

INPUT FOR THE PRIME MINISTER MEETING DEC 3RD, 2020

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Pluralism in Motion and The Toronto Area Interfaith Council are privileged to be a participant in the Contribution of Faith Communities in a Pandemic being hosted on December 3rd, 2020. We have attached some preamble material to assist in the dialogue that captures our experiences, front-line support efforts, planned activities and social concerns as a result of the work we started as part of the Eradicating Poverty dialogue which has been quickly taken over by the immediate concerns and impacts of Covid-19. This report is by no means reflective of all that is being done but it gives you a sense of what we are doing now, what we feel we can do to assist further and provide our communities the support and dignity needed to immerse from this situation, a whole and vibrant community.

We also believe that the Faith Community resources and abilities should not be overlooked as we deal with the issues of today and in the future, encouraging all levels of government to utilize our abilities and resources to help in such causes. Clearly the Faith Communities are now speaking in unison with one voice that we hope can be harnessed in creating the good works of our changing society.

We look forward to sharing our thoughts, ideas, issues and willingness to support.

Regards,



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PLURALSIM IN MOTION – OBSERVATIONS AND ISSUES

Faith Organizations can be a beacon of hope providing resources for those in need, not only in this time of crisis but beyond. This document focuses on contributions made by respective Faith groups contributing in the fight against the Covid pandemic and suggests how Faith Organizations can have a larger impact now and as we begin Stage two readiness and work towards the post Covid period.

Pluralism in Motion has for the past year put tremendous efforts and research on poverty related issues with the intention of hosting a Summit. It focused on four pillars of poverty related issues, i.e. the increasing need for food banks, income insecurity, homelessness and all the other myriad social ills so many are burdened with. Faith Organizations will need to be even more vigilant as compassionate and caring leaders in enumerable ways.

Both Nationally, Provincially, and Regionally, there appears to be some specific items that can be done to address our concerns. These are:

- A cohesive and collective approach on how all manners of access to food can be better coordinated, distributed, and made available to the requests of those with desperate requirements.
- Access to accommodation as well as facilities to ensure health and safety of those marginalized. This also includes access to income to assist with the daily needs of the individual. There will be a continued requirement for essential services and access to funds to help in such endeavours.
- The continued access to PPE's for essential services, all front-line services as well as volunteer organization (eg food banks, homeless shelters) so that not only can volunteers feel comfortable in providing support but also keep the curve flattened for the future as many of our volunteers are Senior aged. This needs to include vaccine strategies and prioritization to encourage volunteer support.
- Create a specific task force to deal with the findings and results of the deplorable situations in our long term and senior care locations. We need to address the level of training, the level of staffing, health security and accessibility to these souls who deserve our respect and dignity.

The following highlights what we view as the key focus items to put in place to address both the near and long term objectives of working with Government Services and the significant Faith Community philosophy and resources to make a difference. We need to have National strategies with the Federal Government taking a leadership role with the Provinces in key area's such as wage subsidies, senior care standards and vaccine deployment:

- Continue to develop a Consortium of Faith Leaders and Faith organizations with Community Support group leadership and Governmental representations as a single point of contact to represent the conscience of and advocate for our Communities' needs and priorities. This needs to include National strategies on Senior Care policies, Economic support, prioritized vaccine deployment and PPE protection.
- Generate a coordinated financial support effort from Faith Communities, Private and Public mechanisms, and corporate interests, to facilitate assistance with a strengthened organizational structure and supporting community needs and priorities. This would include Community input on desperate family needs
- Continue to plan for the Eradication Poverty Summit to be held in sometime in 2021 to consolidate priorities and optimize resources.
- Work with all levels of Government to participate in future planning activities and align efforts including joint policy development.

We passionately believe that the crisis caused by the Covid pandemic can serve as a catalyst to address many of our (policy) shortcomings with respect to various social and economic problems. As we enter the Second Wave of the pandemic, it is a priority and expectation for all to work together to move beyond this difficult period for Canadians. The

Pandemic has caused us to rethink many aspects of how we live, how we govern and the kinds of policies we need to put into place to create a more just society in which human values count. We believe that Faith Organizations can play an important role in the sensitivities of society, humanity, and religious doctrines, along with Government and Corporate, in the design of a better future for all.

2 CHALLENGES THAT FAITH COMMUNITIES HAVE WITNESSED AND EXPERIENCED.

There are very few food programs open in the evening albeit most provide breakfast and lunch. There is a strong need for evening food programs in the downtown areas.

For evening food programs public and private partnerships should be more integrated as they can be supportive to each other and be able to utilize available resources.

There is no work available for individuals who are living at shelters and have relied on 'Labour Ready' and other part-time employment (instead of work already in the first line) for income to buy food and other necessities. We are also concerned about those families on fixed incomes who do not have the ability to receive the same benefits as other groups and are barely surviving on what income they do receive. The discussions around basic income, needs to be reinvigorated.

Individuals who are homeless need to be able to access places to sleep and meals later in the evening when they miss the curfew time for their regular shelter.

