



On Tuesday July 6th Colleen Sym (pictured left) from our Diocese spoke on *poverty reduction initiatives* in Halton to the Halton Health and Social Services Committee. **Crystal Orvis** was one of the witnesses that spoke on that

day. Crystal lives in poverty and her words below are very powerful. We urge you to read this carefully – so that your (our) awareness of issues of poverty might be heightened, strengthening us as a diocese to act accordingly.

Over the last couple of months, I've been fortunate to have been given the opportunity to not only speak up and out about the issues of poverty, but moreover—the opportunity to be 'heard'.

Good morning everyone. My name is Crystal Orvis and like hundreds, if not thousands within the Halton Hills community, my family and I live in poverty. For most of us, the challenges begin with the desire and need to be heard; to be listened to; to be given the chance to explain and tell our stories in the hopes that even 1 person out there, will hear us and enable us to make a difference in our own lives and the lives of so many others.

This past April, I was able to share our story within a social audit. In June, dozens and dozens of others shared their stories at ISARC's forum on poverty. It was a unique and treasured experience. It's difficult to relay the emotion on that particular day because when you live in poverty and build that resilience towards life's everyday struggles, you begin to believe that

you've already lived and experienced many of life's hardships. Yet for me, that day exposed a level of understanding throughout that forum that was truly eye opening, heart breaking and courageous. It takes a great amount of courage to share your story with complete strangers. An even greater strength to live it and realize that poverty affects more and more people every day. No one is alone and no one is immune to facing poverty. Individuals within society however, simply refuse to grasp that they could be next.

The story of our lives has been ongoing. In comparison to many, we've been fortunate in our struggles. We now live in a Habitat for Humanity home, have the blessing of great friends and neighbors as well as the support of an amazing church family and school system. Most however, are not that fortunate. It also doesn't mean that the struggles don't continue and there are moments, they are even unbearable.

Transportation has been a constant issue for us over the years and without affording the insurance, it has turned our lives inside out. What used to be a quick trip to the grocery store to obtain necessary items, now can take days or even a week to arrange a ride there and back. Similarly, job interviews are now 'off' the table. Since attending Middle school, the children are no longer able to participate in extra-curricular or after school activities. Their desire is strong; the means is non-existent. New clothes for school, day trips or summer excursions simply haven't happened in years and by now the children are used to mom saying, "We simply can't afford it". I'm blessed with wonderful children and now they too have built up resilience to living in a society where there are those who have and have not. Not exactly the life I imagined for my children but if anything,

they have learned never to take anything for granted and to appreciate everything and everyone that comes our way.

While I have been unemployed for more than a couple of years now, the desire to keep busy and maintain some level of independence is ongoing as well. Without the means to do things with family or friends outside of your immediate area, you begin to feel socially secluded from the community in many aspects. Often, you feel like a prisoner in a world where many don't comprehend. There is a loss of dignity; there is a strong lack of communication within the system of Ontario Works; there is a lack of nutritional food within the Food Banks; there is a lack of affordable housing within our communities; there is a lack of needed government policies; there is a lack of strong social structure and for many, there is a lack of hope for the future.

Yet, there are no lack of stories out there; NO lack of people living in poverty; no lack of all of us maintaining a strong desire to work and most of all, there is simply no lack of all of us wanting to be heard. For every individual or family out there faced with poverty or approaching it, there is a different story every time. Those of us in 'the system' easily recognize that no two circumstances are the same. What it took to bring one family or individual to their road of poverty is never the same situation that was a result of another's. There will always be similarities between each of us and our stories; that is expected...it is life. What needs to be recognized however is that the same dictated and drawn out policies/ rules created within organizations looking to 'help out' one person will not always directly

apply to the next. We are ALL different so it's only natural to assume that our stories and circumstances will be as well.

Within our families' own church community, we live to make the 'Invisible Christ-visible'. Similarly, the invisible poor struggle to become visible- and its usually within our own communities. In a province as wealthy as Ontario, you have to ask yourself, "How does this happen?" Now as pre-teens, my children are beginning to form their own hopes and dreams about the future. 'Getting OUT of poverty' should not be a part of that thought process. Each of us holds great worth and value and even poverty stricken individuals and families have something to contribute to society. We know and believe that, yet the vast majority, do not.

Poverty is real; it exists. Without getting that message to the forefront of our governments; our communities; our churches and each individual in our society-things will never change. My children and I maintain hope and we hang onto it with an immense desire and strength of faith knowing that **eventually** someone has to hear the cries for help from those living in poverty. For some, it may already be too late. For the rest of us, our hope has to extend into tomorrow and hope that one day, we will all be empowered to make a difference.

Thank you

Crystal Orvis