POVERTY REDUCTION IN CANADA
(A&P 2018 p. 369-70, 14)

Poverty Levels in Canada Still High

In 2007, the General Assembly adopted a report from the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) on the “Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor in Canada”. The General Assembly had not considered poverty and the gap between rich and poor since 1992.

The current Government of Canada initiated a consultative process which concluded at the end of the summer in 2017 as part of its 2015 commitment to develop and implement the first-ever Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS). As this report to the General Assembly was being prepared, the government had not released its plans, but intends to release the CPRS in 2018.

The Government of Canada does not have an official definition of poverty. Statistics Canada produces three main measures of low income. Each has strengths and weaknesses. (Scott, Aldridge) What is important is that there are too many people in Canada living in difficult circumstances and a poverty reduction strategy from the Government of Canada could contribute to reducing poverty levels.

Many countries use the Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT). A household is considered low income if its income is 50% below the median household income. It is a relative measure of low income. Using this measure, how does Canada compare?

According to a report (using the LIM-AT) by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Canada ranks 20 out of 31 wealthy countries for its levels of poverty. Iceland ranks first with the least number of its citizens below the poverty line. The United States, Turkey and Israel have the highest rates of poverty. (Government of Canada, p.3)

According to 2015 census data and using the LIM-AT, 14.2% of Canadians live in poverty; 17.4% of children in Canada live in poverty. (Campaign 2000) Without government transfers, this figure would increase to 27.8%. Transfers such as the Canada Child Benefit (introduced by the current federal government and indexed to inflation in the 2018 budget), improvements to the Guaranteed Income Supplement for Seniors and the Working Income Tax Benefit make a real difference, but a more comprehensive approach is required to address the many areas that impact people’s ability to meet even their most basic needs.

In 2007, the Moderator of the General Assembly wrote to then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, encouraging the Government of Canada to set specific targets and timelines to reduce poverty. The Moderator also encouraged the government to work in partnership with provinces and territories, municipal governments and Indigenous organizations to reduce the levels of poverty. Further, the Moderator acknowledged that civil society, including faith communities had an important role to play in reducing the levels of poverty in Canada.

Since 2009, “Dignity for All: The Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada” has been calling on the Canadian government to create a national anti-poverty plan. “Dignity for All” is organized by Citizens for Public Justice and Canada Without Poverty. “Dignity for All” was endorsed by the 2010 General Assembly. (A&P 2010, p. 39)