

Bread Not Stones

Taking Action to End Child Poverty

Jesus said: “Would anyone among you offer your child a stone instead of bread, or a snake instead of fish? If you know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will our loving God give good things to those who ask!”

(Matthew 7:9–11 paraphrased)

The United Church of Canada



L'Église Unie du Canada

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Tools for Action

Bread Not Stones has tools to encourage and enable communities of faith to **pray**, **learn**, and **act** toward eradicating child poverty in their local regions.

These Tools Inform

These tools inform all readers by providing background information on child poverty in Canada as well as links to further resources to help readers find out more about child poverty in their own regions. In addition, the tools include resources to connect United Church congregations, community and social justice ministries, and Canadian and global partners.

These Tools Assist

These tools assist communities that are being called to respond to this issue in their own unique ways. Many churches recognize the existence of child poverty in their own local community and wonder what to do about it. These tools will assist in discerning faithful, appropriate, timely, and effective responses.

These Tools Are a Response

The 41st General Council (2012) of The United Church of Canada (UCC) directed the Executive of the General Council to develop strategies to enable all members and adherents of the UCC to take action in collaboration with all levels of government, the business community, and the community of non-profit organizations and partners to address child poverty in Canada.

The General Council was directed to embrace the opportunity to encourage every Conference, presbytery, district, presbyterial, and congregation to advocate for:

- the development of long-term provincial and national strategies for reducing poverty while increasing social inclusion; and
- the development of poverty reduction strategies where measurable targets, time frames, transparency, accountability, and progress assessment measures are among elements given serious consideration

The United Church has been active in the public arena—including elections—since its earliest days. The founders of this church believed that ours is a living faith and witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ that is expressed in active, thoughtful involvement in society. It is important for people of faith to bring forward the consistent message that every individual must be cherished and included, and that the earth must be carefully tended. Our combined voices have greater impact when we work together.

Background

Child Poverty in Canada

Children are not an isolated group, and poverty is not an isolated issue. Child poverty needs to be addressed through an approach that supports the whole family. The gospels tell us that Jesus valued children and their place in the community. However, still today, children are among the most vulnerable people in our society.

The most recent statistics indicate that one in seven children lives in poverty¹. More children and their families live in poverty as of 2011 than they did in 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously resolved to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. When it comes to child poverty, Canada ranks 24th of 35 industrialized countries.

Poverty among Racialized and Indigenous Children

Racialized² communities face high levels of poverty. The 2006 Census showed that the poverty rate for non-racialized persons was 9 percent while it was 22 percent for racialized persons³, and 40 percent for Indigenous children⁴.

Poverty in racialized communities is also a growing problem. The problem is especially severe among more recent immigrants, the vast majority of whom belong to racialized groups. In general, over the past two decades poverty rates have been rising among immigrants and fallen among the Canadian born.⁵

Children of immigrants, a lone woman parent, of racialized families, of Aboriginal identity, and those with a disability are at a higher risk for poverty. Children from these groups are more likely to live in poverty than all children⁶.

¹ *Canada's Real Economic Action Plan begins with Poverty Eradication*, 2013 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada, Campaign 2000, Family Service Toronto.

² "Racialized people is a term used to indicate that race is socially constructed rather than an inherent physical identity that one is born with. It also draws attention to the fact that in racist systems, people seen as White are often regarded as 'neutral' or having no 'markings' of race. The term refers to people who are viewed as different from the status quo or unequal." (*Ending Racial Harassment*, The United Church of Canada 2008 pg. 5)

³ *Poverty Profile: Special Edition, A Snapshot of Racialized Poverty in Canada*, National Council of Welfare, 2012.

⁴ *Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada*, June 2013, The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Save the Children.

⁵ Picot, Garnett and Feng Hou. The rise in low income rates among immigrants in Canada. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11F0019MIE2003198, June 2003.

⁶ *Needed: A Federal Action Plan to Eradicate Child and Family Poverty in Canada*, 2012 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada, Campaign 2000, Family Service Toronto.

Pray

A Reflection on Child Poverty

Estimated time: 10–15 min.

Supplies: Hymn books (if you choose to sing), a Bible

Bible Reading

Mark 7:24–30

Then share the following reflection.

Charity Is Not Enough

Shortly after protesting child poverty on the frigid steps of the Alberta Legislature with 100 other United Church people, three of us met with the minister responsible for children. We asked if the government would provide hungry kids with a free lunch. The minister seemed bewildered by the question. “You mean all children?” We suggested he could begin with the hungry ones.

Shortly after, I visited a school in Ndilo, Northwest Territories. “Do you have hungry students here?” I asked the principal. “No,” she replied, “our staff cook makes breakfast and lunch, although kids can bring their own if they prefer.” If Northwest Territories can do it, why can’t the wealthiest province in Canada?

Hungry students cannot learn, sparkle, or behave in their own best interests. They are at risk of academic failure and poor health—not news to anyone with common sense. Yet many Canadian students are hungry. People say it’s the parents’ responsibility. But if parents cannot fulfill that responsibility, should we stand by? The fact is there are not enough volunteers to take over the job. Charity is not enough.

In 1989, the Canadian government promised to eliminate child poverty by 2000. We failed. Why? Because we’re in denial, we want someone else to fix this, and because we don’t place children’s well-being at the forefront of public policy. In 2012, the United Nations child advocacy agency ranked Canada 18th out of 35 industrialized countries when child poverty rates are compared with overall poverty rates. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel to correct this. We can learn from Scandinavia, Japan, and Ireland. We can learn from the village of Ndilo.

The Child Well-Being Initiative was started in 2006 by Alberta Northwest Conference United Church Women who learned about hungry students, homeless children sleeping in churches, and the 91,000 children living in poverty in their rich province. Since then, the women have raised public awareness, petitioned government, written letters, and demonstrated.

It is encouraging to learn about the school in Ndilo and to learn of the school principal in Lethbridge, Alberta, where in addition to dealing with report cards, she buys groceries and organizes volunteer teams to help feed her hungry students. Although there are volunteers everywhere who help, charity is

obviously not enough to help all impoverished Canadian children. We need the political will to turn this world around for kids.

Carolyn Pogue

Discuss

- What question could you ask your reeve, chief, mayor, member of the legislature, and member of parliament that would help them understand the urgency of child poverty?
- Jesus commands us to put love in action. Where do you see this carried out in your community?

Pray This Prayer Together

God of all children,

we stand before you bewildered by the fact of child poverty.

We stand in frustration and shame that students are hungry,

that homeless children sleep in cars and church basements because we don't provide meals at school, nor build enough affordable housing.

Strengthen us to honour and care for the children in our communities.

Help us to place the best interests of children first.

In the name of your child, Jesus.

Amen.

