



Combating Homelessness and Promoting Affordable Housing
Strategy Development Document

Social Justice & Advocacy Board
Anglican Diocese of Toronto

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Combating Homelessness and Promoting Affordable Housing - A Strategy for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto

Background and Organizational Context

In 2003, the Diocesan Centre undertook a reorganization. As part of this, the former Community Ministries Board was refocused away from the operation of ministries, toward the development of strategies and initiatives which better nurtured and supported parish outreach ministry.

The Social Justice and Advocacy Board, evolved from the Community Ministries Board, was asked to develop priorities for advocacy for the Bishop and others as they interact with government officials and those who influence social realities in our Diocese. In January 2004, the Board gathered input from many across the Diocese and, with the approval of Diocesan Council, identified “Homelessness and Affordable Housing” as the top priority for both advocacy and parish outreach work.

This led to the development of this document which sets out a proposed strategy for the Diocese and indicates how we can work together in various ways to address this situation.

Mission and Vision of the Diocese

The mission of our Diocese of Toronto is to worship God and proclaim Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and to embody – in word and action – God’s reconciling love, justice, compassion and liberation, through which knowledge of God’s reign is extended.

This is our collective purpose and quest which we bring to life throughout our Diocese in many ways. In our baptismal covenant, each of us has vowed to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and to respect the dignity of every human being. Therefore, at the core of our Christian community is our ministry on behalf of those who are marginalized and in need. Christ tells us, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40).

In the Diocese of Toronto, we are building communities of compassion and hope through three distinct but complementary strategies:

Making our Anglican life seeker friendly [Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 5:38, Luke 14:28-30]

- Being, and being seen to be, welcoming to and supportive of all individuals in our communities who seek spiritual, social and/or physical nurturing.
- Being seen as a beacon of light, of good news and celebration, of friendship and of caring, to all who look for a source of affirmation and joy amidst the noise of a modern world.

Creating distinct and supportive ministries which respond to and reflect the diversity of our society [Matthew 28.1, Galatians 3:28]

- Sponsoring and encouraging ministries which are, and are seen to be, supportive of diverse cultural communities
- Sponsoring and encouraging new ways of ministry which resonate with young people and speak to young seekers
- Renewing our ministry around that which is sacred to reflect the key segments of our society.

Advocating Christ's message to influence social policy and social realities [Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 4:17-19, Micah 6:8]

- Being, and being seen to be, a courageous and persuasive voice for the homeless, the poor and the marginalized.
- Creating and carrying out ministries which address the needs of the homeless and the poor across our Diocese as living examples of Christ working among us.

Inherent in both our mission and our strategies is the recognition that we, as Christians, are called to be Christ's hands and voice – working together to create a society which provides affordable housing to those in our communities who are in need.

Daily Realities for the Homeless, the Poor and the Marginalized

We all need a place to call home. But many of us struggle to hold on to our homes or apartments. Across Ontario, three-quarters of a million people live in households where half or more of family income goes toward rent, leaving little for everything else. For some, "home" is a mat on a church floor or a hostel bed. An estimated 1,000 Toronto children bed down for the night in homeless shelters. Hostel conditions are often dangerous and overcrowded, with the risk of diseases such as tuberculosis.

The housing crisis extends far beyond Toronto. People in Barrie, Peterborough, Orillia, Oshawa and many other parts of our Diocese find it increasingly difficult to pay the rent, feed their children and meet their other needs.

The shortage of affordable housing is so severe that it is causing deaths. A memorial behind the Church of the Holy Trinity in downtown Toronto lists the names of over 300 homeless people who have died on the streets of Toronto. More victims are added each month. The crisis is also breaking up families. The Children's Aid Society reports that inadequate housing is increasingly a factor in causing children to be taken into care, not just abuse or neglect.

A Scriptural Context for Understanding How to Respond

The fact of so many of our neighbours enduring hardships involving their housing speaks directly to us as Christians. Our advocacy work on homelessness is inspired by a Gospel vision that affirms the value of every human being, and their right to live in dignity, no matter what their income. A strong emphasis on justice, on taking care of the vulnerable, and on freedom for the oppressed permeates the Bible.

For example, the jubilee legislation in the Torah is directed to restoring impoverished slaves and peasants to their ancestral homes. The prophets insist that God judges harshly those who ignore the poor and the needy.

