



ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

CONFERENCE DES EVEQUES CATHOLIQUES DE L'ONTARIO

October 27, 2008

The Honourable Deborah Matthews, MPP  
Chair, Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction  
Growing Stronger Together  
Whitney Block, Room 4620  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Minister Matthews,

We are writing to offer to you and to the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction some observations that we hope will be helpful in your work of preparing a poverty reduction strategy for our province.

We are blessed to live in a rich province, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Indeed Ontario's bounty has grown rapidly in the last generation. Yet as prosperity has increased for some Ontarians, for others poverty has continued or even worsened. One in eight children and many people with disabilities live in poverty, as do many other Ontarians working in part-time jobs or full-time jobs with low wages and few benefits. This situation cannot be acceptable for us as a province or as people of faith.

While charity calls us as individuals to assist the poor in our midst, justice demands that we seek to discern and eradicate the causes of poverty. As a society we must seek to assure that those who can work have employment that pays a living wage and that those unable to work receive adequate support to live with dignity. Likewise, it is critical that the most vulnerable and needy of our citizens have access to affordable housing, childcare, education, health care and community support programs.

We commend our provincial government for publicly committing itself to develop a poverty reduction strategy and we urge you to enshrine this commitment in a law that will both set measurable targets for poverty reduction within concrete timelines and commit the government to the ongoing task of keeping poverty on the political agenda.

We are under no illusion that poverty can be vanquished simply by an act of legislation. However, we are also well aware that it is through legislation thoughtfully proposed and conscientiously administered that society manifests its priorities and works to bring about meaningful and lasting change.



The Catholic community of Ontario has always been involved in outreach to the poor. Through Religious Orders, Catholic social service agencies, organizations like the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the generous love of the people in our parishes, we have sought to see and serve our Lord in those most in need.

As we encourage you to legislatively address the issue of poverty, we also offer you the assistance of our insights and experience. Be assured of our willingness to do whatever we can to facilitate the development and the implementation of a sound, practical and just strategy of poverty reduction.

Many years ago Saint Vincent de Paul told a group of his followers, "When you serve the poor you must ask for their forgiveness, because you simply give them a bowl of soup but they give much more - their dignity". We send you this letter and offer you our support in the hope that the poverty reduction strategy you will present to the government will be one that truly moves us closer to that day when no Ontarian need lose their dignity through poverty and all Ontarians can be proud to know that we are a province that cares for the needs of all its citizens.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Peter Hundt, Chair  
Social Affairs Commission  
Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops

Social Affairs Commission Members:

Bishop R. Anthony Daniels  
Bishop John Puzak  
Bishop Jean-Louis Plouffe