

PROPOSAL TO SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL #2022-01

RAISING AND INDEXING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES IN ONTARIO

Origin: Social and Ecological Justice Commission

1. What is the issue?

Background:

The Ontario Social Assistance program which is composed of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Programs (ODSP) is designed to provide basic supports for Ontario residents who are unemployed and without other means of financial support.

Ontario Works is intended for those who are unemployed but with the hope of returning to work. ODSP is designed for those who have barriers to employment and may also need additional supports. Hence a higher income level for those who receive ODSP

This “social safety net,” as it is referred to, is supposed to provide the means by which someone can provide basic food and shelter for themselves and their family and live as a member of the community.

However, the reality is that social assistance rates lag far behind any realistic cost of living, even the most modest of housing and the simplest of basic needs.

For example: a report by the Maytree Foundation, Welfare in Canada, 2020, found that Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Programs (ODSP) left recipients far below the Market Basket Measure of Poverty (MBM).

Four household types were surveyed (single adult on OW, single adult on ODSP, single parent with a young child on OW and a couple with two children on OW) and all had incomes that left them in deep poverty -- meaning incomes less than 75% of the Market Basket Measure (Welfare in Canada, 2020: <http://www.maytree.com>)

A single adult on OW had a monthly income of \$714, which amounted to only 56% of the deep poverty threshold.

The couple with two children had an income that amounted to 91% of the deep poverty threshold. The better financial position of poor families reflects the investments in child benefits at the federal level as well as provincially.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that even with child benefits, families that rely on Ontario's basic income security programs -- OW and ODSP -- still live in deep poverty.

Action Needed: The government of Ontario needs to immediately:

- raise social assistance rates starting with an increase that would bring them to the Deep Poverty Threshold (that is 75% of the Market Basket Measure (MBM)),
- collapse the basic amount and shelter allowance into a standard Flat Rate benefit,
- index OW and ODSP rates to inflation, and
- initiate a multi-year plan to raise social assistance incomes above the Market Basket Measure of Poverty

2. Why is this issue important?

Call of the gospel to love neighbour

Call of the gospel to build community

Call of the gospel to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Jesus' reminder to his disciples that whatever you do to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do to me.

Justice, equity, compassion and care for neighbour are at the heart of the Christian gospels and Christian theology.

For too long we have offered the charity model of "helping the poor," without equal passion and energy for addressing the root causes of poverty: unfair distribution of wealth, discriminatory labour laws, insufficient wages and stigmatizing and isolating of those who are vulnerable and impoverished.

We add further harm when we provide a "social safety net" that is woefully inadequate to meet basic need, and so complicated with barriers, it penalizes those who seek to become participants in the economy.

Currently, it is estimated that 900,000 Ontarians seek to survive on social assistance incomes that leave them in deep poverty.

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitment on equity?

One only needs to look at the demographic of those who are on social assistance to see that disproportionately it is composed of those who are victims of inequity: people with disabilities, immigrants, women, people of colour, the sick, the elderly and those seeking to escape the trauma of abuse and violence.

In its fifth cross province consultation (2020), listening to stories and asking for recommendations from people living with poverty, ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, which includes the United Church in its membership) heard yet again that social assistance rates are too low, and that, with no increase in social assistance rates since 2018, they are worse off than ever.

The isolation of Covid-19 has been difficult for everyone, but especially difficult for people who continued to receive less than half of a CERB payment and were forced to live in very poor housing conditions with couch surfing or the streets, the only alternative if they were evicted.