In the New Testament we are called to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:24-40) and take seriously Christ’s command: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40). If we were to ask why Christians should care for the homeless and the working poor, who are only one missed paycheque away from homelessness, then the most powerful answer would be that it is precisely amongst such people that we meet the One whom we call our Lord.

By providing a decent place for homeless people to live, we are taking seriously our baptismal vows to “seek and serve Christ in all persons...(and to) respect the dignity of every human being.”

Current Housing Support

Anglicans have long been involved in combating the housing crisis and in related efforts to counter poverty. Our work has spanned a broad range of initiatives, including providing emergency shelter, using church property for housing, working with ecumenical partners to build housing, and advocacy efforts. Here are examples of what Anglicans are doing to alleviate the plight of the homeless and provide housing for people in need:

- LOFT Community Services, which the Anglican Church launched, offers supportive housing to 640 people, community support services to 700 people and street outreach services to 1600 people at 50 sites in the greater Toronto area and York Region. We continue our support of LOFT through FaithWorks.
- Several community ministries supported through FaithWorks help homeless or poorly-housed people. All Saints Community Centre in Toronto provides a place for homeless people to come during the day. The David Busby Street Centre in Barrie, supported by FaithWorks, employs a housing outreach worker whose sole job is to find decent housing for people who are either homeless or else living in slum housing. Couchiching Jubilee House in Orillia provides supportive housing for vulnerable women and children. St. Matthew/St. Aiden Anglican Church in tiny Buckhorn, Haliburton County, provides shelter for victims of abuse and disasters like fires at its Women’s Emergency Transition Shelter.
- Twenty years ago Anglicans joined forces with six other faith groups to provide homes for Toronto’s homeless by creating Ecuhome, a non-profit housing corporation. Today Ecuhome houses almost 500 people in 56 houses and three apartment buildings. Ecuhome’s five resource centres offer supports that help tenants keep their homes. Ecuhome’s board of directors includes two Anglicans.

- A recent Parish Outreach Survey carried out by the Social Justice and Advocacy Board, with the help of the Anglican Church Women, indicates that 34 parishes are directly involved in helping the homeless through the Out of the Cold program. Some, such as All Saints Kingsway and St. Simon the Apostle in Toronto, operate their own Out of the Cold program to provide shelter for homeless individuals. Others give support to a local Out of the Cold program; for example, members of St Margaret's Barrie help provide a hot meal.
- Members of Trinity Aurora helped build a Habitat for Humanity home in Newmarket. Parishioners at Christ Church, Campbellford collect clothes, toiletries and bedding for a women's shelter in Peterborough.
- Anglicans are reaching out to other people and organizations in their communities with similar values and goals. In Peterborough, Rev. Gordon Finney and Adele Finney were concerned about the local housing shortage, so they offered their own spacious rectory to help meet the need. Working with their parish, the Older Women's Network, and the Peterborough Community Housing Development Corporation, the rectory was converted into a home for six low-income single women. Anglicans in Peterborough are also helping to build a new shelter for needy families. Six Anglican parishes helped raise funds for this shelter, which opened in September 2004.
- Motions urging governments to take action against the housing crisis have been passed at recent Synods.

As we can see, there is much being done. All of this helps to inform our strategies and future direction for the Diocese.

How the Diocese of Toronto Should Respond

As a Diocesan organization (i.e. Diocesan Council or Social Justice Board), we need to focus on those things that we do best at the diocesan level of our church and ensure that our parishes and congregations are supported and resourced to carry out active and caring ministry in every community across our Diocese where the need exists.

We propose that Diocesan Council, through its Social Justice and Advocacy Board, should:

- Increase awareness and focus on this issue through communications and relationship building across the Diocese.
 - Broaden understanding amongst Anglicans of the root causes of the housing crisis, and how each of us makes choices which help or hurt.
 - Raise awareness about what individual Anglicans and Anglican parishes are doing to alleviate homelessness and provide more affordable housing, thus informing Anglicans about the many ways in which they and their parishes can choose to respond. (See Appendix A.)
 - Give voice to housing issues and solutions at various meetings across the Diocese including deanery and area meetings. Council members and Board

members can become champions to keep this issue in front of people in a meaningful way.

