

Whatever measure we use to determine the poverty level, if you want to understand what's really going on behind all the numbers, you need to ask these questions:

- 1) What are the assumptions about poverty underlying the measures cited? Is poverty being viewed as physical survival?
- 2) If poverty is viewed as relative to living standards, what is being measured and why? How are differences in living standards of different communities reflected? When was the measure last updated?

Faith in Action believes it's time for BC to adopt a standard poverty measure and track this measure over time. In this way, programs and policies designed to end poverty could be effectively evaluated and the "politics" of helping the poor, eliminated.

The fact that we do not have such a measure can only mean one thing:

not enough people in government consider this issue a priority.

Here's the danger we face: if we use contradictory measurements to try to understand and evaluate poverty, society will be unable to develop the consensus to act. Our ability to make good decisions about poverty will be limited.

Why would any government want to limit our ability to help the vulnerable? Why, indeed!

About Faith in Action

Faith in Action (FIA) is a multi-faith coalition of faith communities and individuals in the CRD who share a concern for the poor and vulnerable. Our focus is to envision BC income assistance programs and other initiatives that will end poverty and respect the dignity of all.

Here's what we do:

- provide educational resources to members about the needs of the poor;
- hold forums and information sessions that explore creative strategies to identified problems and issues;
- encourage members to take actions to end poverty that will result in effective solutions grounded in justice, rather than charity;
- engage in conversations with all levels of government about the need to develop a compassionate approach to policies, programs and services designed to eliminate poverty;
- communicate what we learn to news media and in the public arena.

Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month at 4:30 pm in downtown faith communities.

Check our website for meeting details.

All who share this vision are welcome to join us.

www.victoriafaithinaction.ca



"We only pay attention to what we measure."

Faith in Action asks:

How is poverty measured in BC?

You'd think that would be an easy question to answer... it's not.

It all depends on who is answering the question.

Here's the problem:

different statistical measures can provide very different results.

And that's confusing..

How can the ordinary citizen evaluate a proposal or a program without having a measure that everyone agrees accurately reflects the level of poverty in BC?

Under these circumstances, it's not surprising that we're tempted to...

tune out

or

pay attention to the person who sounds the most convincing.

In a healthy democracy,

poverty is defined for the community, and then a tool is developed to measure how effectively we're eliminating it.



"We only pay attention to what we measure."

Why haven't we had a nationwide conversation about how poverty is measured in Canada?

It's not that we haven't studied poverty in this country. We have. For decades, universities, private foundations, non-profit societies, Statistics Canada as well as all levels of government have commissioned studies and written reports on this issue. Everyone agrees that vulnerable people are entitled to more help.

And yet the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow...



How can that be?

In a word-

IDEOLOGY



Consider this question:

Who is poor in Canada?

If poverty is defined as including only those whose physical existence is threatened, then only 5% of Canadians are poor, according to the Fraser Institute, a conservative think tank.

If poverty is relative to community standards and norms, with poverty meaning that a person cannot fully participate in society, then 12 to 15% of Canadians are living in poverty. This is the definition used by most anti-poverty organizations.

Canada does not have an official poverty line or income below which someone is considered poor, depending on where they live and family size.

To learn more about the kinds of measurements that are used in Canada to determine who is living in poverty, go to:

http://www.metcalfoundation.com/downloads/Cutting_Through_the_Fog.pdf