



MODERATOR OF THE 2018 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Daniel Cho, B.A., M.Div.

31 January, 2019

The Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, M.P., P.C.

Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

Dear Minister:

I bring you greetings on behalf of the 2018 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada which met June 3-6, 2018 in Waterloo, Ontario.

The ongoing challenges of Canadians living in poverty cannot be understated, and so we would like to begin by saying that the General Assembly is encouraged by the government's commitment to implement a national Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Church welcomes the public consultation the Government conducted and the creation of the poverty reduction strategy, *Opportunity for All*, which was the result. The adoption of a Market Basket Measure to establish the official poverty line for Canada is encouraging as is the ongoing review of the MBM to ensure it adequately reflects ongoing regional needs. We look forward to seeing the dashboard indicators the Strategy mentions for accountability and progress tracking.

The Church believes that a society should be judged by how it treats the vulnerable and marginalized. Because of that belief, many Presbyterian churches are directly involved in community service programs for those living in poverty, including meal programs, food banks, and shelters, as well as support programs assisting clients with access to transitional and longer-term housing, health care, and other essential services. We have seen that 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 to reduce the number of people who rely on access to programs such as food banks. Still, too many of our citizens are being left behind. Indigenous people, racialized minorities, people with disabilities, and new Canadians too often experience disproportionate levels of poverty.

The General Assembly is pleased to see that the new Poverty Reduction Strategy lays out concrete poverty reduction targets, specifically a 20% reduction in poverty by 2020 and a 50% reduction in poverty by 2030. These targets are important steps toward ensuring that basic human rights—including access to affordable housing, food, and clean water—are increasingly met, but more can be done to reduce or eradicate poverty as *Opportunity for All* defines it, namely: “the condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.” The General Assembly therefore encourages the government of

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Donald Muir

Canada to consider the following questions in its ongoing implementation of the strategy toward meeting its stated targets by 2020 and 2030:

- How will the government ensure that the National Advisory Council established in the strategy is given adequate independence and funding to fulfill its purpose, along with a strong mandate based in meeting human rights such as food and housing security, and meeting our international legal obligations? Can the Council reasonably fulfill its mandate in the 2 years noted on the Department of Employment and Social Development's website?
- What is the timeline for the "dashboard of indicators" mentioned in *Opportunity for All* to appear online, allowing Canadians to track the progress and success of the strategy? What targets has the government set for poverty reduction?
- How will the government hear and make decisions where there is indication of systematic continued infringement of basic human rights regarding food, housing, and other necessities for an adequate standard of living?

Living in, or in fear of, poverty deeply impacts the mental and physical health and wellbeing of all who experience it, as well as all those around them. While we applaud the \$22 billion in funding since 2015 that the Strategy lists, we also therefore urge the Canadian government to consider creating new and additional funding towards programs in areas such as job skills improvement, food security, and income security which would be aimed at reducing or eradicating poverty in Canada. We believe that doing so will create a stronger, healthier, and ultimately better Canada.

Our thanks for your attention, and we look forward to your response. Please rest assured of our continuing prayer for your work.

Sincerely,



Rev. Daniel Cho
Moderator
The 144th General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Cc Karen Vecchio, PC Critic for Families, Children and Social Development
Brigitte Sansoucy, NDP Critic for Families, Children and Social Development