- Develop support networks for Anglicans who are active on housing issues, so that they can learn from and support each other.
- Strengthen the voice of the Anglican Church in advocacy with government on issues of homelessness and affordable housing.
 - Support the role of the Bishops in taking Christ's message to business, community and political leaders.
 - Develop an understanding with our provincial and national church of how we can work together for maximum impact and change.
 - Build collaborative lobbying programs with other Dioceses, other churches and other like-minded social action groups.
 - Take every opportunity to raise this issue with the media, government officials and politicians.

Changes in public policy which encourage construction of affordable housing are essential for making a meaningful difference for the hundreds of thousands of people who need decent housing which they can afford. We are keen to work with governments, at all levels, for positive solutions to homelessness. For example, in 2004-05, a priority for the Bishop might include meeting with Ontario's Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to encourage the government to do much more to provide affordable housing. Board members can assist in mobilizing Anglicans in support of advocacy campaigns, and working with housing advocacy groups on specific campaigns. (See Appendix B for ideas of how organizations such as ours can create change).

- Create a framework within which church property can be re-deployed or used in assisted housing.

Parishes may come forward with a proposal to use some of their property for affordable housing initiatives. The Planning and Development Board is responsible, under Canon 35, for the use of parish properties, including the development of housing on church property. Our Diocese has been involved in supporting 29 non-profit housing projects in recent decades. Most provide low-cost housing for seniors, while others help meet the needs of the homeless, youth, abused women and the physically challenged. Most of these housing projects are owned and operated by a non-profit corporation, on land leased from the Diocese or parish. There is currently a moratorium on development of new housing projects on church-owned property until we have a shared understanding of how and when we should participate by contributing real estate to initiatives of this kind. This participation can provide the opportunity to promote other ways to encourage non-profit housing, such as through parishes partnering with established housing providers such as Ecuhome, LOFT Community Services and Habitat for Humanity.

Milestones and measures of progress

Our criteria for success for this work would be developed annually by the Social Justice and Advocacy Board for approval by Diocesan Council. These would then become the milestones and measures through which the Board will be accountable to Council for bringing this strategy to life.

The following are current examples of milestones and measures which signify progress:

- By March 2005, identify, recruit and empower housing champions in diocesan groups including regional deans, the Ministry Resources Board, the Planning and Development Board, Area Councils, and the FaithWorks Allocations Committee.
- By June 2005, create an Anglican housing network involving lay and clergy members from at least ten parishes who are active on housing issues in their community as well as in broader advocacy efforts.
- By December 2005, implement an advocacy program which involves at least 50 Anglicans in organizing meetings with their MPP and MP to discuss housing issues.
- By December 2005, convene a meeting with church leaders and the provincial or federal ministers responsible for housing to promote action in specific housing policy options.

Appendix A

This appendix is representative of the communications which will support awareness building and informing Anglicans about the many ways in which they and their parishes can choose to respond.

There is a lot that each of us as individuals, and each of our parishes, can do to combat homelessness and work for more affordable housing. Each of us can be part of the solution. Here are some suggestions:

LEARN ABOUT THE ISSUE. Hold an educational event in your parish. The Social Justice and Advocacy Board can help provide a speaker and resources. Be creative! For example, the Caring Alliance, based in Scarborough, sponsored drama presentations in local churches depicting how real-life families became homeless.

FIND A “CHAMPION” in your parish willing to mobilize others to work on this issue.

TALK about housing during election campaigns. Ask candidates what they plan to do to address the issues.

CALL, WRITE OR MEET with your city councillor, MPP or MP asking what they plan to do on this issue. Organize a delegation from your parish.

ATTEND OUR ANNUAL DIOCESAN OUTREACH NETWORKING CONFERENCE, which offers the opportunity to meet other Anglicans concerned about this issue and learn from each other. Workshops on housing issues include information and discussion about possible action responses.

ORGANIZE AN EVENT FOR NATIONAL HOUSING DAY, held each November by the National Housing and Homelessness Network.

WELCOME SUPPORTIVE HOUSING INTO YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Housing for people with special needs, such as people with addictions or people with disabilities, is known as “supportive housing”, because these people need support both to maintain their housing and to move ahead in their lives. We all know it’s wrong to discriminate against people because they’re mentally ill, disabled, have low incomes or suffer from addictions. Yet time after time, excellent housing developments to help such people are fought, and even blocked, by neighbours who don’t want different people around them. For example, Habitat for Humanity was turned down in its bid to build homes in Aurora. A planned Habitat project for 90 affordable homes in Scarborough seemed destined to meet the same fate — until concerned citizens, including Archbishop Finlay, raised their voices in support of it in April 2004, leading Toronto City Council to approve the project. Instead of “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY), we need the courage to say “Yes, In My Backyard.”

