



the
**Church of the
Holy Trinity**
(Anglican)

The Church of the Holy Trinity is a community of people who express Christian faith through lives of integrity, justice, and compassion. We foster lay leadership, include the doubter and marginalized, and challenge oppression wherever it may be found.
Mission Statement, 2010

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing you today to express my support for the Ombudsmans report on encampment evictions. The City of Toronto should be ashamed of its actions, which have been abusive, confusing, expensive and arbitrary to say the least. As the Director of Church of the Holy Trinity, I have been at the frontlines of this growing crisis of houselessness and housing disparity in Toronto for many years, which has been enhanced by the COVID-19 crisis. During this time we have supported thousands of individuals living on the streets of Toronto to survive and find support, especially during the 2020-2021 period when almost all services in the downtown core had shuttered. We did not close, often working 6-7 days a week to serve hundreds of meals, and to provide survival supplies, counselling, healthcare and cultural support to all those who came to our doors. Almost immediately, the City of Toronto took an oppositional approach to our work, and did everything in their power to diminish, prevent, and impede our supportive activities in our communities. This continued for years, in which we had to petition on a daily basis for the basic rights of the most marginalized people in our society. Their actions at best were racist, embedded in colonial entitlement, based in ego, and intended to deny the reality of what the impacts of COVID-19 had been. During this time they took actions to put the health and safety of people who had taken shelter around our parish, centered in Trinity Square Park, at risk- for example by turning off all of the lighting in the park to encourage a dangerous environment. It took an immense amount of advocacy to mend our relationship with the City of Toronto to the point in which they would consider a dignity based approach to the well-being of houseless people. This only became possible after the commitment of houseless peoples to take up space in such a way that the City was forced to negotiate away from their perspective of eviction and displacement as a matter of course for individuals living on the street.

Over the past year, we have worked with Streets to Homes, and City staff to temporarily house *hundreds* of persons who were living in tents in Trinity Square, or other locations seeking support in accessing this system. There is not a single person we have worked with at our location who has chosen to live on the street over having a room made available to them at a shelter hotel. We collaborated with City departments- namely the coordination on encampments, shelter support and housing, and streets to homes, to do this in a specific way, leveraging our relationships with individuals to ensure that they are able to make a positive choice for themselves. This meant before a person was evicted from our park, they would be offered a hotel shelter room, and support to get to that room. To facilitate this, we provided continuity of care in food, hygiene, healthcare, counselling, harm reduction support, and other practical services. This process worked very efficiently and had a high success rate in getting people placed in appropriate temporary housing locations, with consent and adequate care. We had several meetings to agree on this approach and refine it, we also had an ongoing dialogue with City staff to collaborate on individual cases. The only challenge to this uptake was availability of space in shelter hotels, and individuals being discharged from shelter hotels for behavioural related incidences or policy

infractions (ie. Not coming back to the shelter on time, taking the stairs, having too much stuff, etc.) This would result in individuals returning to Trinity Square and the process restarting. Each of these sites and housing providers purport to be harm reduction and trauma informed, however these approaches and a lack of capacity and experience in staffing have created a very dangerous environment, that is not harm reduction focus and in fact increase harms, up to the point of being discharged and banned for extended periods without a dispute resolution process. As the system began to operate beyond capacity, spaces only became available when an individual was discharged. Individuals are always discharged to the street, regardless of weather- and many times without the appropriate clothing, often in the middle of the night. This meant that we needed to provide for that individual the appropriate clothing, and a tent and sleeping bag as a minimum requirement to their discharge. With this capacity at shelter hotels, and with the clothing of respite sites, the City began to only consider the referrals of an individual with a tent. This meant that the basic cost of a referral to any temporary housing program was the minimum cost of a tent and survival gear. Nonetheless we continued to work in as good of faith and partnership as possible with the City and their parties to ensure that individuals we able to survive through the seasons and that their fundamental rights and freedoms were respected during this often lengthy process of referral to shelter hotels.

During the past two year period we have had several occasions in which these procedures and arrangements were broken without warning, and evictions took place. The added presence of security firms was an additional complicating factor as they often acted violently towards individuals on the streets- one time pulling out batons on individuals camping behind our Parish. I believe that these evictions took place in times when the City was unable to shuffle individuals in and out of temporary housing and instead worked to invisibilize and displace individuals. The City has changed their policy several times without informing even individuals that they are working with or their housing agents, so that everyone is caught off guard. We regularly see young women, trans people, disabled people, and other vulnerable people who these policy shifts, and arbitrary decision making. It is retraumatizing, it impedes health and social service cohesion, individuals are at greater risk for violence, sexual violence, overdose. These are things we see on a daily basis- all of the consequences of this system that is changing its rules at a whim.

I believe that the City of Toronto is more concerned with appeasing business lobbies and developers than it is with providing the services it is tasked with. It has taken on the immense costs of grooming the social landscape for affluent classes, and is ignoring the ongoing crises that this ideology has created. It has tasked completely inappropriate staff to address the social issues that are driving houselessness, and refuses to make the appropriate level of investment to work its way out of the deficit it has created.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Zachary Grant

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