



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

October 19, 2016

Vulnerable Manitobans going without daily bread

First published in the Winnipeg Free Press, Oct 19, 2016 as "Manitobans hungrier for meatier food allowance".

If you only had \$3.96 a day to spend on groceries, what would you buy?

That's a question Laura Shields deals with every day. Laura is a 61 year old woman who grew up in Winnipeg's North end. From the age of 17 she worked in a number of factories on an assembly line. Later, she worked for the post office. Because of a slipped disc and twisted pelvis, Laura is unable to work. Her husband, Lyle, used to work selling the *Winnipeg Free Press* but the paper stand at Hargrave and Portage closed down. With only a Grade 6 education, Lyle has been unable to find a stable job. Their stories have been used with permission.

Laura and Lyle are not the only Manitobans who have to deal with the question of what to buy with \$3.96 a day. It is a predicament faced by thousands of Manitobans.

If you are on Disability Allowance or on General Employment and Income Assistance, you receive \$3.96 per day as a food allowance. You have no vehicle, no bus pass and you have to shop at the nearest corner store where prices are higher. What you buy is never enough to feed you so you must go to soup kitchens and food banks to survive. This means spending hours standing in line and having to choose food that you may not like or don't know how to use.

Eight faith traditions have joined together to bring attention to the difficulties facing Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens. These faith groups are part of Hunger Free Manitoba (www.hungerfreemb.ca) and, together, we are calling on the provincial government to help Manitobans who are trying to live on this meagre amount.

Faith communities have a long tradition of helping to feed hungry people. Each is unique in its response to hunger.

Sikhs have a tradition called langar where everyone is given food at no cost whenever there is a gathering. This is based on the concept of equality and dignity for all. Sikhs feed people by the thousands in locations all around the world. Some are open 24/7. If you show up at a gurudwara on any given Sunday, you will be fed.

Christian churches have been instrumental in setting up food banks and soup kitchens in neighbourhoods all over Winnipeg. Indeed, it is a Christian obligation to welcome the stranger and feed the hungry.

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Every year Muslims spend a whole month fasting, with no food or water from sunrise to sunset. It is a time of reflection on one's relationship with God but also a time to grow in understanding of and compassion for others. The Prophet Mohammed said to his followers, "He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while the neighbour to his side goes hungry."

The Jewish approach to caring for the poor is best summarized in the words of the prophet Isaiah (58:5,7) traditionally read in the middle of the Yom Kippur Fast. Speaking for God, Isaiah says: "Is this what you call fasting--a fast that the Lord would accept? Rather, this is My chosen fast...To share your bread with the hungry; to take the homeless into your home; to clothe the naked when you see them; to not turn away from people in need." The Hebrew word for charity is *Tzedakah*--literally, "righteousness"--as if to say: a person cannot possibly be called righteous, if they don't regularly, actively give in support of the poor.

While different faiths have made a valiant effort to fight hunger with charity, Hunger Free Manitoba has come together to call for change. We are acutely aware of the fact that Manitoba's most vulnerable people have to rely on charity in order to survive.

Without donations to food banks many would starve. The question is why do we have food banks at all? Instead of all Manitobans supporting those in need through fair taxes, we let those who have compassion for the less fortunate prop up this under-funded system with generous giving. In a wealthy society like Manitoba we have the resources to transfer sufficient revenue to those in need so they may live a life of dignity and have basic needs met.

The focus of our efforts is to call on our provincial government to raise the Basic Allowance for people on EIA and Disability Allowance. For us, it is a moral issue. We are hoping that Manitobans who hold these convictions will let the

Premier know by signing one of 10,000 postcards or by sending an email through our website (www.hungerfreemb.ca).

We need to call on all MLAs to commit to a Manitoba free of hunger and to raising the Employment and Income Assistance levels so all Manitobans live hunger free.

Lynda Trono is the Minister at the West Broadway Community Ministry, a member of the Hunger Free Manitoba, Make Poverty History Manitoba and a Research Affiliate of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

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