NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

U.S. Census: 800,000 more in poverty since 2006

Mark Pattison Catholic News Service | Aug. 28, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Figures released Aug. 26 by the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that, while the number of Americans in poverty last year rose over 2006 levels, the percentage increase was not statistically significant.

Try telling that to America's newly poor, said Candy Hill, senior vice president for social policy and government affairs at Catholic Charities USA.

"We have 800,000 more people living in poverty, including 500,000 more children" and 200,000 more senior citizens, Hill told Catholic News Service shortly after the figures were released.

The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and its American Community Survey, both issued Aug. 26, had a margin of error of 0.2 percent, so percentage changes in either direction from 2006 to 2007 are regarded as being "statistically unchanged."

David Johnson, chief of the Census Bureau's Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, told CNS in an Aug. 26 telephone interview that changes of 0.3 percent or more are recognized and reported in the surveys.

Among the findings are:

-- The poverty rate for Hispanics climbed from 20.6 percent in 2006 to 21.5 percent in 2007.

-- For children younger than 18, the poverty rate rose from 17.4 percent to 18 percent.

-- The number of uninsured children dropped by 600,000 to 8.1 million, from 11.7 percent to 11 percent. During an Aug. 26 press conference discussing the surveys' findings, Johnson chalked up the decrease to greater enrollment of children in government health care programs.

Census Bureau figures showing 45.7 million uninsured Americans, down 1.3 million from 2006 levels, should be taken with a grain of salt, according to Sister Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who heads the Catholic Health Association.

"The U.S. economy was in better shape when this data was collected and states were expanding enrollment of low-income children in Medicaid and SCHIP," the State Children's Health Insurance Program, she said in an Aug. 26 statement.

Since then, Sister Carol noted, SCHIP expansion has been vetoed twice. "Current economic realities underscore the need for comprehensive health care reform worthy of our country," she added.

Although overall U.S. poverty rates are up 0.2 percent, "I wish I could say that our service requests were up by that small of a number," said Hill of Catholic Charities.

Based on reports received from Catholic Charities affiliates as well as her visits to affiliates, she said the service

numbers for 2008 will be considerably higher than for 2007.

"We're seeing a tremendous number across the network in increased requests for food and shelter, and dramatic increases in the number of families who just can't make it in this country," Hill told CNS.

"We haven't seen the end of the foreclosure crisis yet, and that's certainly having a dramatic impact on the number of people coming to us for assistance. That's complicated by the fact that we've had increasing fuel costs, but not just for people that we serve but for Catholic Charities trying to deliver services for people.

"This summer has been a real struggle for us," Hill said.

During the press conference, Johnson alluded to 1999 as being the "pre-recessionary peak" in terms of lower numbers of people in poverty and of poverty rates.

In 1999, the number of Americans in poverty had fallen to 31 million from a 1993 figure that had approached 40 million. That 31 million number hadn't been duplicated since 1989, and 1981 before it, when poverty numbers were rising from an all-time recorded low of less than 24 million in 1974. The poverty rate in 1999 had also been pushed under 12 percent, a rate that had not been seen since the 1970s.

Johnson noted during the press conference that the children's poverty rate was higher than the rate for adults and for seniors. He added that 12 million more seniors would have been labeled as poor were it not for Social Security payments.

Hill said that despite Catholic Charities' campaign to cut U.S. poverty in half by 2020 "we're stuck." But the new figures call for a "redoubling of our efforts," she added.

Neither of the two economic stimulus packages passed this year by Congress was comprehensive, according to Hill. She said the current Congress still has time to pass a third such package that expands unemployment benefits and authorizes emergency food stamp benefits, since the increases put in place by this year's farm bill have been "largely negated" by rising food costs.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-31 13:43*): http://ncronline.org/news/us-census-800000-more-poverty-2006