

## Voices for a Just Society

### Minutes of Meeting of February 28, 2013

#### St. John's York Mills Anglican Church

Attending: Ann Barrett, Rev. Barb White, Beth Baskin, Heidi Fiebig, Pamela Kormano, Howard Watson, Jan Williams, Rev. Maggie Helwig, Margaret Watson, Marillene Allen, Rick Parton, Rosemary Pryde, Scott McDougall, Shirley Bush, Ann Bythell, Doug Joyce, Rev. Canon Dr. Drew MacDonald, Linda Gilpin, David Clemens

Regrets: Audrey Gilpin, Geegee Mills, Heather McPherson, Jan Buchan, Jannie Mills, Kay Jolly, Kathy Salisbury, Peter Wilkins

Chair: Rosemary Pryde

Note taker: Linda Gilpin

The meeting commenced at 7:10 pm.

Welcome - Rosemary Pryde

Rosemary acknowledged the fine work of Marillene, Scott and Ann in her absence and thanked them on behalf of the group. Rosemary also reminded those present of the availability of the job for the coordinator role for Voices as she will be stepping down following the Spring 2013 meeting.

Opening Prayer - Scott McDougall

The agenda was approved.

#### **I       Voices for a Just Society: Moving Forward to Action**

Guest speaker- Marillene introduced Murray MacAdam, Social Justice and Advocacy Consultant for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto since 2003.

Murray made the following suggestions in terms of Education and Advocacy from the simplest to the more difficult.

(i)       Education for the Voices Group and for our individual churches and parishes.

1. A book titled Living Justice: **A Gospel Response to Poverty**, which includes action ideas. [Edited by Karri Munn-Venn and Rev. Adam Snook; published by Citizens for Public Justice]

2. **Poverty is No Game**. This is a board game where participants assume the role of an individual living in poverty that is facing hard daily decisions. It underscores the need for advocacy around root issues. It is best to allow two hours for the exercise. The Anglican Diocese of Toronto has a trained facilitator for this activity.

3. **The Food Bank Diet.** One gets a glimpse of the diet and the isolation that those who rely on a food bank experience. Murray recommended doing this for a minimum of three days and preferably longer. He further suggested that appeals to politicians for increases in social assistance, minimum wages etc. would be stronger if the person appealing could state that s/he had personal if limited experience with food bank diet.

4. The ideas in the **Outreach Guide** from the Anglican Church can rejuvenate a committee.

5. A movie - **Poor No More** featuring Mary Walsh

Also the Anglican Diocese of Toronto is in the process of making an eight minute video about low income people and advocacy titled Turning the Tide.

(ii) Advocacy

LOCAL ISSUES

1. Murray felt that City Council's recent decision declaring Toronto a sanctuary city was a sign of hope.
2. Municipal budget. Murray suggested adding our voice to that of the Social Planning Council of Toronto in advocating for funds for affordable housing. This raised a question of whether there is a sufficient number of shelter beds. Those who work in the field say there are not enough shelter beds and there is a short supply of affordable housing. We need to speak in support of affordable housing when it is proposed in our own area and say "yes, in my backyard" rather than "no, not in my backyard".

ACTION: Margaret Watson offered to forward the Social Planning Council template letter on this issue to all on the mailing list. [Done!]

PROVINCIAL ISSUES

1. Groups to keep in touch with include the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction: [www.25in5.ca](http://www.25in5.ca) and Citizens for Public Justice [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)
2. Minimum Wage and More

There is more hope for movement on the following issues including raising the minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$11.50; social assistance recipients keeping more before claw backs; and restoring an increase to social assistance rates beyond a cost of living increase, but this will become clear when the provincial budget is released. Murray mentioned that the government may be open to the \$100 increase in social assistance rates but at the expense of the special diet allowance.

Murray recommended the Citizens for Public Justice website, [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca). He spoke about exploitation of people in the workplace who are working for less than minimum wage and the need for more enforcement of labour laws. We must endorse more fair sharing of our

society, a modest tax increase for those at the top since the top 10% receive 80 times more than the 10% at the bottom. He is impressed that groups not usually involved in these issues are speaking out, for example Doctors for Fair Taxation and Lawyers for Fair Taxation.

Murray also told us that we need to be creative and bold in our efforts. By including some element of advocacy, the awareness of a particular issue is expanded. He gave an example of Anglican churches in the Diocese of Toronto being asked this year to present a motion at Vestry, their AGM so to speak, recommending to government the repeal of the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act. To date, almost fifty churches have passed the motion.

