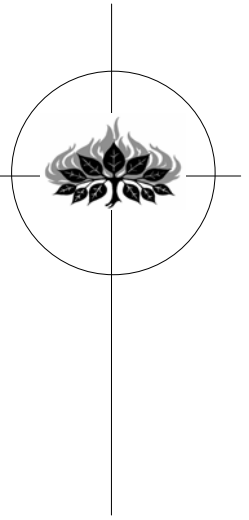


The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 133RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Dr. J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg
B.A. (Hons.), M. Div., M.A., D. Min., D.D.

January 11, 2008

Premier Dalton McGuinty,
Legislative Building,
Queen's Park,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty,

I bring you greetings on behalf of the 133rd General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada which met June 3-8, 2007 in Waterloo, Ontario. The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body in our denomination.

One of the issues that our General Assembly considered was the depth of poverty in Canada today. Many of our congregations in both rural and urban areas seek to respond as faithfully as they can to the immediate needs of citizens on low incomes.

Most provinces and territories are enjoying impressive economic growth. Yet the benefits of this growth are not being as fairly shared as they might be. With some exceptions, a \$ 10.00 an hour minimum wage would allow an individual working full-time for a year to reach the Low Income Cut-Off, as formulated by Statistics Canada. Our General Assembly approved a recommendation requesting provincial/territorial and federal governments to increase the minimum wage to \$ 10.00 an hour. The minimum wage in Ontario is now \$ 8.00. The Government of Ontario has scheduled increases for the next three years until March 31, 2010 when it reaches \$ 10.25. There are currently about 184,000 employees in Ontario earning the minimum wage or less or about 3.5% of the workforce. Does the Government of Ontario have policies and plans in place to index the minimum wage to the cost of living?

According to the 2006 Campaign 2000 Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario, there are 478,480 children living in poverty in Ontario. We acknowledge that in the March 22, 2007 budget, the government announced an Ontario Child Benefit to assist low-income families. The National Child Supplement Benefit (NCSB) is federal financial assistance which can help reduce poverty in low-income earning families. The Government of Ontario currently reduces provincial financial assistance to those who receive the NCSB. The NCSB can contribute to the well-being of children living in low-income families. Does the Government of Ontario intend to end the claw back of provincial financial assistance to those who receive the NCSB? Will the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit result in a reduction from current levels of assistance to citizens receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works or other forms of provincial assistance?

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall, The Rev. Donald Muir, The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp

Canada accedes to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. States are required to report to the United Nations on measures they have taken to give effect to the Covenant. In May 2006, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the body mandated to review State compliance with the Covenant, recommended that "...federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency...". The recommendation suggests ways to counter inadequate housing, including the implementation of a national strategy for the reduction of homelessness. More recently, while visiting Ottawa on October 22, 2007 the United Nation's special rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, urged the Canadian Government to take steps to address homelessness and inadequate housing.

The Ontario 2007 budget announced \$127 million for the construction of new affordable housing and to retrofit older housing. It also announced rent assistance for low-income earning families, and \$80 million for off-reserve housing for Aboriginal communities. This is welcome news. Is this annual funding for a multi-year program?

We believe that a society should be judged by how it treats the vulnerable and marginalized. Too many of our citizens are being left behind in the current prosperity. There is a wonderful opportunity for provincial/territorial and federal governments to work together to reduce levels of poverty through a poverty reduction strategy with measurable targets and a clear timeline. Does the Government of Ontario have a poverty reduction strategy in place?

I look forward to hearing from you. Rest assured of our continuing prayers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hans Kouwenberg', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the left.

The Rev. Dr. Hans Kouwenberg,
Moderator of the 133rd General Assembly,
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Cc The Hon. Bob Runciman, Official Opposition House Leader, Progressive Conservative Party, Ontario