

Kingston

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Local prayer vigil delivers poverty message to MPPs

By Mark Kerr

For more than 13 years, several community members have been holding a silent prayer vigil outside Kingston City Hall every Friday to protest and educate people about the cuts to social assistance in the province. Last Wednesday the group took that message on the road.

Thirty people from the local area travelled to Queen's Park in Toronto to join the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) prayer vigil. The prayer vigil began March 3 and will continue until next Thursday when the provincial budget is announced. People from all different backgrounds are praying that compassion be directed to the poor in the provincial budget.

Sister Pauline Lally attended the prayer vigil in Toronto. She said that although some advances have been made since the Harris government cuts 13 years ago, the provincial government must do more to help those most in need.

"We want the government to give the dignity back to these people and help them get out of poverty," she said. "It's not by chance that people are in poverty. Poverty is po-

litical and unjust trading keeps people poor."

Lally said the politicians need to be aware of the dire situation for many people in Ontario and the government needs to take action in the upcoming budget.

"People living in poverty are going to suffer during this economic downturn, perhaps even more so than other people," she said.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has pledged to make poverty reduction a top priority of his government. Last December the provincial government released its plan to reduce poverty in the province. Among other things, the government set the goal of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent in five years.

ISARC said the provincial government needs to take action on its poverty reduction strategy in this upcoming budget.

The interfaith coalition has called for more funding from the province to go with the recently announced federal investment in affordable housing and childcare. ISARC would also like to see a \$100 healthy food supplement to help all adults on social as-

sistance afford nutritious food.

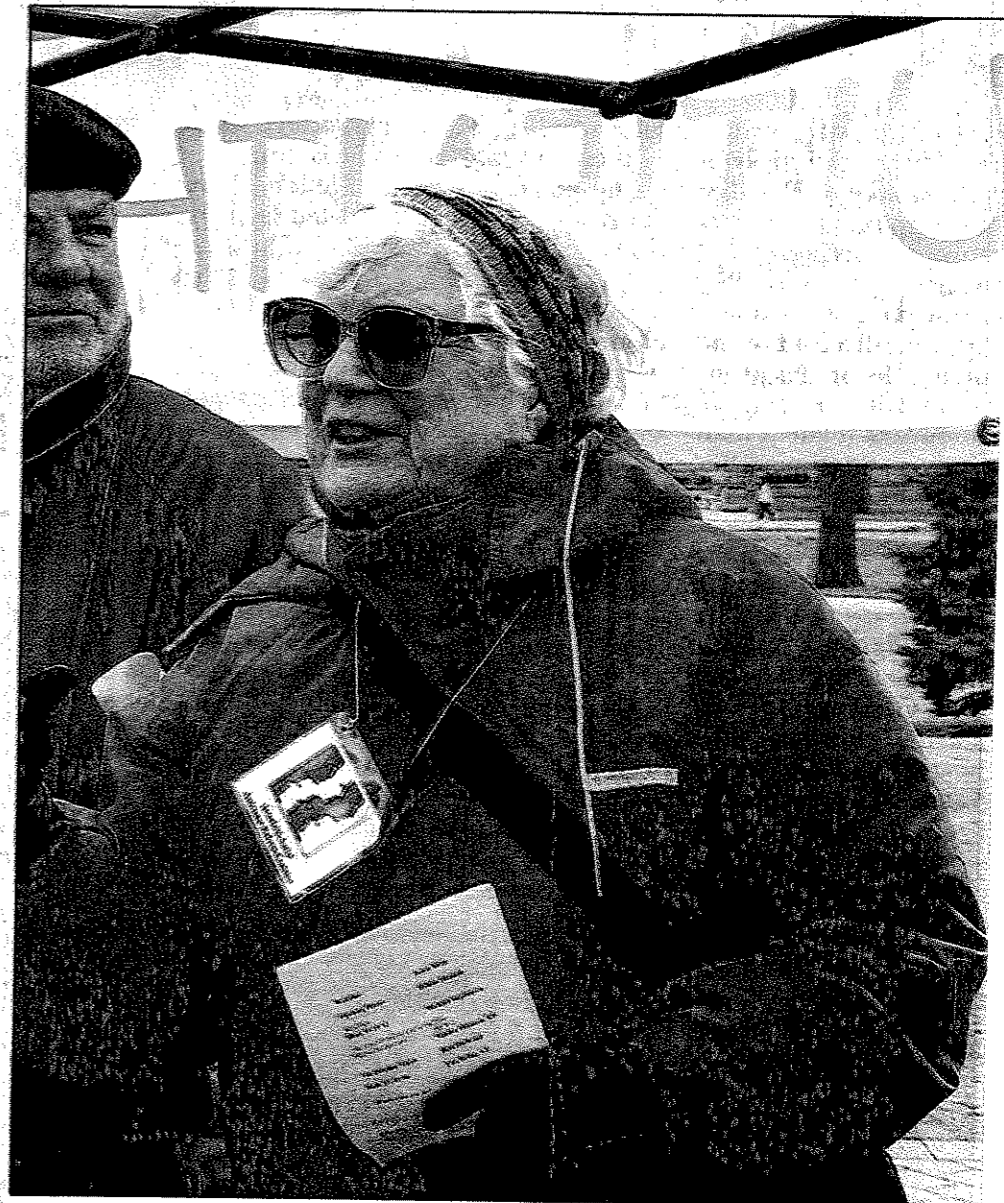
In an effort to help low-income renters meet the rising cost of housing, ISARC is asking the provincial government to introduce a housing benefit. The group also seeks an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit to \$92 a month in 2009 and \$125 a month in 2010.

Finally, ISARC would like to see 7,500 new affordable childcare spaces. The group argues that they are necessary for working parents and those other parents who are retraining in order to meet the demands of the changing economy.

The prayer vigil in Toronto has been receiving coverage in the Toronto media. Lally said she heard that one MPP stopped by and said that the elected officials heard their message.

Whether the vigil translates into meaningful action to reduce poverty by the provincial government remains to be seen. Lally said she is optimistic the provincial government will do the right thing.

"I am hopeful for what is to come. If I didn't have hope, I would not be out at the vigil on Fridays."



Sister Pauline Lally gives a speech in front of the provincial legislature last Wednesday. A group of 30 local people, many of whom hold a prayer vigil in front of Kingston City Hall every Friday during the lunch hour, travelled to Toronto to participate in an interfaith prayer vigil. The vigil is reminding provincial politicians that they need to include anti-poverty measures in the upcoming provincial budget that will be announced March 26.