

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 21% of all Canadian children live in poverty.¹ Child poverty is worse today than it was in 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously resolved to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. UNICEF rates Canada as 21st out of 40 industrialized nations when it comes to child well-being: health and safety; education behaviours and risks; housing and the environment.²

Poverty among Racialized and Indigenous Children

The inequities caused by persistent racial and gender discrimination, ableism, and ongoing colonialism translate into greater levels of poverty among children and families who are Indigenous, racialized, recent immigrants, affected by disabilities, or living in a female-led lone-parent family. Fifty percent of First Nations children live in poverty.

In the last 10 years, Canada's social safety net has been eroded, precarious and low-wage work has increased, and tuition fees for post-secondary education have risen. At the same time, racial profiling continues to marginalize many families.³

¹ UNICEF Report Card 12, 2014, p. 5.

² Ibid.

³ Campaign 2000, "Let's Do This," 2015 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada, p.6

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/worship
 - United Nations www.timeanddate.com/holidays/un/international-day-for-poverty-eradication
- b) International Day of the Child – November 20
 - United Church of Canada (Children's Sunday) www.united-church.ca/worship
 - 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.[†]

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.

[†] By Brian Ogden, from *Nursery Rhyme Nativities*, published by Barnabas for Children 2011, www.brfonline.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 ...”⁵

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 participant⁶. 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.

⁵ Used by permission. Poost (www.poost.co.uk) and Chris Goan from “Learning to Love.”

⁶ <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.⁷

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.

⁷ 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 ...⁸

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.⁹

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

Closing Song

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

⁸ Reproduced with permission.

⁹ 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

Recent studies have shown that 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.

Much work on child poverty already exists. Many United Church global and Canadian partners, community ministries, 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.html). In 2015, the report noted that poverty has continued to persist even after two decades of the organization's work. The 2015 Report Card states:

Campaign 2000 has consistently stated that child poverty is not inevitable, but that it is a result of choices. Federal politicians pledged to end child poverty in 1989, 2009 and 2015, but it continues to deprive 1.34 million children of their only childhood. Choosing to allow child poverty to continue forces children to endure hunger, deprivation and exclusion, and compromises their health and life chances. Choosing to reduce Canada's fiscal capacity rather than invest in social programs exacerbates inequality. Choosing to cast away almost 1 in 5 children to poverty deprives Canada of the richness of their full contributions.¹⁰

The Broadbent Institute reports:

While Canada falls well short of US levels of inequality, the OECD notes that we have become much more unequal since the early 1980s. Today, the top 10% own almost half of all wealth. According to the latest rankings, for 2013, the top 100 Canadians now collectively have a net worth of \$230 Billion. This elite group are all worth more than \$728 Million, and will likely soon consist entirely of billionaires....

Why, it is often asked, does this concentration of wealth and income at the very top matter? Part of the answer is that the rapid growth of top incomes has taken place against the backdrop of stagnant middle-class living standards. Canadian real GDP per person grew by 50% from 1981 to 2011, but the real median hourly wage (half earn more and half earn less) rose by just 10% over this extended period. Rising tides boosting the fortunes of the rich have left far too many boats stuck in the mud.

The more important answer is that too much inequality undermines a healthy society and meaningful equality of opportunity for all individuals to develop their talents and capacities to their fullest. Canadians might not endorse equality of condition, but they certainly believe that all

¹⁰ Campaign 2000, "Let's Do This," p. 1. With permission from Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada. For more info on child and family poverty, visit www.campaign2000.ca.

children should have a fair chance in life. Research by Miles Corak (2013) has shown that the life chances of children are much less determined by the economic circumstances of their parents in more equal societies like Sweden compared to more unequal societies like the United States, with Canada standing somewhere in between.¹¹

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.

¹¹ *The Return of the Gilded Age: Consequences, Causes and Solutions*, Broadbent Institute, 2015. 2015 Harry Kitchen Lecture in Public Policy, delivered by Senior Policy Advisor Andrew Jackson to the Department of Economics at Trent University. Used with permission.

2. Dignity for All Campaign

Dignity for All campaign (www.dignityforall.ca), endorsed 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).

3. 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).

4. 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 *National Anti-Poverty Plan* (www.dignityforall.ca/FedPlan).

5. 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).

See also *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Canada: A Study for the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and the Earth* (AGAPE), World Council of Churches.

6. 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 26 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.

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)
 - * *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-canada).
 - * *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.
- 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.

