Dear Friends,

The month of February brings Candlemas (Groundhog Day!), St. Valentine’s Day, Family Day… and for most of us, the annual vestry meeting.

For many years, it has been our practice in this Diocese to offer a social justice motion for parishes to consider at their vestry meetings. Each year, the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee chooses an issue of present concern and develops a motion and materials to support it. It is then presented to the College of Bishops for approval and shared with parishes. Building on previous years’ motions on wages and racism, this year’s social justice motion centres around justice and dignity for all workers.

Over the past two years, the pandemic has heightened our awareness of what “essential” work really is, and who our essential workers really are, even if we haven’t historically recognized their value. We’re now conscious of how we rely on so many people to keep society going: people who grow and harvest our food; people who work in warehousing and delivery; people who work in grocery stores and restaurants; people who keep our public buildings clean and safe; people who care for our loved ones in daycare centres, hospitals and long-term care homes.

Unfortunately, many of these essential workers are precariously employed. Not only are they paid at or near the minimum wage, they too often lack the workplace benefits and protections that many take for granted: paid sick days, dependable schedules and, if classified as a “gig” or contract worker, a rate of pay consistent with their colleagues who are full-time permanent employees. Furthermore, a large proportion of these precariously employed workers are vulnerable in other ways as well: women, newcomers and/or members of racialized communities.

This year’s vestry motion calls on the provincial government to pass legislation requiring employers to provide paid sick days, reasonable scheduling and equal pay for the same work, whether done by part-time, temporary, casual or full-time workers. You can find the motion on the [diocesan website](https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/diocesan-life/social-justice-advocacy/social-justice-vestry-motion/?lang=en), together with materials for further study and next steps.

We expect there will be some debate around this motion, and that’s a good thing! There are a variety of interests to be considered, and Anglicans will bring many different perspectives. The Social Justice & Advocacy Committee believes, and the Diocese of Toronto knows, that no one political party or perspective has a monopoly on the common good. The aim of the motion is not to champion or oppose any political party, but to lift up the concerns of the most vulnerable members of society, as Jesus calls us, and to apply Christian values to social issues. Your parish’s engagement with the social justice vestry motions helps to inform the advocacy we do as a Diocese with all levels of government.

We engage in these issues because our faith calls us to look not only to our own interests, but to those of others. Like the exiles in Babylon, we’re called to seek the welfare of the communities where God has placed us (Jeremiah 29.7). In baptism, we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” and to “respect the dignity of every human being.” This motion offers parishes – and individuals – an opportunity to reflect on and pray about their own employment policies. It also engages us in public witness by adding our voices towards building a society characterized by justice and dignity for all.

I invite you – encourage you! – to engage in a robust consideration of this year’s social justice vestry motion and to let us know how the conversation goes.

God bless your vestry meetings, and may Holy Wisdom infuse your gatherings with courage and grace.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Andrew Asbil
Bishop of Toronto