

VOICES FOR A JUST SOCIETY
MINUTES OF OCTOBER 30, 2013
ST. CLEMENT'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

PRESENT: Marillene Allen (host and chair), Rosemary Pryde, Margaret Watson, Scott McDougall, Linda Gilpin, Beth Baskin, Richard Parton, Mary Frances Green, Heather McPherson, Kathy Salisbury, Geegee Mills (scribe), David Clemens, Heidi Fiebig

WELCOME: Marillene welcomed us, we had a round of introductions and were led in an opening prayer by Heather McPherson. (Our thanks to Marillene for hosting our meeting so graciously).

ADVOCACY LETTERS:

1. Geegee presented a letter that she had written to Mayor Ford, requesting that the Homelessness Task Force that he announced at the beginning of his term be activated, as no action has been taken on this as of yet. The letter did not name Voices for a Just Society but was from concerned citizens in north Toronto. A number of signatures were added. Geegee will send it to Mayor Ford with copies to Councillors Stintz and Robinson. See attached letter if you wish to do the same.
2. Margaret Watson has agreed to develop a second letter in the context of the committees currently addressing this issue at City Hall.
3. Scott presented a letter to Premier Wynne with copies to appropriate others, about the SAR and Drummond reports and specific actions that need to happen. This was signed by those present and will be circulated by email for more signatures. Discussion followed as there are so many groups working on these issues and we want to be in line with those other advocacy groups where possible. We also will contact the local media. As this is a Voices initiative, it was formalized with a motion to approve. Moved by Rosemary R. and seconded by Dave C. The letter is attached.

ODSP : We had expected to have an ODSP user speak to us, but she was unable to attend because of illness. However, we will hope to have Tanya another time, perhaps with a panel. Scott reminded us that it is important to get feedback from front-line people. They may have better ideas about what we should be recommending. We hope to have this on the agenda for the February meeting.

INFLUENCING THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL AGENDA:

Rick P., Scott M., Beth B., Kathy S., David C. and Geegee M. all said that they were interested in being part of a Task Group to work on issues to raise with candidates. (Others are welcome to join.)

Rick then led us through a good discussion of a new book by John Ibbitson and Darrell Ricker, The Big Shift. (See the attachment that outlines the major points of the book.) The book discusses the impact

of suburbanization on the political agenda in Ontario and the negative impact on funding for the disadvantaged. Another book, Shopping for Votes by Susan Delacourt was also cited. Discussion ensued about the demographics, ethics and attitudes raised in the books and how Voices needs to develop strategies to meet these new realities. We agreed that we need to address these issues with our own ministers and encourage them to meet with fellow church and faith leaders through ministerials and other focus-specific gatherings, such as Faith in the City and Festival of the Family. We need to ask them what other clergy/faith leader contacts they have in the community and how we might help them further this conversation. Frustration was expressed that it feels like we are voices crying in the wilderness so it is important that we find ways to encourage our congregations to be more pro-active in working on these issues and contacting our political representatives at all three levels of government. We see this as a crisis of faith, of loss of basic social values, and of poor or inappropriate use of the public purse. It was emphasized that there are numerous groups working to bring about change that we can link to and encourage our faith groups to support. Note: Voices sent out a letter to members last Spring to share with our ministers, asking them to help us with creating a climate of Advocacy in our congregations. If you haven't had a conversation with your minister(s), perhaps you can do this between now and our next meeting in February.

Some of these groups and web sites include:

Hugh Segal's campaign for a guaranteed annual income, Campaign 2000, Wellesley Institute, Raise the Minimum Wage Campaign, Anglican Diocese of Toronto website, Poverty Free Ontario, etc.

We agreed to try to get a list of all the Faith Groups with contact names and numbers in our ridings. This has been done for some ridings and we can call on our Councillors to get this information for us. Rosemary will contact Karen Stintz and Scott will contact Jay Robinson for this information. Thanks to Rick P. for initiating this important topic. We hope to hear more at our next meeting.

Dave Clemens presented a **valuable history of recent Efforts to Reduce Poverty in Ontario and the place of Voices in this.** (See the attachment).

Scott and Kathy are organizing visits to our representatives in the two main ridings that Voices mostly serves: Don Valley West and Eglinton-Lawrence. Be sure to let Kathy (Eglinton-Lawrence) or Scott (Don Valley West) know if you wish to take part in these visits. Paul Audley is planning a visit to the Rep. from St. Paul's riding. Contact Beth Baskin if you wish to join that group: (BBaskin@united-church.ca). One goal is to build a working relationship with our elected representatives at both the city and provincial levels. The primary goal, of course, is to lift up the issues that we see as most important, especially in the area of poverty reduction. At election time, we want to extend this contact to all candidates.

We are assembling a number of Reports, such as the Ont. Non-profit Housing Ass. Report on Homelessness. Raise the Minimum Wage Campaign has also done a Brief. Beth Baskin called our attention to a five-minute video produced by the Anglican Church that explains clearly the limits of the minimum wage and ODSP in Ontario. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHfD9au5Nok>). All of these materials will be helpful as we prepare to meet with candidates and politicians.

BRAND AND LOGO: Our new tagline 'People of Faith Working for Change' was presented to the meeting.

NEXT MEETING: Sometime in February. (If your church can host , please contact Marillene.)

IMPORTANT MEETINGS:

1. RELIGIOUS LEADERS' FORUM 2013 Wednesday, **Nov. 13**, from 9:30 – 3:00, Queens Park, Rms. 228/230

"ENOUGH FOR ALL: How can we make poverty reduction a reality in Ontario? " Registration \$40 (includes lunch) \$20 students, Free for low income. Cheques payable to United Church of Canada – ISARC program, Mail to: ISARC, c/o 10 St. Mary St., Suite 800, Toronto, M4Y 1P9, or email info@isarc.ca to register. **We are all welcome!**

2. EGLINTON ST. GEORGE'S SPEAKER SERIES: A JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR A JUST SOCIETY

FEDERAL CORRECTIONS IN CANADA – AN OMBUDSMAN'S VIEW,

Eglinton St. Georges United Church, Sunday, **Nov. 24** at 12:30 (lunch included)

Howard Sapers, Ombudsman for federal offenders, discussing the role, mandate and priorities of his office and the need for prison oversight. He will focus on the impact of recent policy changes on federally incarcerated populations, women offenders, Aboriginal offenders and those with mental health needs. **All are welcome!**

3. DON VALLEY WEST LIBERAL ASSOCIATION HOUSING POLICY FORUM

Thursday, November 14th, 7:30 pm

Jenner-Jean Marie Community Centre, 48 Thorncliffe Park Drive

Speakers – Senator Art Eggleton; Rob Oliphant, former MP for Don Valley West

An opportunity to learn current thinking about housing in one political party

The meeting adjourned with a prayer.