Talking 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 Indigenous 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 12: Children of the Recession* puts Canada 20th out of 41 industrialized nations, with a 21 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.

Sample Questions on Child Poverty to Ask MPs

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

Letter to the Prime Minister

Sender's address

Date

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons,
Ottawa, ON
Fax 613-941-6900

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

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 Indigenous 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 and 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 12: Children of the Recession* puts Canada 20th out of 41 industrialized nations with a 21 percent rate of child poverty. This is a sad reality. 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)
- 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

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 churches' 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	✓

Resources—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:

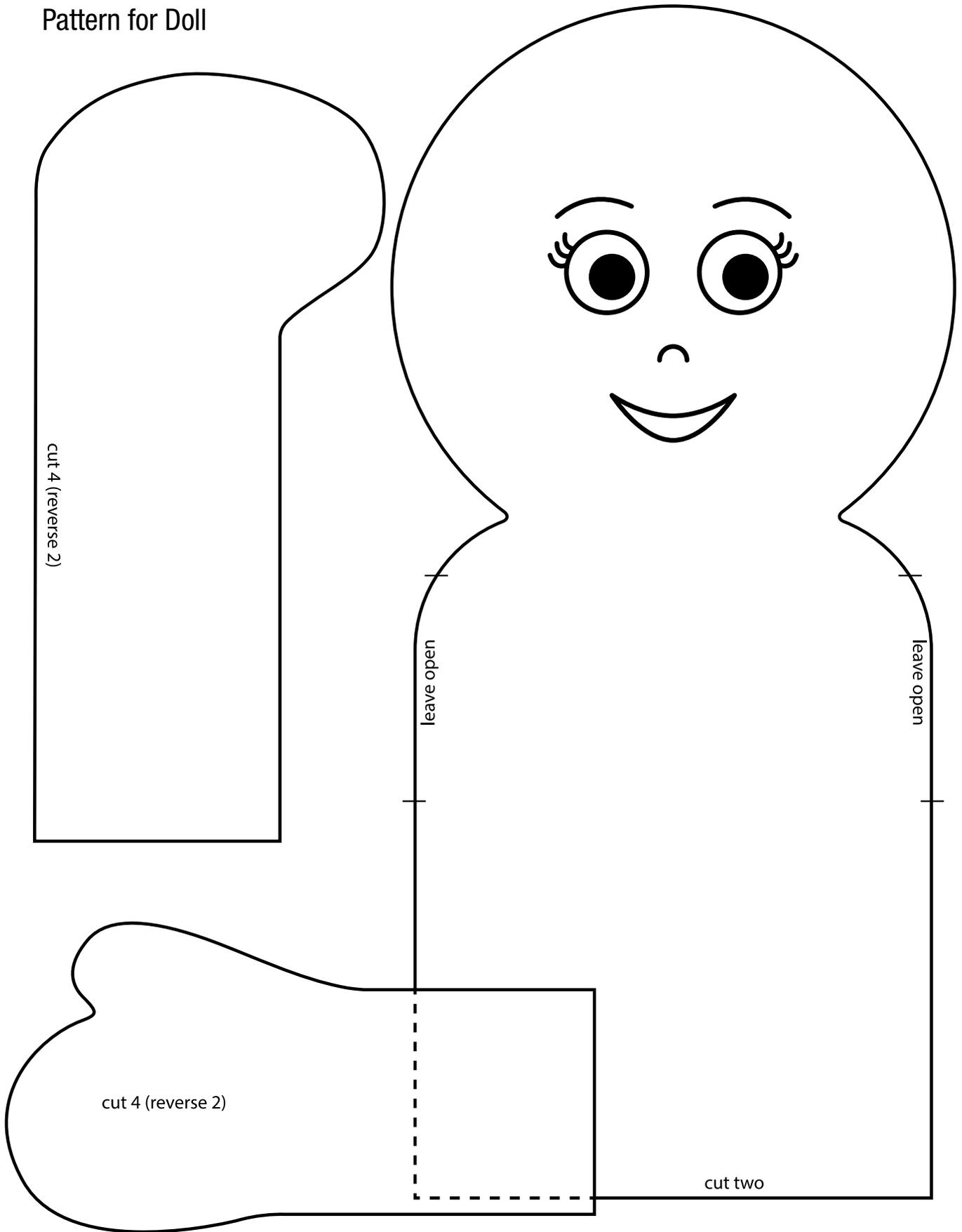
Please try to use rags and leftover materials, old sheets, mismatched fabrics and so on; that is part of the point; children are living in poverty. Old wool socks for the dolls' sweaters is also part of the point. Poverty is not colour coordinated!

