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Washington, DC, September 16, 2010 – Annual data released today by the U.S Census Bureau indicates that 43.6 million Americans—one in seven people— now live in poverty. This is the largest number of people in poverty in the 51 years for which the estimates are available. The figures also show that African Americans experience poverty at a much higher rate than whites.

“It’s troubling that, in one of the world’s wealthiest nations, one in four African-American households struggle to provide for their families,” said Bishop Don DiXon Williams of Bread for the World’s Church Relations department. “The vast disproportion in poverty rates between African Americans and whites suggests that we must urge our nation’s leaders to do more to end poverty and hunger.”

In 2009, the poverty rate for African Americans reached 25.8 percent—almost twice as high as that of the general population. One in three African-American children now lives in families that have trouble providing for them. Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (formerly called food stamps) has hit record levels, with African-Americans accounting for 22.6 percent of the 40.5 million Americans who receive SNAP benefits each month. This figure is projected to rise in 2011.

“High rates of poverty and long-term unemployment among African Americans make legislation to extend certain provisions to low-income families extremely important,” said Bishop Williams. “This month, Congress can help by voting to extend tax benefits for low- and moderate-income households.”

SNAP, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) have been in lifting people out of poverty and helping families respond to the recession. If SNAP benefits were accounted for in calculating the poverty figures, 3.6 million people would be lifted out of poverty in 2009 (compared to 1.4 million in 2008). Similarly, accounting for payroll taxes and refundable tax credits, like the EITC and CTC, almost 3 million children would be lifted out of poverty.

Additional Census Bureau Report findings for 2009 include:

- ·In 2009, the poverty rate increased for non-Hispanic whites (9.4 percent in 2009, up from 8.6 percent in 2008), Asian-Americans (12.5 percent in 2009, up from 11.8 percent in 2008), and Hispanics (25.3 percent in 2009, up from 23.2 percent in 2008).

For children younger than 18, the poverty rate increased from 19 percent in 2008 to 20.7 percent in 2009, bringing the number of children living in poverty to nearly 15.5 million, an increase of over 2.1 million children.