

## BACKGROUND

This vision statement has undergone constant reflection and revision during the coalition's existence. The Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador (RSAC) was founded in recognition of increasing levels of poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the spring of 2007, at a multi-faith forum, Arnold Bennett challenged faith leaders to move from discussing issues of poverty to taking action. On April 17, 2007 in response to this challenge, the Religious Social Action Coalition of NL was formed. Since inception, its main objective has been, and will continue to be the elimination of poverty in the Province of NL, the country and in the world at large. Its membership comes from almost all religions such as Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh. The membership has fluctuated over time to some extent; some members dropping off and others joining.

Although the membership has been affiliated with various religions, we all participate in RSAC in our individual capacity without compromising the doctrines of our parent religious affiliations. Still, most of those on the Executive Committee required a tacit nod from their organization for being a director of RSAC.

Poverty elimination is an issue which is supported by all religious communities. However, the actual methods and mechanisms for poverty reduction may or may not have the support of these communities. This is because of the all inclusive membership of the religions and their congregations. Each religion has both rich and poor; politicians and non politicians; extreme right and extreme left and those in between. The directors use their own discretion and judgment in order to maintain a fine balance. What brings them together quite fervently is the moral concern for poverty from the perspective of their own faith. In a land of great wealth, poverty is a failure of community.

Since Poverty has many facets and therefore requires diverse mechanisms to reduce it, RSAC has in general terms supports all measures for addressing, eliminating poverty and reducing the gap between rich and poor. But, it is not possible for RSAC to engage itself actively in a large number of these measures. RSAC's focus is on more visible non antagonist aspects only, such as poverty levels, minimum wages, income gap etc.

Organizationally, RSAC is neither a social enterprise nor a charitable organization. It is not registered as a non profit organization either. It is a fairly loose coalition of religious people with common objectives of social justice. Poverty elimination is our focus.

It has used moral pressure and persuasion on candidates contesting for election – both provincially & federally and on governing members & elected officials for pledging to work towards poverty elimination and acting upon it. It has engaged in the following activities during the past 6 years.

- Many attempts at engaging the larger number of supporters from various parishes and religious institutions.
- Raising questions on why poverty rates increased or stayed up.
- Meetings with elected officials and government members.
- Launching candidates against poverty initiative.
- Letter writing campaigns to members of Parliament and NL Legislature.
- Raising public awareness about poverty and income gap through media.
- Participating in public consultations on government poverty reduction strategy of the provincial government.
- Approaching the government for adopting a fairness prism in order to evaluate the impact of

government legislation, programs and policies on income gap and poverty levels.

- Supporting higher minimum wage.
- Discussions around living wage.
- Monitoring the data on gap between the rich and poor and advocating the narrowing of the gap.
- Advocating the monitoring the number of people below low income cut off or NL Market Basket Measure.
- Advocating the allocation of funds from off shore oil revenue to social programs directed at narrowing the income gap and poverty rates.
- Agreed to push for fairness prism as a priority.
- Agreed to work on living wage introduction in NL.
- Establishing a website.

Based on common themes in its aspirations, deliberations and actions over the last 6 years and its desire to focus on results, the following emerges as RSAC's Vision and Action Plan for the future.

## **ACTION PLAN**

- Continue to raise public awareness about income gap and levels of poverty and the need for poverty elimination.
- Continue to challenge elected officials and governments to take action through legislation, policies and programs for reducing the income gap and eliminating poverty.
- Continue and strengthen the "candidates against poverty" initiative.
- Be proactive in convincing the government for adopting "Fairness Prism" for assessing the impact of all legislation, policies and programs on income gap, levels of poverty and social equity.
- Arrange for research on "Living Wage" for selected communities in NL. Also work with these selected communities for implementation of Living Wage Strategy.
- Participate in discussions and forums to the extent possible on various issues which alleviate the impact of poverty, such as affordable housing, homelessness, child care, minimum wages, and funding for these programs.
- Establish linkages with other organizations with similar interests and objectives.