For the pattern, see page 26.

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 29.

Pattern for Doll



Tips and Instructions for Rag Dolls

Tips

Note: The dolls are not safety-tested, so they are not given to children.

1. Use mismatched fabric scraps, old sheets, etc. Poverty is not colour-coordinated! Use old wool socks for the dolls' sweaters, or cut up an old sweater.
2. For the hair, use strips of various colours of fabric or wool.
3. The doll is to look child-like, but not perfect. Make the clothing and hair somewhat dishevelled or frayed, and don't hem the clothing.
4. Every doll has a red felt or fabric heart. Attach it to the left side of the chest, on top of the clothing.
5. Name your doll. Children in poverty are not just statistics.
6. The dolls are not meant for children, but just in case, do not use buttons or anything else a child could pull off. Do not use glue.
7. Poverty affects every race. Dolls can be white, brown, or any other colour.
8. Draw a simple face before you sew on the arms and legs. If the face doesn't turn out, you can flip the doll over and try again on the other side. Some dolls have smiles or semi-smiles, while some have sad little faces. A simple "Happy Face" smile, turned up or down, is easiest and always looks cute. Pencil it in first, and then use a fine-tipped permanent marker. Some people prefer to embroider the face—again, keep it simple.
9. If possible, make the arms and legs mismatched colours or prints.
10. Take only a ¼-inch seam, otherwise the doll becomes too small.

Instructions for Sewing

1. If possible, sew the body, arms, and legs by machine, so the stitching is tighter, taking only a ¼-inch seam. Hand-sewing is also acceptable.
2. Leave an opening on each side of the body large enough for the arms to fit in.
3. Turn and stuff the arms and legs, leaving a ½-inch or so unstuffed at the tops. Use the top of a pencil to push the stuffing in. (Do not stuff the body yet.)
4. With the body still inside out, place one arm inside the body. Then tuck the arm into the open space from inside the body, pin, then sew in place. Repeat with the second arm.
5. Turn the body right side out—now the arms will be on the outside.
6. Next pin the legs to the backside only of the bottom of the body.
7. Hand or machine sew them to the back of the body. Legs can be sewn in straight or on an angle, with the feet pointing outwards.

8. Stuff the head and body and sew up the remaining opening by hand or machine.
9. Next, make the clothing: use an old sock or sweater, or create a somewhat raggedy dress or pants. You can make a simple dress from two rectangular pieces of fabric sewn together on the side seams, with a basting stitch around the neckline. Simply pull both ends of the thread at the neckline, as you would a drawstring. Leave an open space on each side seam of the clothing for the arms to fit through.
10. Make the red felt heart and attach it to the left of the doll's chest on top of the clothing.
11. Once the clothing is in place, make the hair. Use fabric strips, wool or embroidery yarn, etc. For fabric, cut the strips approx. ½-inch to ¾-inch wide and approx. 16 inches long. Tear the strips, rather than cut them, for a more dishevelled look.
12. Centre the hair on the head, one strip at a time, and pin into place using one pin on either side of the centre of each strip. Start just in front of the seam on the top of the head, then attach strips all the way down the back of the head.
13. Sew into place, by hand, down the centre of the head from the top to the bottom. When finished, cut the strips to varying lengths.
14. If you prefer, make the hair as a wig attached to a small cap, which you then attach at strategic spots to the head.
15. You may wish to use 2 more fabric strips for bows to tie the hair into 2 side ponytails. Secure the bows in place with several stitches. Fuss and fiddle and play until you get the hair the way you want it. You might cut her bangs or add a beret or hair band, etc.

Have fun!

Here is a card to pin to your doll.

The “Bread Not Stones” Initiative of The United Church of Canada

“If a child asks for bread, who among us would give that child a stone?” (Matthew 7:9)

This doll is a symbol of our initiative to eliminate child poverty in Canada. These dolls, paper dolls and advocacy with all levels of government are vital components of our Canada-wide project to raise awareness that more than 1,000,000 children in our country live in poverty.

Children living in poverty and their families deserve:

- Affordable housing
- Affordable child care
- Nutritious meals each day
- A living wage

We need a nation-wide strategy to eliminate child poverty.
We can do it! Visit www.endchildpoverty.ca.

This doll is not safety tested—do not give to children

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