

The Right Reverend  
ANDREW J. ASBIL

Bishop of Toronto



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Anglican Church of Canada

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February 8, 2021

His Worship John Tory  
Mayor of Toronto  
City Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
100 Queen St. W.  
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Tory,

I am writing to you to ask you to address, on an urgent basis, the lack of indoor space available to people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic, and to urge you to make community centre space available, as I requested in a phone call to your office last week.

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, a large number of people who had been informally sheltering in Union Station were expelled. We understand that the City is concerned about public safety (although Union Station, as a large drafty space with high ceilings, is significantly safer than most shelters), but these people have already been deprived of all the informal supports which sustained their lives.

Prior to COVID-19, a large number of people, more than the City has ever acknowledged, survived by spending time in Tim Hortons, McDonalds, the public libraries, and other spaces where they were able to get a few hours of warmth, and access to washrooms. Nurses and other frontline workers are reporting a dramatic increase in cases of frostbite and other injuries related to exposure among people who are unhoused. There has been a lot of public attention paid to encampments. This is a genuine issue of concern, but the large population of people who sleep rough in more dispersed situations has never really been noticed or addressed.

Many of these people, it is true, are quite resistant to going into shelters, but they are often willing to access respite sites – however, the respite sites are now full almost every night. There are also very few shelter beds available, and those few are usually far from downtown, and the hotel-shelter rooms are all occupied.

**People need indoor space**, at least for a few hours of their day, and not only in extreme cold. Union Station was literally the last space left for a significant number of people. Community centres are currently not being used for public programming, and they are located around the city, in areas where people are already comfortable, where they know the streets, where they are with their friends. If they could be made available, even with a skeleton staff, simply so that there is somewhere that a person can sit inside, have a hot drink, and use a washroom, this could be lifesaving.

We know that you are operating under extreme budget constraints, but this is a truly urgent situation. Please open community centre spaces in neighbourhoods of high need, as soon as possible.

Yours in Christ,

The Right Reverend Andrew Asbil  
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cc: Mary-Anne Bedard, General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration, City of Toronto