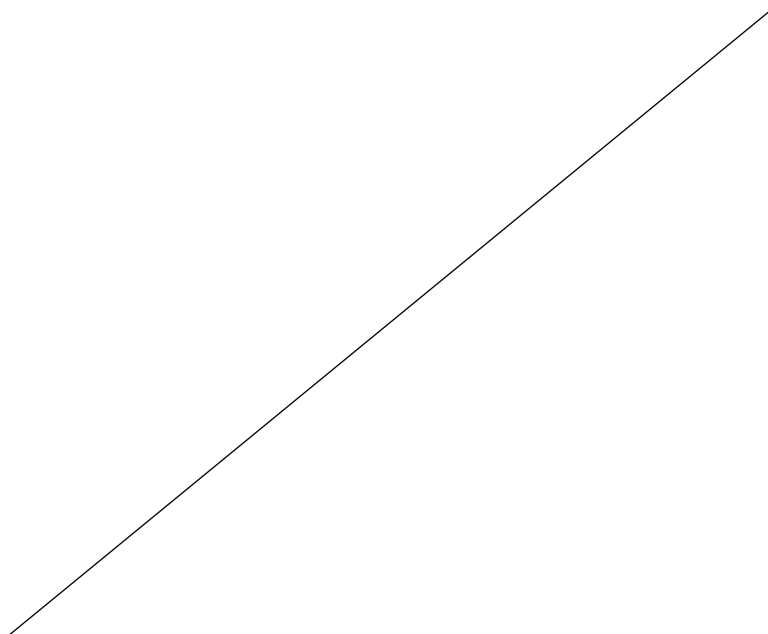
Efforts to increase social assistance rates in Ontario have been made by many coalitions, community advocacy and faith groups for many years. The United Church has also long supported increases in social assistance to allow people to live with dignity and adequacy and for children to have proper housing and nutritional supports.

The call to index social assistance would eliminate the stop-gap nature of social assistance increases and allow those on social assistance to stay in line with inflationary increases. This would prevent social assistance rates from falling even further behind.

4. How might Shining Waters Regional Council respond to this issue?

The Regional Council might:

1. call on the Government of Ontario to immediately:
 - raise social assistance rates starting with an increase that would bring them to the Deep Poverty Threshold (that is 75% of the Market Basket Measure (MBM),
 - collapse the basic amount and shelter allowance into a standard Flat Rate benefit,
 - index OW and ODSP rates to inflation, and
 - initiate a three-year plan to raise social assistance incomes above the Market Basket Measure of Poverty
2. direct the Regional Council President to immediately release a media statement outlining the call to the Ontario Government as outlined in item #1 above;
3. call on Communities of Faith in Shining Waters Regional Council to engage in education and advocacy around the need for increased social assistance support in the form of higher rates and indexing to the cost of inflation;
4. request that each Community of Faith in Shining Waters Regional Council name a lead poverty advocate to connect with the Social and Ecological Justice Commission, this name to be provided by June 30, 2022;
5. take steps, working with the Social and Ecological Justice Commission, to create, in consultation with other Ontario Regional Councils (through SJNOR (Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions) a social justice liaison position with the provincial government. This consultation might be expanded to include ecumenical and interfaith partners, with a report back to the next Regional Council meeting.



PROPOSAL TO SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL #2022-02

STATISTICS AND FINANCIAL REPORTING FOR SHINING WATERS REGION

Origin: Dalston-Crown Hill United Church

The Issue

At the last Annual Meeting on November 13th, 2021, of the Region, the Financial Report consisted of one page of numbers (see Appendix A) which combined the financial report with the budget for future years. There was no written summary and very few details making it impossible for the members to make an adequate evaluation of the status of our finances. Questions at the meeting and, after the meeting, were met with evasive answers regarding the amount of money and assets currently being held by the Region. The report did not meet the standards that Communities of Faith are required to submit yearly on their statistical reports, or even the requirements of CRA regarding “Registered Charity Returns.” See Appendix B for a description of the UCC and CRA forms required.

The financial statements have not been audited for several years and the submitted reports to the auditor were not made available. There was no commitment at the November 13th meeting to make the reports of the auditor and their recommendations available.

