

## Fairlawn Reads: February 6, 2011

Lives Still In Balance. *Ontario's Social Audit*. Interfaith Social Assistance Coalition 2007

Updates: Persistent Poverty. Voices from the Margins. 2010\*

The good news: there have been some positive steps taken by the provincial government since 2007.

- ✓ The minimum wage has been increased to \$10.25
- ✓ The Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) provides a tax-free benefit of \$1100 a year per child under 18 for low income families.
- ✓ In December 2008, the provincial government passed the Poverty Reduction Act leading to the goal of reducing childhood poverty by 25% in 5 years (2013)
- ✓ In November 2010 the province launched the most comprehensive review of social assistance in 20 years. (Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- ✓ A dental plan has been announced that will cover the cost of preventive dental care for children of families living on low incomes.

The bad news *"The pace of change has been discouragingly slow. The 2010 provincial budget's support for poverty elimination is minimal at best."*\*

The provincial government has again delayed releasing its promised Affordable Housing Strategy and has not moved to eliminate the 'stupid' rules that make the lives of OW and ODSP recipients so difficult and demeaning,

In Ontario social assistance rates are still below the level that individuals received prior to the 21% in cut in 1995. In 2010 a single person living on OW has 41% less purchasing power that he or she had in 1995.

As of December 2010 a single person receives \$592/month on OW and a single parent with one child receives \$992/month plus OCB of \$92/month, leaving the family \$9,700 below the poverty line.

In November 2010, 451,300 Ontarians relied on OW – up from 370,000 in Nov 2008

It is not only people on social assistance who live in poverty and "on the margins." In 2008, 1.6 million or 12.5% of Ontarians lived in poverty. 15% of children were living in poverty. Because of the recession these rates will be higher in 2011. In Toronto the figure is closer to 20%.

Use of food banks in Toronto rose by 14% in 2010 over 2009 (approximately 873,000 to 997,000) Food banks in the 905 area saw a 15% increase in the same period.

Throughout Ontario 149,000 children rely on food banks

Sources;

- ✓ ***Persistent Poverty - Voices from the Margins.*** Interfaith Social Assistance Review Coalition (ISARC) 2010;
- ✓ **2010 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario.** Campaign 2000

*How long, O Lord?" asked Terence Finlay, former Anglican Archbishop of Toronto, on reading Persistent Poverty. "How long before our politicians listen and then act?"*

Other resources:

- ✓ Generous Justice. How God's Grace Makes Us Just Timothy Keller, Dutton 2010
- ✓ Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of the American Community, and the sequel
- ✓ Better Together. Robert Putnam

Recommended by Christopher White

And ..... the Bible!