Sing

“When I Needed a Neighbour” (*Voices United* 600)

“Who Is My Mother” (*More Voices* 178)

Special Sundays

Most Canadian poverty organizations and many congregations mark one or both of these international days with some sort of activity or action to either raise awareness or advocate for systemic changes. Consider either developing an action for these days or drawing attention and encouraging action on partner initiated activities. These resources can help you plan special Sundays and other events:

- a) International Day for the Eradication of Poverty – October 17
 - United Church of Canada www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons
 - United Nations www.timeanddate.com/holidays/un/international-day-for-poverty-eradication
- b) International Day of the Child – November 20
 - United Church of Canada www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/children
 - United Nations www.un.org/en/events/childrenday/

Remembering Hungry Children

Estimated time: 20–30 min.

Supplies: Hymn books (if you choose to sing), a Bible (different translations), paper dolls (a chain of 14 for each participant and one extra set), pen, and markers

Opening Prayer

(sing to tune for “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush”)

We gather round in this holy space,
holy space, filled with grace.
We gather round in this holy space,
to do as Jesus taught us.⁷

B. Ogden, 2002

Bible Reading

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12)

Reflection

For most, the words of the Beatitudes are familiar; many of us can probably recite them from memory...

But words can become divorced from meaning. They can be abstracted and used for a million mundane purposes. They can be pasted into advertisements and mission statements of multi-nationals.

They can become like veneer glued to plastic to give it the appearance of fine carpentry. Or they can be obscured by a fog of assumptions that makes them illegible. Like wearing someone else's thick glasses.

Perhaps some words are overly venerated—locked away in glass cases—filled and categorised and cross referenced. Pinned like a lifeless butterfly.

But these words—it seems to me that every generation needs to discover them anew. They contain something so wonderful, so powerful, that they are dangerous.

Like dynamite.

⁷ By Brian Ogden, from *Nursery Rhyme Nativities*, published by Barnabas for Children 2011, www.brfoonline.org.uk, used by permission.

Here are the words of Jesus, spoken to his friends. Given as a means to shape their engagement with the present-future Kingdom of God.

Words that turned everything upside down.

Subversive, revolutionary words.

Beautiful, hope-filled, wonderful words.

May they find their way to the middle of you ...”⁸

Chris Goan, Poost, 2009

Listen again to the words of Jesus...

Read

Matthew 5:1–12 (*You might read from a different translation or a paraphrase of your own.*)

Discuss

- What does it mean to call something or someone blessed? What or who are considered blessed in your community? How are they treated? How do you think God would have us treat them?
- The poor, the poor in spirit, the persecuted, those who mourn...if Jesus were here today who else might he add to this list?

Group Responses

Children are precious, yet 14 percent of children in Canada live in poverty. They are poor, persecuted, in mourning; and they are among the people whom we are to consider blessed.

Make a string of 14 paper dolls for each participant⁹. Explain that the 14 dolls represent the 14 percent of children in Canada living in poverty, then invite participants to spend some time in quiet reflection with their paper dolls, asking themselves:

- Do I know of children in my community living in poverty? (Participants may be acquainted with several but do not know it.)
- What might child poverty look like in my community?
- How might it be different in other parts of Canada?

On an extra set of dolls (or one side of the participants' set of dolls) write (or ask the participants to write) the following statements (one statement per doll) and read them aloud.

⁸ Used by permission. Poost (www.proost.co.uk) and Chris Goan from “Learning to Love.”

⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYXxoVbPzqI>

- I don't eat three meals a day.
- I don't eat protein every day.
- I don't eat fresh fruits or vegetables every day.
- I don't have any appropriate books to read.
- I have nothing to play with outside.
- I don't get to join after-school activities with my friends.
- I don't have anything to play with.
- I am not able to participate in school trips that cost money.
- I don't have a quiet place to do my homework.
- I do not have access to the Internet.
- I never get new clothes.
- If my shoes get wet, I don't have a second pair.
- I can't invite friends over to my house to play.
- I don't get to celebrate special occasions like my birthday.¹⁰

Ask participants to write similar statements on their own dolls (or the reverse side of the dolls) drawn from their own experience of what child poverty looks like or might look like in their community. Once everyone has written their statements, conclude the time with a song and community prayer.

Sing

“Jesus Loves Me” (*Voices United* 365)

During the song, link the chains of paper dolls together and use them to encircle your gathering space or worship centre as a visual and physical reminder of the children whom we are called to love.

Community Prayer

Holy Mystery,
 You speak to us words of comfort and
 words of challenge,
 words that are subversive, powerful, explosive, and sometimes confusing.
 You call the meek, the physically weak, and the downtrodden fortunate,
 and you promise that the hungry will be fed
 and the thirsty will be given something to drink.
 Yet we are surrounded by stories of children who are living in poverty.
 Children who:
 do not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables
 (*add examples generated from the group response*).

We pray for these children, Holy Mystery, especially those unknown to us.
 We long to see suffering children experience comfort;
 we desire that all children who are hungry be fed.
 And we acknowledge that we cannot meet these requests on our own.
 We need to work with many others (locally, regionally, provincially, and federally) and
 we need your Holy Grace.

¹⁰ Statements are based on the 14 Measurements on Quality of Life from UNICEF www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/imce_uploads/DISCOVER/OUR%20WORK/ADVOCACY/DOMESTIC/POLICY%20ADVOCACY/DOCS/unicefreportcard10-eng.pdf.

So with the help and support of each other, and by your grace, we trust in the promise that has been given to us through Jesus that:

He is with always; we are never alone.

With this assurance, God, we pray for the children living in poverty in Canada and the families who struggle to support them. . . In their suffering, may they be soothed by the words of Christ and by the assurance of the coming Kingdom.

We pray also, God, for those who are actively working toward eliminating child poverty in Canada such as (*name communities, people, and social service agencies in your community*). In their work, may they be encouraged and supported by the witness of Christ's followers.

We pray that your Kingdom come to earth as it is in heaven.

And ask that you help us all to be good stewards of our unique and individual gifts by responding to the needs around us with your vision, so that one day:

the poor in spirit may know the kingdom of God,
those who mourn may be comforted,
the meek may inherit what is theirs,
and no child will live in poverty.

We gather these prayers together in the prayer that Jesus taught us . . .¹¹

Alydia Smith

Prayer of Jesus

Our dear God, who lives in heaven,
your name is very, very special and great.
You look after everyone who has died and everyone alive.
We want to live here on earth, with you,
just like you live in heaven.
Please give us all that we need to survive.
Sorry for all we've done wrong—please forgive us.
We will forgive everyone what has done wrong to us.
Please stop us wanting to do bad things and don't let anything bad hurt us or make us want to fight back.
Help us to remember that you made this planet,
and us, and everything else on it.
You are in charge of the world and will be for ever.
Amen.¹²

Jack, India, and Harry of the Parish of St. Thomas the Apostle, Elson

Closing Song

“May God's Sheltering Wings” (*More Voices* 214)

¹¹ Reproduced with permission.

¹² By Jack, India, and Harry of the parish of St Thomas the Apostle, Elson, Gosport, UK. Taken from *Creative Ideas for Sacramental Worship with Children* by Simon Rundell (Canterbury Press, UK: 2011), p. 60.