## II Discussion, Ideas Questions with Murray

Following Murray's presentation, the floor was open for questions and comments summarized as follows:

- the biggest wasted resource is people not functioning who could.
- the need to challenge the government in a respectful way, e.g. accountability is important - targets for poverty reduction have not been met.
- housing is optimal, less expensive than shelter beds and an example of a long term solution that is needed
- while the letter to the Premier was a first step, where do we go next? See Action items 1&2
- need to involve different kinds of people from our congregations in meeting MPPs or signing a letter from the congregation
- Murray suggested attending the annual ISARC Religious Leaders' Forum at Queen's Park on April 18<sup>th</sup>. To get receive further information about the Forum contact [info@isarc.ca](mailto:info@isarc.ca)
- how can we involve clergy to help us work together, regardless of denomination. On the other hand, the fact that Voices is not clergy driven is seen as positive.
- the unfortunate defeat on second reading of bill C-400, a Bill to work with the provinces to develop a national housing strategy. Significant and mainstream partners were not as involved and a post mortem assessment of the campaign will be done by Dignity for All and Citizens for Public Justice
- good interaction with people when wearing the Tax Me end poverty buttons
- partnering with other groups is beneficial
- some felt that people who are not faith-based may have more influence with politicians.

Rosemary thanked Murray for coming and giving us such great ideas.

### III Issues and Ideas Identified plus Additional Comments

-minimum wage is a real concern

-the emergency around lack of shelter beds is also a major concern with at least 7 deaths recorded this winter from lack of spaces.

-housing. We did have a small task group a couple of years ago lead by Marillene Allen – see the task group's report submitted at the June 7, 2011 meeting for this group's initial work.

-tax increases can be a way to find funds for social assistance

-sufficient social assistance rates need to be kept front and centre. Put food in the budget has moved to an emphasis on a \$100 increase in basic benefits rather than focusing on a \$100 food supplement.

Partnering with others could increase our scope.

One member expressed distress at seeing notices on church doors stating that they were no longer able to give help in the form of food vouchers or other emergency assistance. This in turn raised the question about finding up to date information on what churches do currently provide. St. Clement's has a guide to service titled Fellow Pilgrims. Marillene Allen will forward the details.

### IV ACTION

Note: The person responsible for action is in bold caps beside each action item

1. SAR letter next steps will include a media release and a response to the budget when it comes down. We need both preliminary information about the budget as well as a volunteer to review the budget items for any mention of our priorities. **BETH BASKIN** to forward a link for pre-budget information.  
  
**WE NEED A VOLUNTEER TO REVIEW THE BUDGET ITEMS**
2. Prepare and send out a press release to local publications regarding the SAR letter to the Premier as a way to get our name out there. **SCOTT MACDOUGALL**
3. Write a letter to the Premier on the Drummond report using the template from the SAR letter. The letter will include all recommendations endorsed by Voices at its June 6, 2012 meeting plus a statement about minimum wages. The letter will again emphasize the importance of the \$100 increase in basic benefits. **SCOTT MACDOUGALL** to do the first draft and **DAVE CLEMENS** to review before sending the letter to the full group for comments and approval.
4. Write a generic letter to clergy introducing Voices for a Just Society and asking for

- support in communication and action with our congregations. The letter will be signed by as many of our members as we can gather. Individual members can further tailor the letter to suit their own congregation. **ROSEMARY PRYDE** to write; **BARB WHITE and JAN WILLIAMS** to review.
5. Arrange meetings with our MPPs and any nominated candidates to discuss the issues from the SAR letter as well as the idea of increasing income taxes.
    - Develop a one-page preparation and leave-behind document. **DAVID CLEMENS** and **SCOTT MACDOUGALL**
    - Send out a sign up sheet for the visits for each of the ridings and coordinate the names. **ROSEMARY PRYDE**
  6. Identify the pros and cons of raising the minimum wage. **BETH BASKIN** and **RICK PARTON** to research
  7. Possible event featuring the Premier on social justice sponsored by Voices for a Just Society. Rev Drew MacDonald indicated he would be pleased to offer St. John's York Mills as the venue as the church is in her riding. As this could be a good deal of work to organize and we need to carefully consider the idea it was agreed to form an initial 'fact finding' committee. **RICK PARTON** and **DAVID CLEMENS**

## **V CLOSING**

Rosemary suggested the Spring meeting be held the first week of June. She will send around date choices. She thanked Scott for hosting us and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm with Barb giving us a closing prayer, an Irish blessing.