Each Community of Faith is required to submit statistics each year regarding the number of members and adherents, the places of worship, the value of property held, investment amounts, bank account balances, insurance coverage, salary amounts, travel expenses, numbers of employees, etc. Similar number for the Region should be provided and including the number of active, closing, amalgamated, and new Communities of Faith.

The lack of this information means that there is no real oversight being provided by the Annual Meeting,

Why is this important?

Without such information, the Executive is basically operating without any accountability to the Region members. Much of the Region money is being spent on donations, and although a list of recipients was temporarily provided on the Region Web site, after a question at one of the Town Halls, the amount of money granted to each organization was not provided. Members have no idea of the priorities of the Region in terms of how their Annual Assessments and M&S donations are being spent. The M&S donations need to be specifically identified in order that donors can know that their contributions are going to good causes.

Most Communities of Faith rely on volunteers, not paid employees, but the Region seems to employ many individuals. This difference needs more explanation. The 2020 Registered Charity Return for Shining Waters (available online) indicates 9 full time staff and 15 part time staff for a total salary budget of \$1,241,390. Eight of the full-time staff were paid in the \$80,000 to \$119,000 salary range. Since \$354,703 was spent on part-time staff, the calculated average salary for full-

time staff in 2020 was \$98,500. This important information is not on the financial statement in the Annual Report.

The Region is spending money from the sale of property without providing details and this leads to some concern from Communities who are struggling with their own finances, and who are aware of the struggles of those who have reluctantly closed. A perception exists that this money is not being spent wisely. Perhaps funds could be set aside to help Communities of Faith in need of assistance.

The lack of transparency means that people might question why the Region needs money. It seems to be capable of surviving without additional money through assessments and M&S. The 2020 Registered Charities Return indicated \$3,349,752 in total assets with nothing listed under land and buildings. The corresponding number in 2019 was \$4,609,723.

Recommendations to the Region

The Region needs to operate with transparency, a need to keep the membership informed, and a desire to be accountable. The statistical reports and the Registered Charity Returns that Communities of Faith provide annually should be used as guidance. The Executive should consider forming a Statistics and Finance Committee with oversight on statistics, expenditures, and budgeting reporting. More specific ideas include:

- 1) A detail financial statement needs to be provided which includes the investments (long and short term), the bank balances, and the value of the physical assets, including land and buildings under the Region's control. The documents provided to the auditors would be a good start. The statement should include a descriptive written narrative.
- 2) A written commitment to provide the results of any audit to the Regional Council should be provided.
- 3) A detailed summary of money donated to specific users, with a breakout of M&S and Region funds should be made available. There appears to be a reluctance to provide dollar amounts given to specific organizations, but there is a need for this detail.
- 4) The number of full time and part time employees is essential, with some idea of salary ranges like what is required for the Registered Charity Return. Are M&S funds being spent on salaries?
- 5) Commissions are provided an annual budget, \$25,000 each, and the need for the funds should be specified.
- 6) Statistics describing the Region should be provided including the number of active, new, amalgamated, and closing Communities of Faith. It is important to list the closing Communities in the Annual Report, along with possible reasons for closure.
- 7) Statistics describing the Region Communities of Faith would be useful giving numbers on such things as: Clusters, Affirming, accessibility, congregation size, rural or urban identification, multiple point charges, policies permitting same sex marriage, and policies on such things as racial discrimination, harassment, green plans, etc.

Appendix A

Shining Waters Regional Council Financial Information Submitted for November 13, 2021, Annual Meeting