Learn

Growing Income Inequality in Canada

The 2011 Occupy Movement highlighted increasing inequity in Canada and the world over. Many United Church of Canada (UCC) members supported and participated in the movement that raised awareness of how wealth is concentrated in fewer hands while the number of those living in poverty is increasing. At the same time, investment in the common good (social security) is eroding. This increased awareness emphasizes the need for the United Church to develop a strategy to eradicate child poverty by addressing systemic causes.

A lot of work on child poverty exists. Many UCC global and Canadian partners and members have already started to focus their work on child poverty issues.

Campaign 2000 produces a yearly Report Card on Child and Family Poverty (www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2013C2000NATIONALREPORTCARDNOV26.pdf). In 2011 the report noted that poverty has continued to persist even after two decades of the organization's work. The 2011 Report Card states:

As Campaign 2000 issues its 20th monitoring report on child and family poverty, we are struck by the lack of progress over two decades. The economy has more than doubled in size, yet the incomes of families in the lowest decile have virtually stagnated. The gap between rich and poor families has continued to widen, leaving average-income families also struggling to keep up.
(Campaign 2000: 2012)

The Broadbent Institute released *Towards a More Equal Canada: A Report on Canada's Economic & Social Inequality* (www.broadbentinstitute.ca/sites/default/files/documents/brod_equalityen.pdf)—a tool to stimulate discussion. The study is framed around a poll that found that approximately 77 percent of Canadians find inequality a problem, over 70 percent support increasing corporate taxes, and a larger number still support increasing taxes for the richest Canadians. The Report details how when it comes to income inequality over the last 20 years, the majority of Canadians have seen more losses than benefits. (Broadbent: 2012)

The Broadbent Institute, Campaign 2000, UCC members, and other Canadian partners all provide ideas and strategies that will help the church to fulfill the General Council resolution.

Strategic Directions

Any plan for eradicating child poverty in Canada needs to contain broad strategies including key recommendations on child benefits, early childhood education, child care, Employment Insurance, federal work tax credits, a living minimum wage, a long-term national housing strategy, Aboriginal rights, immigration, access to service, racism, refugee policy, and employment equity.

The United Church collaborates with a number of Canadian ecumenical, interfaith, and civil society partners working on poverty issues. Therefore, a level of involvement already exists that includes: sign-on

letters, information dissemination, supporting campaigns of others, participation in campaigns, as well as initiating campaigns.

The existing Child Well-Being Initiative (CWBI) started by the Alberta and Northwest Conference United Church Women (UCW), provides an exciting model of a movement that has involved congregational members in a campaign that emphasizes the root causes of poverty in Canada. We have an opportunity here to support and expand the CWBI nationally.

The following list gives information about this UCW initiative, plus other existing initiatives, campaigns, and/or movements that tackle child poverty and systemic injustice.

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada is subject to Periodic Reviews before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. These reviews provide an opportunity to collaborate with existing partners like KAIROS and Campaign 2000, both of which produce and submit Shadow Reports with recommendations to the committee.

The KAIROS report (see no. 6 on page 14) focuses primarily on Aboriginal children. In between committee sessions, KAIROS continues its advocacy and monitoring.

Campaign 2000 also produces a report that encompasses all of Canada, but also pays specific attention to the situation of poverty in Aboriginal communities.

The UN Periodic Review offers an opportunity for focused advocacy at the level of the UN. As a signatory, Canada is required to respond to questions put before it by the UN Committee, but any recommendations arising out of the UN findings are just that—recommendations that are not binding or enforceable.

2. Bill C-233: The Act to Eliminate Poverty in Canada

Bill C-233 is a private member's bill that arose in the House of Commons out of the lack of action on child poverty, despite the 1989 all-party resolution to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, and the 2009 unanimous motion that was to develop a plan to eliminate all poverty in Canada.

Campaign 2000, Canada Without Poverty (www.cwp-csp.ca), and Make Poverty History have developed an Advocacy Campaign centred on Bill C-233. People are encouraged to contact their MPs to support the passing of this bill and to sign a petition calling for action. This campaign is a natural complement to the Child Well-Being Initiative.

3. Dignity for All Campaign

Dignity for All campaign (www.dignityforall.ca), sponsored by the UCC and organized by UCC partners—Canada Without Poverty and Citizens for Public Justice—calls upon the federal government to take action to eliminate the structural causes of poverty in Canada. The campaign advocates for:

- a federal plan for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans
- a federal anti-poverty act that ensures enduring federal commitment and accountability for results
- sufficient investment in social security for all Canadians

This campaign involves signing on to a petition with these demands, and campaign organizers suggest that signatories distribute postcards that can be used for further advocacy with the federal government. The campaign is ongoing. It is also supported the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (a UCC community and social justice ministry).

4. Make Poverty History

The Make Poverty History campaign (www.makepovertyhistory.ca) was launched in February 2005 with the support of a wide cross-section of public interest and faith groups, trade unions, international development agencies, students, academics, and literary, artistic, and sports leaders. Make Poverty History is part of the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP).

5. Citizens for Public Justice

UCC partner Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) (www.cpj.ca) is a national organization that advocates, campaigns, and researches poverty in Canada from a faith-based perspective.

A key piece of work that CPJ undertakes is to produce a variety of reports, report cards, and other research pieces that contain recommendations for action to eradicate poverty. For example, in anticipation of federal budgets, CPJ will produce reports with clear recommendations. Moments like these could provide an opportunity for the UCC to encourage members to take the report and its recommendations to its local MPs, as well as actively participate in CPJ requests for action, including awareness-raising activities and advocacy initiatives.

A useful resource for study groups and worship is CPJ's *Living Justice: A Global Response to Poverty* (www.cpj.ca/living-justice-gospel-response-poverty).

6. KAIROS Canada

KAIROS: Canada (www.kairoscanada.org/) is a coalition of Canadian churches, church-based agencies, and religious organizations dedicated to promoting human rights, justice and peace, viable human development, and universal solidarity among all people. Link with KAIROS work on “Honouring the Children” UN Rights of the Child and Aboriginal children (see www.kairoscanada.org/dignity-rights/indigenous-rights/honouring-the-children).

See also *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Canada: A Study for the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and the Earth* (AGAPE), World Council of Churches (www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/SUS-CJ-11-10-PovertyWealthEcology.pdf).

7. Child Well-Being Initiative

The Child Well-Being Initiative (CWBI) is a project of the Alberta and Northwest Conference United Church Women (UCW) whose members were and continue to be outraged by the number of children in poverty in such a rich province. This same Conference drafted the General Council Resolution for GC 41 (see page 4).

