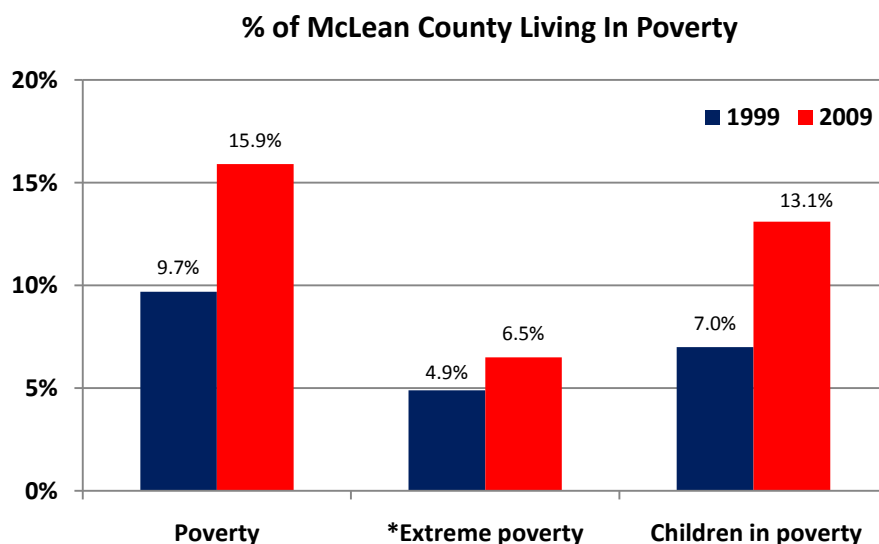


Poverty is increasing in McLean County: are we responding with actions and in truth?

The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey reveals the number of persons living in poverty is climbing in McLean County. In 2009, 25,196 people lived at or below the poverty rate (\$22,050 in annual income for a family of four).

Of those McLean County residents living in poverty in 2009, 9,256 faced extreme poverty, meaning their annual income was less than 50% of the poverty rate. Of those living at or below the poverty rate, 4,778 were children.

The graph below shows the significant growth in poverty when comparing 2009 to 1999. Though 2010 numbers have not been released, the prospect for an abrupt improvement seems unlikely given stagnant economic growth and an unemployment rate which is nearly double the rate prior to the Great Recession.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey

As Christians, we are called to have a heart for those who are lacking. 1 John 3: 17 – 18 says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

I often find myself consumed with responsibilities of the day to the extent I don't even notice those who are less fortunate, let alone respond with actions and in truth. Some very meaningful experiences for me have been serving at the Jesus House. When I think about the Jesus House, I'm moved not only by the sacrifice in actions which Tom and Bonnie Lentz dedicate to the poor, but also by their fervent, but not imposing, witness to the truth.

For those who have never volunteered at the Jesus House, I encourage you to do so. Or, consider other opportunities in the community to serve with actions and in truth.

Randy Zehr, for the Peace & Justice Committee