

Affordable Housing: We All Need to Do Our Part

DRAFT –September 17, 2009

Purpose

- To start an ongoing dialogue toward the development of affordable housing– among people involved in developing affordable housing (people in need of housing, front line workers, church-based agencies), church leaders (Anglican and Lutheran pastors, clergy and bishops), and Members of Parliament.
- To remind the Government of Canada of its role and obligation in making affordable housing available to Canadians of the lowest income, especially those who face homelessness and impoverishment.
- To highlight that a national housing strategy is the cornerstone of a national anti-poverty strategy.

Focus and Theme

- The campaign will focus on the role of the federal government to provide leadership for affordable housing across Canada.
- The theme will be “we all need to do our part to make affordable housing happen”. This is what the church and community are doing. This is what provincial and municipal/regional governments are doing. But none of us can do our part unless the federal government does its part too.

Timing and Approach

- From mid October through to November 22, National Day for Housing and Homelessness
- Anglican and Lutheran shelter and housing projects across Canada will send a message to their local Member of Parliament in a format appropriate to their capacity and context – letters, visits, invitations.
- The Anglican Church of Canada will feature these local projects in some way (web stories, series of letters or e-mails) and bring them to the attention of the MP in which the project is located as well as to the federal minister responsible for housing.
- Suggestion: invite MP(s) for coffee and conversation at a housing or shelter site that will that will engage people who are directly affected as well as front line workers, and demonstrate the churches’ commitment to create affordable housing.

In the event of a national election, the campaign will continue but inviting candidates rather than MPs.

Locations

Our goal is to feature up to 20 projects across Canada, both Lutheran and Anglican, including:

- Victoria, BC –Peggy Wilmot (Faith in Action), plus Lutheran colleague

- Vancouver, BC –Barbara Mayers (Lutheran Urban Mission Society)
- Saskatoon, SK – Mark Kleiner
- Winnipeg, MB – Virginia Platt, Paul Gehrs
- Hamilton, ON (Niagara) – Colleen Sym
- Toronto, ON – Murray MacAdam

... with additional efforts to reach these places and contacts:

- Aboriginal communities
- London, ON (Huron)
- Ottawa, ON – Housing Alliance, Suzanne Garvey
- Calgary, AB – Wayne Stewart
- Edmonton, AB – Rick Chapman
- Montreal, QC—Sue Winn, Joyce Sanchez
- St. John's, NL—Robin Barrett
- Halifax/Dartmouth, NS – Gary Thorne

The Primate has given his blessing to this project and is willing to give it national profile in partnership with the Lutheran National Bishop.

Key messaging

1. The Anglican and Lutheran Churches are doing our part. We have a faithful record of working with and for people who are facing homelessness and struggling to find or stay in long-term affordable housing. Examples:
 - Out of the cold
 - Soup kitchens
 - Thrift shops
 - Food banks
 - Short term shelters
 - Non-profit housing initiatives
1. Like the “importunate widow” (Luke 18:1-9) who came day and night to ask justice of the local judge, our churches have come again and again to ask justice of the federal government for people facing homelessness. Unmoved by fear of God or respect of neighbour, the judge eventually granted justice to the widow out of exasperation, so that she would not wear him out by continual coming. Likewise, we intend to keep coming to the federal government until our request is heard and justice is granted.
2. Canada’s housing policy by default is to regard housing as a commodity, as a vehicle for Canadians to create and accumulate wealth. The federal government has offered financial and renovation incentives to this end. Current federal housing policy is directed to housing consumers, to creating a

competitive housing sector, and to reducing taxes for first time homeowners.

3. However, this housing policy excludes that portion of Canada's population for whom home ownership is unattainable, for whom the rental market is out of reach, or who move in and out of shelter s because of other crises in their life. It ignores the fact that it is not in the interest or capacity of the private sector to provide affordable housing for this portion of our population.
4. Current federal policy identifies homelessness as a lack of shelter (shelter-lessness). It focuses on factors such as skills, literacy, or substance abuse, which do nothing to contribute to housing affordability.
5. Housing, not shelter, is the prerequisite for home. It is elemental to the human spirit, not just a commodity. What is needed instead is for the federal government to launch and maintain a comprehensive national housing strategy.
6. Current federal policy takes a weak and passive stance in relation to provinces and municipalities with regard to creating and maintaining an adequate supply of affordable housing. The federal government consistently claims that it is not in the affordable housing business. This is like a school principal saying he or she is not in the teaching business. The power and responsibility for coordinating the delivery of affordable housing in Canada -- a system which is currently fragmented and uncoordinated -- and for holding provinces accountable for delivery, resides with the federal government. We are asking for this justice.
7. Churches are doing their part. Provinces and municipalities are doing their part. We are asking the federal government to do your part:
 - Reverse the trend of funding cuts and downloading responsibility for affordable housing;
 - Give recognition and resources to Canada's social sector -- non-profit, charitable, and community-based organizations -- who serve vulnerable people and strengthen our social infrastructure;
 - Initiate and reinforce an affordable housing plan that is adequately funded for the long term. that holds provinces accountable for delivery, and that interfaces effectively with local, community-based housing and homeless plans;
 - Integrate affordable housing into an overall poverty reduction strategy.