On November 18, 2010, a date close to the International Day of the Child, United Church Women and others descended upon the Alberta Legislature with 83 specially made dolls—one for each member of the legislature. Attached to each doll was a tag that listed child poverty statistics and made recommendations

to end child poverty in Alberta. In addition, they delivered a petition to the legislature that spoke to systemic issues of inequality in our society: the lack of affordable housing, a living wage, food security, and public child care. The petition has been tabled in the legislature by a sympathetic MLA. Since then, members of the UCW continue to sew and deliver rag dolls to prominent people across the country as a continued reminder of the need to address child poverty. (See page 29 for details of the doll.)

The Alberta and Northwest UCW members have continued their advocacy campaign. Two years later, in November 2012, the UCW women returned to the Alberta provincial legislature with 70,000 paper dolls to depict every child living in poverty in Alberta. The Child Well-Being Initiative is raising awareness about this emergency, asking for government action, and seeking support and prayers. The campaigners hold press conferences and work with MLAs to advocate for an end to child poverty in Alberta.

The campaign is exciting on many fronts! Firstly, it is a long-term campaign that is rooted in addressing systemic issues of injustice. Secondly, it is a creative campaign that uses a unique way to gain attention and awareness about poverty in Canada and the need for action. Thirdly, it is distinctly UCC. The UCW in Alberta have embraced and taken on this activity with energy and enthusiasm. They are an important sector of society—the people in the pews—from which government rarely hears. It makes the entire campaign that much more powerful.

Next Steps: Encourage UCW presidents and members and congregations church-wide to take the model of the Alberta and Northwest Conference UCW Child Well-Being Initiative forward into a national campaign prior to the next federal election period.

Additional Resources

- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada* (<http://savethechildren.ca/document.doc?id=361>)
- Citizens for Public Justice resources:
 - * *Poverty Trends Highlights: Canada 2013* (www.cpj.ca/poverty-trends-highlights-canada-2013-report)
 - * *Making Ends Meet* (www.cpj.ca/making-ends-meet-report)
 - * *Poverty at Your Doorstep* (www.cpj.ca/poverty-your-doorstep)
 - * *Take Action: Poverty* Suggestions for political engagement, personal or small-group education, and spreading the word (www.cpj.ca/take-action-poverty).
 - * *Income, Wealth, and Inequality* (www.cpj.ca/income-wealth-and-inequality)
- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, *The State of Homelessness in Canada* (www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/SOHC2103.pdf)
- Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC): Faith Communities in Action Against Poverty (<http://isarc.ca>). ISARC represents the solidarity of the diverse faith communities in Ontario engaged in advocacy efforts for the elimination of poverty in Ontario.
- UNICEF Canada, *Measuring Child Poverty* (www.unicef.ca/en/discover/article/unicef-report-card-10#Issues)
- Connect local, regional, and national poverty issues to situations faced by global partners (see Extra Measures at www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/global/extra-measures).
- Check out *Mandate* magazine, November 2014 (www.ucrdstore.ca/magazines/mandate) for a workshop on child poverty.

Act

Engaging Your MP

Plan to take your concerns about child poverty issues to your MP.

1. Host Your MP

Invite your member of parliament to your church or community for tea and discussion, or organize a town hall gathering.

Before and after your event:

- Reflect on your own context and experience. Where have you experienced or witnessed this issue personally or as a faith community?
- Think of biblical stories or sayings that inspire you to work for justice. Pray for strength, courage, and clarity.
- Plan your event carefully with others, and prepare what you want to say.
- Spend some time afterwards reflecting with others on how things went. Discuss next steps. Look for other groups and networks in your Conference or community that are already working on these issues.
- Let your faith community—and other appropriate courts, such as presbytery, Conference, and General Council—know how it went.

2. Meet Your MP Face to Face

Be sure to know the name and political party of the MPs you want to meet and locate their constituency offices. Their addresses, phone numbers, and e-mails can be found on the Government of Canada website (www.canada.gc.ca/directories-repertoires/direct-eng.html).

Before the Meeting

1. **Make an Appointment:** A phone call to the constituency office is usually all that's required, but you may be asked to put your request in writing. Be sure to make an appointment as far ahead as possible—politicians have many demands on their time. Your phone call may give you an opportunity to speak with the MP's staff about the issues, or arrange to leave material with them. Staff members have an important role in reporting on the mood of the electorate. You might suggest that you are prepared to provide a speaker for their next local party meeting.
2. **Know Your Subject:** Be sure to learn about the issue you're talking about. You don't need to be an expert—most politicians aren't—but you do need to be prepared for the sort of questions they are likely to ask. Knowing what party and faction they are in can help you predict the views they are likely to hold. Bring along a briefing paper or information sheet as a way of maintaining focus during the meeting. It serves to remind you of the points you wish to cover, and to remind the MP after you have gone what was discussed and what actions your group wants to see.

3. **Know Whom You Represent:** Think about on whose behalf you are speaking—yourself, your group or committee, your congregation, and so on. You do speak as part of a local congregation or ministry of the United Church, but not in an official capacity. It is important to communicate simply why, as a Christian, these issues are important to you. For example: I believe that God has created all people equal and intends that we should live together peacefully as sisters and brothers in creation. Conflicts, oppression, and violations of human rights are against God's will.
4. **Be Familiar with the Political Process:** Make sure you understand enough about the political system to avoid basic mistakes that an MP may pounce on. Familiarize yourself with what the government and the opposition are saying on the issue you are raising and tailor your arguments accordingly.
5. **Organize Your Delegation:** Three is an ideal number for a delegation. Having others to share the discussion, as well as to take notes, can be invaluable. Try to include somebody who is a member of the MP's political party.

At the Meeting

Be presentable and respect formalities. Make sure everyone in your delegation knows where the MP's office is, and meet outside 15 minutes early.

Be articulate and concise, as well as friendly and polite. Don't get sidetracked. If you are asked a question that you cannot answer, say you don't know and arrange to get back to them with an answer.

Don't speak for too long. Remember, you are aiming to open up a dialogue and get the MP to do something about your concerns.

It is important to find out the MP's views on the issue at hand. Listen to what they say and be prepared to start from their position.

Give the MP good political reasons why they should be prepared to take a stand. Remember, politicians like numbers, so be familiar with any useful polls (e.g., "Forty percent of people polled said they were confused about the child tax benefit").

Politicians' personal beliefs may conflict with their party's stand or with what they think voters want, so they may agree with you without doing anything to support you. Ask what they would be prepared to do. Draw a commitment from them; that means you will have to get back in touch and vice versa. Would they be prepared to:

- make a public statement
- ask a question in parliament
- talk to a fellow MP or a cabinet minister on your behalf
- write a letter raising your concerns
- table a petition
- raise the issue at a party meeting

Regardless of the meeting's outcome, thank them again for the opportunity to meet and to air your concerns. If local media seem sympathetic to your cause, you may be able to interest them in covering your visit.

What If My MP Raises a Question I Can't Answer? Promise to follow up. Then contact your presbytery or Conference social justice committee or staff of the Church in Mission Unit at the General Council Office for more information.

What Information Can I Leave with My MP? To remind your MP of the concerns you have raised in your visit, leave behind support information about the issue.

