

Addressing the 'moral crisis' of poverty ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Ending poverty is not that complicated if the political will is there, according to one of the directors of the Religious Social Action Committee .

The coalition is made up of many of the province's religious leaders including Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus.

It held a news conference at the Basilica library in St. John's Wednesday to release the results of a questionnaire sent to all three political leaders vying to be premier in Tuesday's election.

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Religious leaders calling on candidates to take anti-poverty pledge

Currie said while political parties have expressed concern and pledged to eliminate poverty the line-ups at food banks in the province continue to grow.

"We see public policies that do not foster self-sufficiency, but which offer limited means for surviving impoverishment," he added.

According to the coalition, between 1992 and 2009 the gap between the average incomes of the poorest 20 per cent and the richest 20 per cent in this province has grown from \$71,300 to \$97,700.

The questionnaire sent to the parties asks 10 questions relative to ending poverty. The coalition has since posted the complete responses to its website — <http://candidatesagainstopoverty.ca> ^[2]

Arnold Bennett, one of the coalition's directors representing the Jewish faith highlighted two questions at the event.

The coalition wants the parties to create an independent provincial fairness commissioner to monitor and ensure the gap is closing and to review every piece of legislation to ensure people of all income levels are being treated fairly.

"In the responses that we have on the website, none of the three parties gives a straight answer to this question," Bennett said.

The second question asks parties to change taxation policy to close loop holes for the wealthy and to repeal tax cuts for the richest people — with incomes of more than \$250,000 — as well as add a surtax on incomes over \$500,000.

But Bennett said no party wants to commit to raising taxes during an election campaign.

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To illustrate his point, he said the responses from the PC party states the province has cut taxes by \$1.6 billion.

But according to Bennett, more than a billion of that went to the richest 20 per cent, with more than \$500 million going to the richest one per cent in the province.

Meanwhile, he said, the total spent on poverty reduction in the province is \$140 million a year.

Bennett said by plugging that leak in the taxation boat that drains

money back to the wealthy the province could afford strategies towards ending poverty.

But Natural Resources Minister Shawn Skinner, who's running for re-election in St. John's Centre and attended the event, said while his party shares the coalition's goals, he wasn't convinced the issue is as simple as that.

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Chris Pickard, the NDP candidate in St. John's West, was more receptive to the idea of a new tax regime to spread the wealth around.

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Sheila Miller is running for the Liberals in the district of Virginia Waters.

She said as a child care centre owner she was shocked when she opened a preschool some years ago in the city centre at how much families were affected.

"I was mortified that I actually had children coming to my preschool that did not have breakfast," she said.

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/10/addressing-%E2%80%98moral-crisis%E2%80%99-poverty> ^[2]

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