Courage is indeed often needed. For example, members of the Church of the Epiphany, Scarborough, encountered fierce local opposition when they supported construction of a youth shelter on church-owned lands. Yet they stood firm, the shelter opened, and it has been successful ever since.

BECOME A BOARD MEMBER OF A NON-PROFIT HOUSING PROJECT. The heart of non-profit housing is volunteer commitment. All such projects need committed people to serve on their boards. It’s a worthwhile way to spend a few hours of your time each month.

CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE AND GROUPS in your community or region. Remember, you don't need to do everything on your own!

JOIN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS TO URGE ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS. Government policies can have an enormous impact. The federal Liberals have allocated \$1 billion to affordable housing since 2001, but very little of that money has been delivered. At the provincial level, both the former Conservative government and the current Liberal government have failed to match federal funds dollar for dollar through the federal-provincial Affordable Housing Agreement. Such a measure would be a major breakthrough, by providing funding for 20,000 units of housing for moderate and low-income families. The current provincial government has also not yet carried out its 2003 election promise to provide housing allowances for 35,000 low-income families.

WORK WITH EXISTING GROUPS. The **Homelessness Action Group** is a faith-based group that advocates on issues of affordable housing and tenant protection. It holds monthly meetings in Toronto and sends out email alerts on urgent issues and actions people can take. Its guide, *Mobilizing Resources for Affordable Housing: Opportunities for Faith Groups*, is an excellent resource available online (www.homelessness.on.ca/kit.html) full of ideas and encouragement. **The National Coalition on Housing and Homelessness**, which includes the Anglican Church, is carrying out a national campaign to seek federal action on affordable housing. To learn more and to sign the campaign's petition, visit www.housingnow.ca and click on the endorsement.

The approach proposed in this document is based on the following underlying understanding of how organizations can be effective in bringing about change. Part of being “effective” is acknowledging the various stages of creating change, and part involves an understanding of the roles that different individuals and groups in the organization will carry out in order to bring about change.

Creating change

Creating awareness of the need for change Creating and increasing an awareness of the need for change is instrumental in aligning and mobilizing individuals around an issue. In our context, as Anglicans, the Gospel speaks to us of this need. However, for our Anglican community to bring about change in today’s society, we need to connect the gospel message to our social realities in a meaningful way that broadens our definition of community and reinforces Christ’s call to action in people’s daily lives.

Creating ownership for response Being aware of a need does not necessarily trigger individual response or an alignment of individuals to respond as part of a larger group. Helping each individual to own and understand what they can do to bring about change and inviting them to be part of the solution is an important step in the change process. Helping each individual or group to see their role as part of the overall solution is also important. This is the step in the change process that overcomes the “someone should” response to need. It changes the “someone should” to “I should”, “we should” or, “let us”.

Supporting response Actions taken by individuals and groups can gather momentum and create greater change when the organization supports, celebrates and reinforces the positive response that is occurring. This is the part of the change process when the people across an organization learn from its successes and support those who experience setbacks.

Building on change At this point, the organization has created a new reality. However, it is important that the new reality is reinforced and nurtured so that the new reality becomes part of the organization’s conscious identity which shapes ongoing work and vision.

Understanding Roles

Diocesan Council has a specific mandate to implement the priorities of the Synod by enabling ministry throughout the Diocese. The Social Justice and Advocacy Board has a mandate to develop strategies and initiatives which address this part of our vision:

- Advocating Christ's message to influence social policy and social realities
[Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 4:17-19, Micah 6:8]
 - Being, and being seen to be, a courageous and persuasive voice for the homeless, the poor and the marginalized.
 - Creating and carrying out ministries which address the needs of the homeless and the poor across our Diocese as living examples of Christ working among us.

The mandate of both Council and the Board are carried out under these principles:

- We will re-focus ministry, mission and resources to strengthen parish and local ministry.
- We will carry out work where it is done best.
- We will be a flexible/adaptive organization that is responsive to change.
- We will practise good stewardship.

Therefore, the role of the Board will be to lead, advocate and directly undertake those initiatives which build strength for the Diocese and throughout the Diocese.