After the Meeting

1. **Follow Up:** Follow up with a thank-you note. If you have promised further information, deliver it soon. Also make sure the MP honours any commitment made to you. If you don't hear anything within a week or so, phone or e-mail until it's resolved.
2. **Debrief:** Talk the meeting over with your group. Discuss what worked, what didn't, and what could be done better.
3. **Communicate with Allies:** Communicate with ecumenical partners, as well as civil organizations that have similar concerns. This ensures that the wider church knows who has been seen and what sort of response we're getting. Feedback is essential for a successful strategic campaign.

3. Write to Your MP

Although face-to-face meetings with MPs are usually the most effective, the number of letters, e-mails, and faxes received on any issue can also prove a valuable yardstick for the extent of public concern.

Some letter-writing basics to keep in mind:

- Type your message (or make sure your handwriting is legible).
- Include your name, address, and telephone number. Introduce yourself—who you are and why you are making contact. Specify if your message is to your local MP.
- Be clear and concise, but also informative and persuasive. Review your objectives and priorities, and state clearly what you are asking for.
- Refer to recent news items and relevant facts to make your argument.
- Outline your concerns firmly and clearly but do not be abusive, as such messages are easily dismissed as irrelevant. Offer to provide further information.
- Remember to ask your MP to do something about your concerns.

4. Using the Media

A well timed story on an issue can have a significant impact in a political campaign. A well written and well researched story can gain community support, which can be used to influence MPs.

If your group is intending to contact the local media, please remember these points:

- Check information you want to send to the media with your Conference office or the General Council Office. In any campaign it is important to maintain consistency about what is being said, to which media, and by whom.
- Please remember you can only speak on behalf of yourself or your own group, not for the United Church as a whole.

- Always provide a contact name and phone/fax/e-mail details of a member of your group with whom the media can discuss the issues in your release.
- Timing of your release is important. If you find your local paper publishes once a week, make sure your release gets there in plenty of time for the media to follow up with you before their deadline.
- If you are targeting radio programs, check the name of the show's producer and telephone them to let them know you are sending a release—they may wish to do an on-air interview on the subject matter. The names of local radio outlets, as well as their addresses, phone numbers, and staff names and positions, can be found online.

Talkback Radio

The biggest daytime radio audiences are for talkback radio. If you go on such shows you'll only be given a short time to talk, so plan your points and expect to make only a few.

When you call talkback, remember these tips:

- Talk to one person at a time. Of course, more than one person is listening, but each is an individual. Just imagine yourself talking to one person—not the whole of Canada.
- To prevent feedback from your radio, turn your own radio off while you are waiting to go on. When you can hear the program through the phone—and that will be well before you go to air—that's the time to switch your own radio off. You will hear what callers before you are saying through your phone, so you won't miss out on anything.

Letters to the Editor

The most well-read part of any newspaper is the letters section, and politicians refer to the letters to gauge support for particular issues. A letter to the editor is a good way to show support for an issue or engage in a public debate.

Some key points for getting published:

- Keep your letter short and simple (no more than 250 words).
- If you can, relate it to a previous story, letter, editorial, or feature that the paper has published (make some imaginative links if necessary).
- Plan your first sentence carefully—if it is dull, the editor may read no further; if it's catchy, you have a chance.
- A simple letter pattern could be to state what you support or disagree with, what evidence or examples you can offer to support your view, and what can be done about it.
- Make sure you sign your letter, and include your name, address, and phone number so the editor can verify it.
- Generally, only one letter in 10 or more gets published. If yours doesn't make it the first time, don't give up. Keep writing and eventually you'll end up in print.

Template Letter to the Prime Minister

Sender's address

Date

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario
Fax 613-941-6900

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

I am writing to urge you and your government to make the eradication of child poverty a greater priority in budget allocations and program emphasis. Specifically, I am asking that you implement a comprehensive plan to eliminate child poverty in Canada. As well, I urge you to protect and further the gains made against child poverty by raising the National Child Benefit Supplement.

As a member of The United Church of Canada, I am alarmed at the high rate of child poverty in this affluent country, especially among racialized and Aboriginal populations. Across the country and across our church the effects of poverty are plain to see: food banks continue to proliferate; homeless persons beg on our city streets; out-of-the-cold programs are overflowing; many racialized Indigenous people live in conditions unimaginable for a wealthy nation like ours.

As a Christian, I believe that all people have the right to be treated with justice, love, and respect. I also believe that it is the right of all people to have adequate access to the resources necessary for a full life, including adequate security provisions and the ability to participate in the life of their community. Children, especially, are the most vulnerable in our society and yet hold the most promise as future citizens, workers, and family members. As a resource rich nation, Canada has an obligation to care for all people, ensuring that basic needs are met.

UNICEF's *Report Card 10: Measuring Child Poverty* puts Canada 24th of 35 industrialized nations with a 14 percent rate of child poverty. This is a sad reality when so much emphasis by your government has been put on "economic growth." I therefore urge you to protect and further the gains made against child poverty by:

- establishing measurable and attainable goals to reduce child poverty
- raising the maximum federal child tax benefit (including the supplement for low-income families) to \$5,600 per child for low-income families (50 percent higher than current levels)
- increasing child welfare support given to Indigenous people to balance that given to others
- initiating and investing in an affordable, accessible, quality childcare system as a way to support low-income families

I encourage your government to act before the costs of child poverty become more of a social and economic drain than they already are. An investment in children is a financially, educationally, and socially sound investment by society.

Yours sincerely,

Sender's name

cc. Your member of parliament

Toward the 2015 Federal Election

From the Child Well-Being Initiative to a National Strategy

The Alberta and Northwest (ANW) Conference UCW Child Well-Being Initiative (see page 14) is an exciting model of action that has raised consciousness and educated and mobilized UCW members and their communities in Alberta to advocate to end child poverty. It is a long-term campaign that is rooted in addressing systemic issues of injustice. It is a creative campaign that has used unique ways (such as the dolls) to gain attention and awareness of the issue of poverty in Canada and the need for action. And it is distinctly UCC. Members of the ANW Conference UCW have embraced and taken on this activity with energy and enthusiasm.

National UCW leaders are now proposing that the same strategies used by the Child Well-Being Initiative in Alberta be used nationally by the NUCW in a campaign that intersects with the 2015 federal election. The General Council resolution (see page 4) urged that it would also be a campaign taken up by the wider church.

The 2015 federal election is an important moment to draw attention to the issue of child poverty. All faith voices need to be heard in the political process. It is our right and duty to participate in forming a government that reflects the will of its people. The more we understand how our faith and values can influence government policies, the more we have a chance to transform our own and others' lives for the common good. We witness to our faith in a just and life-giving God in the public arena by advocating for justice and peace. This is our faith and our vote.

