

## CHAPTER VI

# Homeless and poor: Faith in action

**I**n the two stories that follow below we see examples of faith in action and action in faith, both in the context of Christians coming together to serve the common good:

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*In 2011, at the request of the Mayor of Edmonton, Roman Catholic Archbishop Richard Smith called together leaders from 23 faith communities to endorse Edmonton's 10-year plan to end homelessness. This led to a signed pledge for the faith communities to work on this project and the formation of the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative. Since its inception, staffing, fiduciary responsibility, and a substantial amount of funding for this project has been shared between the Roman Catholic Archdiocese and the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton.*

*Similarly, in 2014, Edmonton's Mayor invited Anglican Bishop Jane Alexander to co-chair another city-led initiative called EndPoverty Edmonton. This project seeks to eliminate racism, and work towards livable incomes for families, affordable housing, accessible and affordable transit, affordable and quality child care, and increased access to mental health services. Partners in this initiative include Anglican and Roman Catholic*

*parishes and entities alongside numerous community, civic, and other resources.*



*Interfaith signatories of the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative / Credit: Julien Hammond*

Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics believe that Christian faith is lived in community and that their witness to the gospel will have an impact on civil society. Several of the ARCIC II texts are explicit in their affirmation of the Church’s public role: “The Church participates in Christ’s mission to the world through the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation by its words and deeds... it is called to be an agent of justice and compassion, challenging and assisting society’s attempts to achieve just judgement” (SC, 31). “The Church is the sign of what God has done in Christ, is continuing to do in those who serve him, and wills to do for all humanity... it is the community where the redemptive work of Jesus Christ has been recognized and received, and is therefore being made known to the

world.” (CC, 18) “Wherever possible, bishops should... witness together in the public sphere on issues affecting the common good. Specific practical aspects of sharing *episcopate* will emerge from local initiatives” (GA, 9).

During the Reformation, differing interpretations of the impact of good works on salvation were in dispute. For the Reformers, the Catholic emphasis on the value of good works was seen as implying that justification depended on human acts in such a way as to compromise the unconditional freedom of God’s grace. At the same time, Catholics saw the Reformers’ understanding of justification as implying that human actions were of no worth in the sight of God and thought that their view of justification might even be a negation of human freedom and responsibility.



Mayor Don Iveson and Bishop Jane Alexander /  
Credit: Margaret Glidden, *The Anglican Messenger*

While the Reformation debate tended to exaggerate differences and caricature positions, ecumenical dialogue over the past half century has attempted to rediscover and rearticulate the faith that unites those who claim to be followers of Christ. In dialogue, Christians seek to overcome traditional anti-Protestant and anti-Catholic hermeneutics in order to find a common way of remembering past events. Those engaged in dialogue will, therefore, not evade divisive issues but instead try to avoid the controversial language in which they have been discussed and look for solutions by re-examining their common heritage, particularly the Scriptures.

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* expresses a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification with which many other churches have been able to identify. In light of this consensus, it is clear that justification does not depend on an entitlement arising from good works, neither is it a legal fiction. Rather, in the words of the *Joint Declaration*: “Good works – a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love – follow justification and are its fruits” (JDDJ, 37).

Just as justification and sanctification are aspects of the same divine act, living faith and love are inseparable in the believer. ARCIC II identifies this in *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (MGH): “The word of God delivered by Gabriel addresses [Mary] as already ‘graced’, inviting her to respond in faith and freedom to God’s call” (MGH, 54; cf. Luke 1:28,38,45). Further, *Salvation and the Church* states: “This understanding of our humanity as made new in Christ by God’s transforming power throws light on the New Testament affirmation that, while we are not saved

because of works, we are created in Christ for good works” (SC, 19; cf. Eph. 2:8ff).

*Where have you experienced God’s grace in your life? How has this affected your self-understanding and how you live out your faith in the world?*

*“Jesus, yes! Church, no!” is a sentiment that is sometimes encountered in today’s society. How would you respond to this?*

*What has been your experience of the Church’s public witness? Where has it challenged you? Where would you challenge the Church to do better?*