

Minister's Message, October 21, 2020

Seeking justice as a way of caring for others

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, justice is about making sure there is equitable distribution of wealth, as well as making sure all people are treated fairly under the law. For this reason we are called to care for 'the least of these', not because they deserve our pity, but because we know they deserve the same love and respect as everyone else. At our recent Council meeting, it was agreed to share this petition entitled "Justice for People in Poverty" from Citizens For Public Justice. It calls for our government to do more to address the systemic factors that cause poverty in Canada. We have attached the text of the petition for you to read. We invite you to sign it at TSA this Sunday. If you wish you can also send a copy of this letter directly to your local MP.

with thanks,
Rev. James Murray

October, 2020

Dear Member of Parliament,
Re: Justice for People in Poverty

Poverty is a violation of people's rights and dignity. Canada's laws and systems are legally required to protect people's right to an adequate standard of living. But hunger, homelessness, and poor health outcomes are just a few symptoms of a much larger problem.

People in Canada are more likely to experience poverty if they are Inuit, First Nations, or Métis; Black, or People of Colour; women, transgender, or gender nonconforming; if they are single; if they are LGBTQQIA+, if they have a disability; if they live in Northern or remote regions; or if they are new to Canada or have precarious immigration status in Canada. These same communities of people also bear the brunt of environmental and public health crises, including climate change and the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed gaping holes and inequities in our system, exacerbating the depth and breadth of poverty and inequity in Canada.

The rights of people in these groups and others living in poverty are being violated year after year by government policy and funding decisions that perpetuate intersecting forms of systemic oppression including, but not limited to, colonialism, racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, ageism, and classism. These systemic inequalities prevent specific people and communities from

accessing the opportunities, services, and resources they need, leading to multi-generational cycles of poverty. They also exclude people from the decision-making processes that create the very laws and systems that affect them most. Charity and good intentions will not solve this problem.

Government commitments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the National Housing Strategy, and the stated intention of implementing the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are steps in the right direction, but have not gone the distance. For climate change, COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts, and poverty alike, the proposed commitments are not sufficiently ambitious or integrated across all government policies and systems to ensure equitable impact. As all three crises disproportionately affect the same groups of people and communities, we need a transformative way of conceptualizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all policy decisions to build a more equitable, sustainable future.

We call on the Government of Canada to do what is legally and morally required to uphold and protect the rights of people experiencing poverty and other forms of systemic oppression in Canada:

1. Fulfil your legal obligations to protect people's rights to an adequate standard of living and end poverty in Canada by 2030. Honour the dignity of each person and community experiencing poverty and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression by putting their rights and well-being first in federal budgets, legislation, and programs.
2. Set specific targets to end poverty and improve measures of well-being and equity among communities experiencing systemic oppression. This includes, but is not limited to, people who are Inuit, First Nations, or Métis; Black or People of Colour; women, transgender, or gender nonconforming; people with disabilities; newcomers to Canada; people with precarious immigration status; people who are single; children and youth; people who are LGBTQQIA+; and people living in Northern and remote areas. These targets should meet or exceed the requirements of existing human rights obligations, including the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Sustainable Development Goals. Targets, methods for data collection and analysis, monitoring and evaluation, as well as other accountability mechanisms should be co-developed with people and communities experiencing poverty and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression in Canada to ensure meaningful, equitable impact.
3. Prioritize funding for strategies that reduce poverty and improve measures of well-being and equity among communities experiencing systemic oppression. Engage in ongoing collaboration and consultation with people and communities experiencing poverty and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression (including children and youth in these communities) to evaluate and monitor the impact of existing laws, programs, and policies on their physical, mental, social, and economic well-being. Mandate the collection of data disaggregated by sociodemographic identities to better measure and understand the impact of government policies on poverty. Reallocate funding from systems that contribute to poverty and inequality and invest in those that

close the gap between the rich and the poor. This should include funding for both universally accessible public systems (e.g. universally accessible, publicly funded health care, including pharmacare, dental care, vision care, mental health, and physiotherapy; childcare; education; subsidized housing; guaranteed basic income) and local, community-led strategies, paired with strong federal regulations and tax justice to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth and power.

Current commitments and committees lack sufficient ambition, power, relationships, and resources to bring about real justice and equity. People's lives hang in the balance. For over a decade, Dignity for All and our supporters have called for a rights-based, comprehensive plan to end poverty in Canada, sending thousands of postcards and letters from people across the country calling for urgent action. Now in the midst of a pandemic, we see more and more the price of inaction. We urge you to work with people with lived experience of poverty and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression to bring about the change we need to protect people's rights and dignity, and to build a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable society.

I ask for the opportunity to meet with you in the near future to discuss these recommendations and facilitate collaborative relationships moving forward. Please contact Natalie Appleyard of the Dignity for All campaign at natalie@cpj.ca for follow-up opportunities.

Sincerely,