“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isaiah 58:1)

The United Church has been active in the public arena—including elections—since its earliest days. The founders of this church believed that ours is a living faith and witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ that is expressed in active, thoughtful involvement in society. It is important for people of faith to bring forward the consistent message that every individual must be cherished and included, and that the earth must be carefully tended. Our combined voices have greater impact when we work together.

Our non-partisan strategy aims to raise awareness about these issues and to build relationships regarding them with politicians in communities across Canada.

Key Messages for a National Child Poverty Strategy

We advocate that the federal government:

- develop a national strategy, with measurable and attainable goals, to end child poverty
- raise the maximum federal child tax benefit (including the supplement for low-income families) to \$5,600 per child for low-income families (50 percent higher than current levels)
- increase child welfare support given to Indigenous people to balance that given to others
- initiate and invest in an affordable, accessible, quality childcare system as a way to support low-income families

Before the Election

1. Study Groups – Learning More about Child Poverty in Canada

Invite UCW members and congregations to use *Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty*, a publication of Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), as a resource for two or three study sessions during the election period. Share the goals of the child poverty campaign and encourage people to write letters to the government. Ask participants to question candidates running for election (see especially pp. 4–6 of the CPJ publication).

2. Letter-Writing Campaign

Using the sample letter in this resource (see page 20), send your personalized message to the Prime Minister and copy to the leaders of the other parties—Justin Trudeau (Liberal), Elizabeth May (Green), Thomas Mulcair (NDP), Daniel Paillé (BQ)—as well as to your own member of parliament (see www.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/Lists/Members.aspx?Parliament=1924d334-6bd0-4cb3-8793-cee640025ff6).

Once the Election Campaign Is Announced

1. Making Election Connections – Mixing Faith and Politics

The United Church of Canada was built on the assumption that faith communities had a role to play in shaping society and developing the common good. In today's pluralistic Canadian society, the public square is represented by a variety of interests: business, labour, the media, and civil society organizations, all engaged in a civil discourse to shape the common good. Faith communities, whether they choose to participate or not, are part of this public space.

The Western principle of the separation of church and state is usually misunderstood. Freedom of religion prevents the state from favouring one religion over another, but was never meant to deny religion a voice in a public forum. In the same way, our witness can never be used on behalf of or in opposition to any specific candidate or party platform. The church cannot be a chaplain for one party or a cheerleader for a specific candidate. We must be political, but not partisan; principled, but not ideological.

The public, non-partisan witness of the church in asking questions of all candidates and in worship at the time of an election is an appropriate and indeed integral aspect of the role of the church in society. Faithful public witness gives concrete expression to Christ's way of love and justice.

Here are some questions and suggestions that you might use within a worship service. They reflect principles and values from the ministry and teaching of Jesus:

1. What are the responsibilities of families, community organizations, markets, and government? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for the earth, and overcome injustice?
2. In evaluating the promises of the various parties, there are three things to consider. Are they economically just? Are they inclusive—who is left out? (Are racialized and Aboriginal people included?) Are they environmentally sustainable?
3. Encourage everyone to vote. Ensure transportation for the elderly and follow suggestions below for the participation of youth and children.

4. Invite the neighbourhood association and other faith communities to jointly sponsor an all-candidates meeting. Ensure the attendance of all candidates by joining with other civic-minded groups in your community and starting the process early. For more suggestions for organizing an all-candidates meeting, see the section below.
5. Include people seeking public office in the prayers of the people every week. When we share our hopes and desires in prayer, we are speaking from the heart about the society we want to build.

2. Questioning Candidates about Child Poverty at an All-Candidates Meetings

1. Write out your question ahead of time to help you stay focused. Ask all candidates to respond to your concern.
2. Before the meeting begins, look for the location of the floor microphones and sit as close to them as possible. When question period is announced, people will move quickly toward the microphones. Often you will only have one opportunity to ask a question.
3. If you are attending an all-candidates meeting as a member of a group, plan your strategy beforehand. Divide key questions among different members of your group according to your interests and consider assigning follow-up questions to different group members.
4. Always be polite. The goal is not to embarrass the candidates, but to raise specific justice concerns and get them on the political agenda. Bring easy-to-read literature about your issue along to distribute to all the candidates.

3. At the Microphone – Points on Child Poverty

1. As a member of The United Church of Canada, I am alarmed at the high rate of child poverty, especially among racialized and Aboriginal populations, in this affluent country of ours. Across the country and across our church, the effects of poverty are plain to see: food banks continue to proliferate; homeless persons beg on our city streets; out-of-the-cold programs are overflowing; many Indigenous people live in conditions that should be unimaginable for a wealthy nation like ours.
2. As a Christian, I believe that all people have the right to be treated with justice, love, and respect. I also believe that it is the right of all people to have adequate access to the resources necessary for a full life, including adequate security provisions and the ability to participate in the life of their community. Children, especially, are the most vulnerable in our society and yet hold the most promise as future citizens, workers, and family members. As a resource-rich nation, Canada has an obligation to care for all people, ensuring that basic needs are met.
3. UNICEF's *Report Card 10: Measuring Child Poverty* puts Canada 24th of 35 industrialized nations with a 14 percent rate of child poverty. I believe that eradicating poverty in general, and child poverty specifically, is essential to the health and well-being of our nation and its families.
4. We are urging the Government of Canada to implement a comprehensive plan to eliminate child poverty in Canada—including making the eradication of child poverty a greater priority in budget allocations and program emphasis.
5. The government must protect and further the gains made against child poverty by raising the National Child Benefit Supplement. The *Poverty Trends Highlights 2013* report, from Citizens for Public Justice, shows that the social and economic costs of poverty affect us all. Although

Canada's investments in child benefits have had a significant impact (Canada's child poverty rate is 26 percent before taxes and transfers—with taxes and transfers, it is cut by about half to 14 percent) the federal government, in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments, needs to do more.

6. The government needs to act before the costs of child poverty become more of a social and economic drain than they already are. An investment in children is a financially, educationally, and socially sound investment by society.

4. Sample Questions on Child Poverty to Ask Candidates

1. How will you and your party work to establish an overall strategy with measurable and attainable goals to reduce child poverty?
2. Is your party prepared to raise the maximum federal child tax benefit (including the supplement for low-income families) to \$5,600 per child for low-income families (50 percent higher than current levels)?
3. Will you and your party increase child welfare support given to Indigenous people to balance that given to others?
4. What are your party's plans to initiate and invest in an affordable, accessible, quality childcare system as a way to support low-income families?

5. Organizing an All-Candidates Meeting

One of the best ways for a group or congregation to promote an engaged democracy is to organize an all-candidates meeting. By doing so, the church sends the community the message that public debate matters and that the church has an interest in the issues discussed. It is an opportunity for the church to take leadership in the public arena.

Many churches organize and hold all-candidates meetings during election campaigns. These are non-partisan events where all the candidates in a riding are invited to share their views and answer questions from the audience. This provides helpful information to church members and the local community about where the local candidates stand on issues of concern.