Another issue for the homeless is the lack of washrooms, laundries, showers, and access to drinking water. With restaurants and even many transit washrooms being closed is a big concern of front-line workers. Is there is a way to provide access to drinking water or offering bottled water in areas where there is homeless neighbours?

Food Banks are not only experiencing greater demand for their services, but they also need protective equipment, donations as well as food. Would it be possible to see if Food Banks and other Volunteer organizations be categorized as First Responders or front-line workers, so they get the support of their needs? The Prime Minister has announced relief for the food banks and charities, mall charities like mosques and food banks may feel excluded, and unaware of access to this funding. And finally, some Faith organizations that are dependent on receiving Faith Ministers from across Canada to conduct service for Funerals and important Religious Services are not able to do so because of travel restrictions.

3 PARTNERING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Personal protective equipment & Vaccinations**

In this context then how can the Faith community help the level of Governments take the lead in providing appropriate and effective personal protective equipment for those providing volunteer public services during the pandemic who are not employed by higher levels of Government. We recognize that there may be a shortage, but can we try to fill the shortage and, in the meantime, triage the distribution of equipment to those with the highest need.

The Faith Communities can also help prioritize the vaccine deployment to ensure not only essential services are identified but also essential front-line volunteers that are the foot soldiers in support of poverty programs.

- **Income support**

The Prime Minister announced that the Federal government was working to cost share a wage boost for essential front-line staff that are making less than \$2,500 a month.

- How can we advocate with the Federal Government that the CERB should be made available to inhabitants of shelters, homeless, and undocumented persons?
- How can the local communities help with the faster deployment of the 75% wage subsidy for their small businesses that continue to struggle with shutdown guidelines.

- **Proper accommodations**

- There also needs to be a heightened strategy in Senior homes to further isolate those residents who have tested negative for the Coronavirus by placing them in other locations, if they so chose, to ensure they are not exposed to the virus. (e.g. Hotel space).
- Government should take the lead to provide greater transparency by publicizing each of its Homes and shelters where there has been an outbreak of Covid19.

How can the Faith communities and all levels of Government work with Financial Institutions to aid those in immediate need? How can the Faith Communities identify those families who are in desperate need of funds right now? What can the Faith Communities do to address the increasing level of anxiety in the Communities and Society? This is in terms of mental health and domestic violence. There is a need to provide more communications vis a vis context and background for the various 'instructions' issued re distancing and transparency on what is attempting to be accomplished.

4 PARTNERING AFTER COVID-19

The Poverty Eradication Summit originally planned for 9th June 2020 was going to address basic issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, income insecurity and all the sociological and psychological problems that go hand in hand and now will get much worse. Homelessness, Mental Health, and Addiction must be looked at holistically and not compartmentalized in future planning and budgeting. A Summit is more necessary than ever.

In addition to addressing Poverty via a Summit and given the uncertainty about the future in terms of Economic Growth and Employment creation, how can Faith Communities get involved with the level of Governments in designing a better, more strategic economic development plan? There should be a joint City/GTA/Province/National task team including representatives of the Faith Communities.

We are working to consolidate and gather all the constituent Faith organizations to work holistically on common areas of need and work together to prioritize where energies can be focused. By working with all the Faith Leaders and their organizations such as TAIC, Faith in the City, Pluralism in Motion, Canadian Interfaith Conversation, and other Partners we can optimize efforts and speak with a united interfaith voice. The support of its volunteer base of foot soldiers can be available now to act as a support to essential workers. This is beginning to become a reality with the efforts started with the Summit composition.

Through the Faith Communities interaction, we will look for Faith Communities, Public, Private, Government and Corporate resources to help with the needs of Society. Such effort with resources can evaluate the immediate and short-term needs by working with Government bodies. This will ensure there is alignment on those items that need addressing on a coordinated basis and use the available human resource the Faith Communities can bring. We currently have established National Not-for-Profit organizations (Pluralism in Motion Inc) with ongoing charitable status applications, we believe we can work to augment resources.

5 ONGOING FOCUS ACTIVITIES

1. Continue to develop a Consortium of Faith Leaders and Faith organizations with Community Support group leadership and Governmental representations as a single point of contact to represent the conscience of and advocate for our Communities' needs and priorities we are aware of at the individual community level.
2. Generate financial support from Faith Communities, Private and Public mechanisms, and corporate interests, to facilitate assistance with a strengthened organizational structure and supporting community needs and priorities
3. Continue to plan for the Eradication Poverty Summit to be held in 2021
4. Work with all levels of Government to participate in future planning and policy activities and align efforts with communities' strategic priorities

6 KEY SOUND BITES:

- PPE and Vaccine prioritized deployment for all essential services, front line volunteers and Senior Care key support groups. Many of the Volunteer resources are also senior aged and concerned about their safety.
- Create National strategies with Provincial/municipal coordination of programs and help with quicker deployment and universal application of funds provided. This to include senior care, food deployment. more extensive Covid testing, and Wage subsidies to support economic revitalization.
- Engage the Faith Community leaders and their Clergy to assist with crisis management and stress counselling that is prevalent in every community, family and individual. There is a natural support mechanism within the Faith organizations in their ability to do this.