the Nova Scotia Government to implement its poverty reduction intentions in the 2009 budget, for instance, by raising the levels of support of social assistance and ending the 70 per cent claw-back of earnings when social assistance recipients enter the work force.

We co-operate with other groups to organize “all candidates” meetings during provincial and federal elections. This year, we helped the Fairview and Clayton Park Community Action Network hold a forum for the provincial election. We also prepared a list of questions for candidates which was distributed to our faith groups as a bulletin insert (attached).

Briefs

The Face of Poverty Consultation often prepares briefs, for instance to the Commons Finance Committee’s Pre-Budget Consultations and the Senate Committee on Poverty.

In May, 2009, we presented a brief to the “HUMA” Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Our brief emphasized the need to provide immediate assistance to the poor, through increased accessibility to Employment Insurance, more affordable housing and day care, and greater progressivity in income tax to shift taxes to higher incomes .

Links

The Face of Poverty Consultation works with other anti-poverty organizations, such as the Affordable Energy Coalition, Coalition Against Poverty (now Community Coalition to End Poverty), and Community Action on Homelessness. Our members also serve on other relevant committees, e.g., the Anglican Justice Camp, the local Kairos, and Make Poverty History groups.

We were designated in Bill 94, setting up the N.S. Poverty Reduction Working Group, and our representative, Alasdair Sinclair, participated fully in its activities.

One of our monthly meetings was dedicated to an incisive presentation by Ron Coleman, on the research of GPI (Genuine Progress Indicators) Atlantic. GPI views poverty from an equity perspective, seeking a more equitable sharing of our current income, rather than further burdening our environment with growth, hoping it will raise the standard of living of the poor.

Membership

As an inter-faith organization, we try to broaden our membership to more faith groups and to increase the depth of participation by organizations already involved with us. Many of our members are actively involved in front-line services to the poor and a few are from a marginalized group, including the First Nations.

Re-structuring

To share more of the burden of the activities of the Face of Poverty Consultation, we have refined the duties of our officers. Our new officers are Chair, Valerie Getson, Past Chair, Carolyn Earle, Treasurer, Gwen MacLean; Recording Secretary, Michael Bradfield; Corresponding Secretary, Jane Cushing. Elizabeth Brown is taking a well-deserved break. Our thanks to Carolyn and Elizabeth for shouldering so much of the work of the Face for several years.

We can be found on the “web” at <http://users.eastlink.ca/~lutheranchurch/Poverty.html>

Respectfully submitted

Michael Bradfield