Here are the steps to organizing an all-candidates meeting:

1. Start early to make sure you have the candidates committed to your event.
2. Consider partnering with other community organizations. Co-operating to host an all-candidates meeting allows you to share costs, access a broader group of voters, and build partnerships.
3. Choose a place, possible dates, and a time for the meeting. Give the candidates a range of dates so that you can schedule for a day that works for everyone.

6. Plan the Format of Your Meeting

1. Decide how long each candidate will have for their opening remarks (usually five minutes). Choose the order in which candidates will speak (e.g., alphabetical order by last name).

2. Decide how long the question and answer period will be (such as one hour), and how long to give for each question (whether asked by the moderator or directly from the audience) and answer (e.g., 30 seconds for each question, one minute for the answer).
3. Plan how much time the candidates will be given for closing remarks (usually three minutes each). Choose the order in which the candidates will give their closing remarks (such as in reverse order from the opening remarks).
4. Choose an interesting and engaging debate moderator. Ask the audience to submit questions to the moderator in advance. The moderator will introduce the candidates and moderate questions from the audience. This person will explain the guidelines and schedule for the meeting and make sure the rules are being followed. The moderator must remain neutral and not get involved in the questions or answers. No personal attacks will be allowed.
5. Choose a time keeper to monitor and notify the candidates and questioners of the time limits. This person will have a stopwatch and gavel or bell. The time keeper will notify candidates one minute before the end of the time limit for opening and closing remarks.
6. Send an invitation to the candidates, asking them to participate. Send them the guidelines and format for the evening. Ask them to provide a short biography to help the moderator introduce them. Let them know there will be tables available for their literature. (If a candidate says “no” or does not return calls, consider having an empty chair or name card on display, and ask the moderator to note the absence of the candidate.)
7. Advertise your meeting. Use the local media, e-mail lists, websites, networks, and partners. Send out the information more than once. Remind the media directly. Give the date, time, and location of the meeting, and the names and party affiliations of the candidates. Inform your congregation of the meeting through a bulletin insert, e-mail, and/or announcement.
8. Prepare your meeting space:
 - a) Tables, chairs, and microphones should be set up at the front of the room for the candidates and moderator, with clearly visible signs indicating their names and political party. Provide water for the candidates.
 - b) Have at least one floor microphone for the audience.
 - c) Provide tables in the hall or foyer for each candidate’s literature.
9. Prepare for after the meeting:
 - a) Team debriefing—review and assess the successes and challenges of organizing an all-candidates meeting and how your efforts could be improved next time.
 - b) Prepare a follow-up media release. Include quotations and a media contact.
 - c) Send thank-you letters to candidates, organizers, partners, and any other contributors.

Partner with Community and Social Justice Ministries

Connect with United Church local ministries that are working to eradicate poverty. These include community and social justice ministries such as Brunswick Street Mission in Halifax, Wesley Urban Ministries in Hamilton, Regina Anti-Poverty Initiative in Saskatchewan, and First United Church Community Ministry Society in Vancouver. Connect as well with presbytery or congregational outreach ministries such as Sydney Presbytery's The Karing Kitchen and St. Aidan United Church's Shelbourne Community Kitchen in Victoria. (Contact your local presbytery to ask about local church's outreach ministries.)

The United Church of Canada's community and social justice ministries are community-based organizations that are supported by the people of The United Church of Canada in a number of ways:

- in their prayers
- by volunteering
- by sharing their property
- by giving to Mission and Service

Donations to Mission and Service (M&S) support United Church ministries like those listed below (and many others, too). These ministries make a big difference to the lives of thousands of people in need.

The following ministries specifically address the issue of child poverty by providing a variety of programs and services that support children and their families with food, clothing, housing, and more. Many of them also address the broader issue of poverty reduction through advocacy.

Organization	City, Province	M&S Funded
All Native Circle Conference		
Regina Outreach Native Ministry	Regina, SK	✓
Toronto Urban Native Ministry	Toronto, ON	✓
Whitecap Dakota - Saskatoon Outreach	Saskatoon, SK	✓
British Columbia Conference		
First United Church Community Ministry	Vancouver, BC	✓
Longhouse Council of Native Ministry	Vancouver, BC	✓
Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub	Surrey, BC	
Our Place Society	Victoria, BC	✓
Alberta & Northwest Conference		
Bissell Centre	Edmonton, AB	✓
Edmonton City Centre Church Corp (E4C)	Edmonton, AB	
Saskatchewan Conference		
Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry	Regina, SK	✓
Sherbrooke Community Centre	Saskatoon, SK	

Conference of Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario		
Northend Stella Community Ministry	Winnipeg, MB	✓
Oak Table Community Ministry	Winnipeg, MB	✓
St. Matthew's-Maryland Community Ministry	Winnipeg, MB	✓
United Church Halfway Homes Inc.	Winnipeg, MB	
West Broadway Community Ministry	Winnipeg, MB	✓
London Conference		
Downtown Mission of Windsor	Windsor, ON	✓
Operation Sharing	Woodstock, ON	✓
Hamilton Conference		
Chalmers Community Services Centre	Guelph, ON	✓
The Bridge: From Prison to Community	Hamilton, ON	✓
Wesley Urban Ministries	Hamilton, ON	✓
Toronto Conference		
Christian Resource Centre (CRC)	Toronto, ON	✓
Davenport-Perth Community Ministry	Toronto, ON	✓
The Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre	Toronto, ON	
Fred Victor	Toronto, ON	✓
Harvest Share Community Food Programs	Parry Sound, ON	✓
Jane Finch Community Ministry	Toronto, ON	✓
Massey Centre for Women	Toronto, ON	✓
Weston King Neighbourhood Centre	Toronto, ON	
Montreal & Ottawa Conference		
Carlington Community Chaplaincy	Ottawa, ON	✓
Centre 507	Ottawa, ON	✓
House of Lazarus	Mountain, ON	✓
Montreal City Mission	Montreal, QC	✓
Saint Columba House	Montreal, QC	✓
Maritime Conference		
Brunswick Street Mission	Halifax, NS	✓
Centenary-Queen Square Care Centres	St John, NB	✓
Coverdale Centre for Women	St. John, NB	✓
Fairview Family Centre	Halifax, NS	✓
North Dartmouth Outreach Resource Centre	Dartmouth, NS	
St. Paul's Family Resources Institute	Halifax, NS	✓
United Church Clothing Depot	St. John, NB	
Newfoundland & Labrador Conference		
Stella's Circle	St. John's, NL	✓
Bridges To Hope	St. John's, NL	✓

- For a directory of all United Church community and social justice ministries (beyond the ministries listed here) see www.united-church.ca/renewal/community
- Learn more about the ministries supported by gifts to M&S at www.united-church.ca/files/funding/msfund/at-a-glance.pdf

Resources of Alberta Northwest Conference UCW—The Child Well-Being Initiative

In November 2010 a doll made by a member of the Alberta Northwest Conference UCW was given to each of the 83 members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly to remind them that every child needs a fair chance. Attached to each doll was the Bible verse "Who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?" (Matthew 7:9). Also attached was a note that read:

