

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

ISARC e-Newsletter, March 2010

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Emailing, as opposed to mailing, saves us time and resources, and allows you to use the various links we put in the e-newsletter version.

You can email us at info@isarc.ca to let us know if you can receive our newsletter by email.

If you do not have access to email or would prefer to receive a paper version of our e-newsletter, we are happy to continue sending it to you in this way.



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Social Audit Beginning

ISARC's Social Audits are beginning across the province. Waterloo Region took place on February 25. Chatham-Kent began on March 22, North Bay on March 23 and 24, and South West Ontario (Rural) will happen on March 31. Other audits are occurring in April.



Go to <http://isarc.ca/SA-Waterloo.html> to read about Brice Balmer's account of the social audit that took place in Waterloo Region.

Go to www.isarc.ca/socialaudit2010.html to learn when and where the Hearings will take place, and to access the Guidelines and various resources we have put together.

If you would like to become a part of the Social Audit in your local area, contact ISARC at info@isarc.ca.

Meeting with Honourable Laurel Broten

Read about our meeting with Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services on March 9.

Go to <http://isarc.ca/BrotenMeetingMarch910.html>.



Recent ISARC Letters to Government

Ontario Budget and child care funding. Letter to Premier McGuinty, March 8, 2010. Go to: http://isarc.ca/archives/Childcare&BudgetMar8_2010.pdf.

The Special Diet Allowance. Letter to Hon. Madeline Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services, March 21, 2010. Go to:

<http://isarc.ca/archives/MeilleurSpecialDietMarch2010.pdf>

Special Diet

The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) reports that on February 17, the Human Rights tribunal of Ontario found that the government's Special Diet program violates the Ontario Human Rights Code. They also reported that the Government might be considering eliminating the Special Diet Program entirely. Go to <http://www.incomesecurity.org/specialdietdecision.htm>



The 25in5 (which ISARC is part of) suggest the following action to Protect Special Diet:

- Contact the Ministers and your MPP: Tell them Special Diet is too important to be cut! Send a letter or email to Minister Meilleur, Minister Broten, and the Premier.
- You can use the 25in5 letter [<http://25in5.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/25-in-5-Special-Diet-Letter-to-Meiller.pdf>] as a template for your own letter. You can also refer to the ISARC letter linked above.
- Call, write or email your MPP about the importance of the Special Diet Allowance.
- The ODSP Action Coalition has prepared a lobby kit with tips about points you can make in phone calls or letters. See the lobby kits at <http://www.odspaction.ca/story/action-needed-special-diet>.
- A list of all MPPs (including postal addresses, phone numbers, and emails) can be found at http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/member_addresses.do?locale=en.

If you send a letter, please send The 25in5 Network a copy at info@25in5.ca.

Put Food in the Budget

Endorse an immediate \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement as a first step towards a healthy diet. Go to: <http://putfoodinthebudget.ca/>.

Do the Math is a survey that calculates what it costs each month to live a healthy and dignified life. Go to: <http://www.dothemath.thestop.org/>.



2010 Ontario Budget, March 25, 2010

Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, will present the 2010 Ontario Budget on Thursday, March 25, 2010. Go to: <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2010/>.

See the pre-Budget Submissions of:

- ISARC: “It takes a village to raise a child”, Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs (January 26, 2010 in London). Go to: <http://isarc.ca/archives/StandingCommitteeonFinanceandEconomicAffairsJan2610.pdf>
- 25in5 Network: “Stay the Course”. Go to: <http://25in5.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/25in5-budget-Submission-Jan-21-2010.pdf>.

Ontario Alternative Budget

The CCPA Ontario office released its Ontario Alternative Budget, “Steering Ontario Out of Recession” [<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/newsroom/updates/ccpa-releases-ontario-alternative-budget>], and its prescription for this year’s provincial budget, calling on the Ontario government to make job creation – not deficit reduction – a top priority.

Ottawa Poverty Reduction

Last November, with the support of the City’s Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network (OPRN) approached the Community & Protective Services Committee to ask the City to develop a municipal Poverty Reduction Strategy.

