

OTTAWA, ON (September, 2018)

Homelessness and Affordable Housing: A Municipal Responsibility

By The Right Reverend John H. Chapman, Anglican Bishop of Ottawa

Ontario residents go to the polls on October 22 this year to elect their municipal governments. In advance of the election, I urge Ottawa voters to discuss the issue of homelessness and affordable housing with their candidates. I ask them to consider the most vulnerable in our society, the poor and the homeless. “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute” (Proverbs 31:8).

Ottawa and the surrounding region, like most major cities across the country, is facing a crisis of homelessness. Despite having a ten-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, last year the city saw a 5% increase in the number of people requiring emergency shelter. The largest increase in homelessness was among families with children, who now account for over half of the bed nights used in Ottawa’s shelters. This crisis is fuelled by severe shortages of affordable housing, extreme poverty for people with minimum wage jobs or on social assistance, inadequate funding for mental health and addictions treatment, and a failure to focus on early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

The Anglican Church is working hard to resolve the issues of poverty and homelessness; operating several affordable housing communities, drop-in day programs, an emergency downtown women’s shelter, and counselling services through our Community Ministries. Whether it is someone struggling with mental illness or fleeing abuse, someone needing a short-term hand or on-going support, someone needing help to feed themselves or their family, or perhaps just needing a listening ear, we are there. The Community Ministries of Ottawa provide the easy welcome and the opportunity to access a network of practical help available for the people who walk through our doors. Together, we are pushing back despair and supporting each success—large or small—one step at a time.

We are committed to continuing this support. In addition, as we prepare to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Diocese of Ottawa in 2021, our goal is to provide 125 new units of affordable housing. Yet, we cannot resolve the issues of poverty and homelessness alone. They require major support from all levels of government, and leadership from municipalities.

We call for municipal leadership in this most critical area to create a sound and vibrant community and a welcoming, safe environment for all residents. Furthermore, we look for our municipal leadership to:

- Create housing that is truly affordable to families and individuals at risk of homelessness
- Use all available planning tools to ensure affordable housing is created in every ward of the City
- Ensure enough funding is available to create more affordable housing, even if it means an increase in property taxes
- Aggressively pursue proposals for available funding through the National Housing Strategy
- Improve living standards for Rooming Houses

As the mid-point of the City’s 10-year plan on Housing and Homelessness comes to an end, it is time to pursue every avenue to create affordable housing. It is time for homeless families and individuals to be housed and stay housed. It is time to prevent the tragedy of homelessness from affecting the quality of life in our community. It is time for Council to act.