Tens of thousands of Alberta children are hungry for bread and a secure home. We want to know that:

- every child has access to nutritious food every day (for example, through school breakfast and lunch programs)
- every parent has access to affordable child care
- families can find affordable housing
- the minimum wage is raised to a living wage

The pattern for the doll was promoted by Carolyn Pogue who in turn credited *Canadian Living* magazine (1991) for the original design. The magazine was informed of the UCW's intentions for the doll pattern and had given Pogue permission to use the pattern to help advocate for an end to child poverty. Pogue attached a note to the pattern that read:

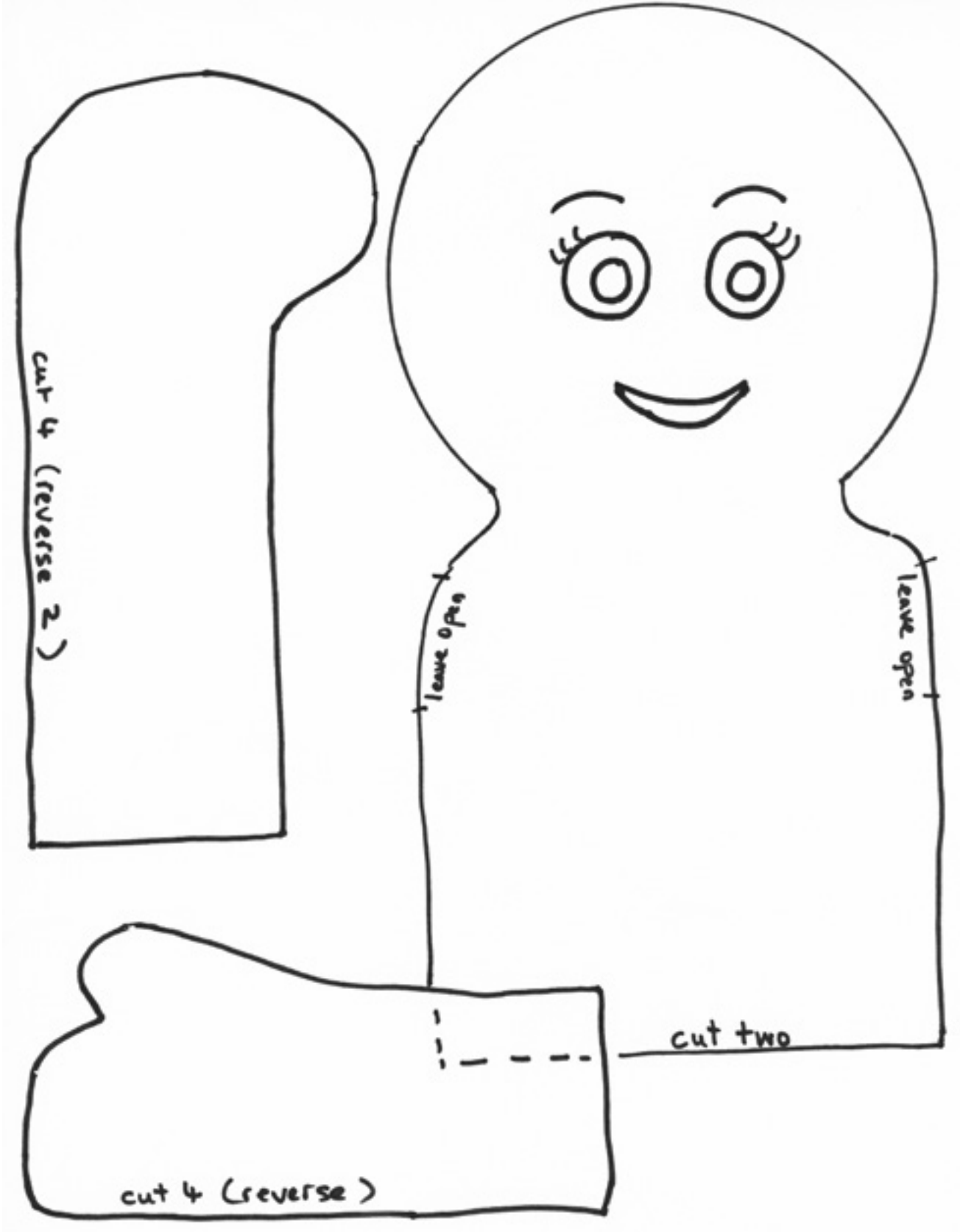
Please try to use rags and leftover materials, old sheets, mismatched fabrics and so on; that is part of the point; children are living in poverty. Old wool socks for the dolls' sweaters is also part of the point. Poverty is not colour coordinated!

For the pattern, see page 30.

Another action by the Child Well-Being Initiative was to circulate the template for a letter addressed to the provincial government. Sometimes, participants in this campaign attached an empty lunch bag to their letters!

For the template letter, see page 31.

Pattern for Doll



Template Letter

Dear Government of . . . , I know you are very busy, so I wanted to help by writing this note to hungry kids in our region on your behalf.

Signed

Date

Dear Hungry Child

It has come to our attention that your lunch bag is frequently empty and that you often go to school without breakfast. We're sorry about that. We in...have a lot of money but we must be careful with it. Money doesn't grow on trees, you know. And don't get me started on raising taxes. The adults we know don't believe in sharing like that. But money isn't the real issue anyway.

We know that people in other parts of Canada and in the world provide healthy food for hungry kids. But our approach is different. We are working hard on the question of WHY you can't bring your own lunch to school. We diligently seek answers to this question.

For example, you may not have lunch because the shelters were full and you slept in a car last night. Most cars don't have kitchens so that could explain it. Or, you might have been couch surfing with your parent because your other parent is scary when he or she drinks; everyone just forgot to pack a lunch for you. Or maybe your parents are working two minimum wage jobs and slept in. Or, maybe they had to choose between paying the rent and buying food. I don't know your reason, but there must be an answer. We have many highly paid folk working on this. Rest assured, we take your situation seriously.

We hold meetings with important people. We make charts and publish slick booklets. We have websites, links, phone numbers, everything. We are busy doing very important work. All on your behalf.

You see, we are concerned about your welfare and your future. After all, if things work out well for you, you might grow up and become one of us. If they don't, you may grow up to become a gang member, school dropout, suicide statistic, career criminal, or suffer chronic illness. Or, maybe you won't grow up at all. Do you see that there is a lot riding on the answer to why you don't have lunch? See how worried we are about this?

I hope that a student will share lunch with you today or that your teacher will bring food from home or some volunteer will make you a sandwich. That would be nice, wouldn't it?

I must end now. I have an important lunch meeting. I can't miss that.

Yours sincerely,

The Government of . . .

And when the Wise Ones saw the Light, they hastened to ensure clean water, fresh air, organic food, peaceful play things, free education, and an affordable, safe home for every child.

And there was peace.

Carolyn Pogue