SWRC - Draft Budget Projection 2021-2026

INCOME	Actual 2020	Approved 2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Grant Income							
PTCC			616,000	600,000	600,000	600,000	600,000
TUCC			59,500	59,500	59,500	59,500	59,500
			<u>675,500</u>	<u>659,500</u>	<u>659,500</u>	<u>659,500</u>	<u>659,500</u>
Investment Income	180,212	25,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
National Grants							
Assessment	325,000	325,000	325,000	325,000	325,000	325,000	325,000
M&S Grant	289,000	240,000	240,000	194,400	174,960	157,464	141,718
Salary	99,000	99,000	99,000	99,000	99,000	99,000	99,000
	<u>713,000</u>	<u>664,000</u>	<u>664,000</u>	<u>618,400</u>	<u>598,960</u>	<u>581,464</u>	<u>565,718</u>
Transfer from Toronto Conference	<u>219,752</u>						
Property Income							
Development					38,000	309,500	543,000
Sale		<u>1,655,400</u>	<u>1,265,300</u>	<u>1,266,200</u>	<u>811,940</u>	<u>465,736</u>	<u>108,782</u>
		<u>1,655,400</u>	<u>1,265,300</u>	<u>1,266,200</u>	<u>849,940</u>	<u>775,236</u>	<u>651,782</u>
Total Income	<u>1,112,964</u>	<u>2,344,400</u>	<u>2,704,800</u>	<u>2,644,100</u>	<u>2,208,400</u>	<u>2,116,200</u>	<u>1,977,000</u>
Expenses							
Clusters and Networks	6,700	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Committees	2,224	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Contingency/Misc.	25,137	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000
Commissions							
Communities of Faith	18,976	100,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Intercultural Diversity			25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Pastoral Relations	15,739	55,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Social & Ecological Justice	2,529	10,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Executive	633	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Finance	28,858	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Grants	350,000	575,000	1,140,800	1,078,600	972,900	923,200	873,500
Legal Fees	12,813	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Managed Properties	136,682	150,000	150,000	150,000	100,000	75,000	50,000
Office Expenses	66,398	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000
Outreach Ministries	137,137						
Regional Meeting	13,429	80,000	80,000	80,000		80,000	
Staff Team	1,014,302	1,158,400	978,500	980,500	781,000	684,000	700,000
SWRC/CSRC Shared Expenses	1,715	10,000	9,500	9,000	8,500	8,000	7,500
Youth	4,738	10,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
	<u>1,838,010</u>	<u>2,344,400</u>	<u>2,704,800</u>	<u>2,644,100</u>	<u>2,208,400</u>	<u>2,116,200</u>	<u>1,977,000</u>
Income less Expenses	- 725,046	-	-	-	-	-	-

Appendix B

Statistical and Information Forms

United Church of Canada

<https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2022-01/2021-statistics-instruction-booklet.pdf>

These forms gather information that is essential to the administration of the United Church at all levels—the local congregation, Regional Council, and General Council. It helps maintain current information on pastoral charges, congregations, and ministers; supports our mailing and e-mail lists; and provides the statistics on which Denominational and Regional assessments are based. Be assured that your information is important to the church whether you are a pastoral charge of 10 members or 1,000!

T3010 Registered Charity Information Return Requirements

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pub/t4033/t4033-21e.pdf>

Charities are organizations that carry on activities which are primarily for the benefit of the public. Under the Income Tax Act (Canada), a registered charity is exempt from income taxes. Although exempt from income taxes, a charity needs to file a T3010 Registered Charity Information Return within 6 months of its fiscal year end. For example, if the charity's fiscal year-end is March 31, 2021; its return is due by September 30, 2021.

The T3010 Registered Charity Information Return serves the following purposes:

- It is published by Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and available to the public
- It provides information to the CRA regarding activities and/or assets held for assessment of sanctions and/or revocation of charity status
- It is used to calculate the disbursement quota

Together with the T3010 Registered Charity Information Return, registered charities must submit the following documents, at a minimum:

1. Financial statements for the reporting fiscal period. If a charity has annual gross income over \$250,000, the CRA recommends that the charity file audited financial statements; otherwise, the financial statements need to be signed by the Treasurer.
2. Form T1235 – Directors/Trustees and Like Officials Worksheet, which is a list of the charity's directors for the year, along with a copy of the Board Meeting minutes and the directors' personal information.

Other forms may be applicable depending on the activities of the charity.