On December 10th, Human Rights Day, City Council approved the request. A cross-sectoral Steering Committee, co-chaired by Barb McInnes of the Community Foundation and Colleen Hendrick from the City and including 2 OPRN members, developed Phase 1 of the Strategy and it was approved by CPS on January 21st. You can see the report at: <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/occ/2010/02-10/cpsc/01-%20ACS2010-COS-CSS-0001%20ENG.htm>. On January 2, City Council adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Remembering Paula Finbow

by Jim Paddon, Vice-President, Ontario Council Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

It is with profound sadness that I had to accept the death notice of Paula Finbow last month. Paula was president of the Etobicoke Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and was a member of our Ontario Council's Voice of The Poor advocacy committee, of which I am the Chair. Paula was a true friend of the poor and a strong advocate of the changes needed in Ontario and Canada to address poverty reduction. She attended several ISARC meetings, either with me, or in my place, and she was certainly a strong supporter of ISARC. Paula spoke at ISARC’s April 2009 Religious Leaders Forum (<http://isarc.ca/religiousleadersforumApril09.html>),

reflecting on her involvement in the Prayer Vigil.

Her death leaves a large void in our advocacy efforts but her memory will help to sustain us in our continued work. May God bless her and the many people living in poverty whose lives she touched.

Breaking Down Barriers:

A Multi-Faith Guide to Accessibility in Places of Worship

This new Guide outlines a step-by-step process for removing barriers to accessibility in places of worship, and is based on the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Published by Reena, an organization that actively supports the social inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities, a copy can be downloaded at <http://www.reena.org/publications.html#03>.

Our diverse religious traditions have different approaches to how we pray for our politicians and government. This series explores the question from the perspective of our various religious communities. Our latest response is from a Unitarian Universalists perspective.

How Do We Pray for Our Politicians and Governments? – A Unitarian Universalists Perspective

by Rev. Jeffrey Brown, Minister

Unitarian Congregation in Mississauga - <http://joomla.uucm.ca/uucm/>



Pray for our politicians and government? Unitarian Universalists can't even agree about what prayer is — or whether it is. No one should be especially surprised, given that as a religious movement, we can't seem to concur that there's anything or anyone to pray to. Lock any two Unitarian Universalists in a room, and they'll come out with at least a half-dozen fundamentally different notions about the existence or non-existence of deity.

So it's to be expected that there would be no one "Unitarian Universalist perspective" on praying for our politicians and our governments. Some of my colleagues have no difficulty appearing before a government body and invoking wisdom and justice to guide its deliberations. As a life-long humanist though, I have quietly questioned my role every time I have received a request to open a legislative session.

When I ask myself what prayer might signify, I return to words that I first read as a child. They continue to resonate for me and guide my "prayers." A much older colleague of mine, Lon Ray Call, wisely observed that: *"Prayer doesn't change things. Prayer changes people, and people*

change things.”

Prayer changes people! Moments of meditation are opportunities for me to focus on what matters most in the world: that our society benefits everyone equitably. Times of reflection allow me to recall that I share responsibility for my neighbours’ — and my planet’s — well-being. The cocoon of contemplation gives me space to move beyond my narrow world of everyday worries to remember that I am one in a larger family of sisters and brothers everywhere.

If prayer only remains interior though, it doesn’t do much. It certainly doesn’t change me when it only rummages inside my head. My prayerful thought is useless if it simply alters my mood and makes me happier. In fact, I don’t believe that prayer really is prayer until it bears the fruit of action. Prayer truly flourishes when it changes how I behave in the world.

Do I pray for my political leaders and my governments? Sometimes, but not often. Do I remember them in my meditations? Yes, but no more than any living creature with whom I share this life. Do I remember them in my reflections? Yes, for I recognize that they have it in their hands to help the too many people in my community and my province who are without suitable shelter, who nightly sleep malnourished and hungry, and who lack real access to appropriate health care.

And that prayer changes me. It spurs me in two directions. First, it pushes me to give more to my local food bank and community centre, my mental health centre and hospice. Second, and equally important, it goads me to write and visit my legislators to demand that our governments support programs that help empower people we have so marginalised. By my presence, my prayers echo in the halls of power. I change — and perhaps begin a shift in the people who hear me — with or without an “amen” to punctuate my words.

Prayer is action that changes the world!

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