

## Letter to His Worship Mayor John Tory, April 22, 2020

### 1 INTRODUCTION:

The fallout from the spread of Covid-19 has created tremendous panic in society across the Globe. The economic dilemmas have added a toll on the emotional condition of life for most Torontonians who are homebound; many laid off or lost their monthly/hourly wages. In times of despair individuals look to a place to worship for hope as a space for silent prayer, daily or weekly services, uplifting spirit and energy with community gatherings, and counselling with faith leaders or staff.

Faith Organizations can be a beacon of hope providing resources for those in need, not only in this time of crisis but beyond. The purpose of this document is to discuss not only what respective Faith groups are contributing in the fight against the Covid pandemic but also to suggest how Faith Organizations can have a larger impact now and especially in the post Covid period.

The TAIC Standing Committee on Eradicating Poverty has for the past year put tremendous efforts and research on poverty related issues with the intention of hosting a Summit on June 9<sup>th</sup> focusing on four pillars of poverty related issues, i.e. the increasing need for food banks, income insecurity, homelessness and all the other myriad social ills so many are burdened with. Faith Organizations will need to be even more vigilant as compassionate and caring leaders in a myriad of ways.

The human tragedy from the Covid pandemic is unprecedented, exacerbating the human condition now propelling greater disparities in the lives of individuals faced with loss of incomes leading to exponential increases in poverty and emotional tolls. We cannot reduce life to a cost/benefit ratio; that, life is not about wants but needs.

The Government of Ontario released its list of essential workplaces that can continue to operate during the COVID-19 outbreak. The list included liquor stores, alcohol producers, wholesale stores that sell beer and wine to providers as well as cannabis stores and other producers. Yet faith based organizations which provide social emotional and spiritual support for communities is mostly absent from the list. In times of increases in domestic violence and substance abuse, Faith Organizations can provide hope and healing to individuals, families and communities.

**Commented [MFB1]:** This covers F. Prakash's input re not for profit essential activities. If not we can make it more explicit

Through the Covid pandemic we have discovered that there is such a thing as 'society'; that not everybody can look after themselves. And it is a moral imperative to look after the poor, the elderly, and other most vulnerable individuals /groups.

### 2 CHALLENGES THAT FAITH COMMUNITIES HAVE WITNESSED AND EXPERIENCED.

There are very few food programs open in the evening albeit most provide breakfast and lunch. There is a strong need for evening food programs in the downtown area.

For evening food programs public and private partnership will be more fruitful as they can be accountable to each other and be able to use available resources.

The faith communities have witnessed and experienced at certain time lack of skill, data, and provision of security, transportation, and medical, mental health expertise.

There is no work available for individuals who are living at shelters and have relied on 'Labour Ready' and other part-time work for income to buy food and other necessities. We are also concerned about those families on fixed incomes who don't have the ability to receive the same benefits as other groups and are barely surviving on what income they do receive. The discussions around basic income, needs to be reinvigorated.

Individuals who are homeless need to be able to access places to sleep and meals later in the evening when they miss the curfew time for their regular shelter.

Another issue for homeless is the lack of washrooms, laundries, showers and access to drinking water. With restaurants and even many transit washrooms closed this is a big concern of front line workers. Is there is a way for the City to provide access to drinking water or offering bottled water in areas where there is homeless neighbours?

Food Banks are not only experiencing greater demand for their services, they need protective equipment, donations as well as food. Would it be possible to see if Food Banks and other Volunteer organizations be categorised as First Responders or Front Line workers so they get the support they need. The Prime Minister has announced relief for the food banks and charities but the small charities like mosques and food banks may feel excluded and not knowing how to access this funding. And finally some Faith organizations that are dependent on receiving Faith Ministers from across Canada to conduct service for Funerals and important Religious Services are not able to do so because of travel restrictions.

### 3 WHAT FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE DOING

Currently religious places are mainly closed and are doing online services. However our priority should be to support the services who are working alongside Government and First Responders. A number of Faith groups have opened a conversation with the City or agencies about use of space in their respective buildings.

Saint Theodore's has created a Deacon's Cupboard - a small foodbank cupboard on the front lawn, accessible 24/7, which we're trying to keep stocked with pasta, rice, legumes, cereal, and dry soups. Several members of the congregation are signed up with the We Love Willowdale volunteer list, to deliver groceries, etc., and offer phone support and online admin support as required;" They have built a system of looking after each member of its church through the Ministering program. So no one has left alone or not cared for.

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Commented [MFB3]: Input from F. Prakash

Other initiatives include 1000 Face Masks a Week for Michael Garron Hospital, surgical caps for nurses at Kitchener- Waterloo Sick Kids Hospital. And the disbursement of older/unused computers to families who need access for schooling online.

Furthermore Faith Communities are remaining open with the services they have always provided e.g. YSM, Salvation Army, Sikhs, Jewish group, Good Shepherd etc.

Commented [MFB4]: Input from F. Prakash

#### 4 PARTNERING WITH THE CITY NOW

- **Personal protective equipment**

In this context then how can the Faith community help the City take the lead in providing appropriate and effective personal protective equipment for those providing public services during the pandemic who are not employed by higher levels of Government. We recognize that there may be a shortage but can we press higher levels of government and industry to fill the shortage and in the meantime triage the distribution of equipment to those with the highest need.

- For immediate needs, however, can the City and its agencies including the TTC respect those workers who exercise their right to refuse to perform work that endangers their health and safety and not impose discipline on them?

- **Income support**

The Prime Minister on Wednesday announced that the Federal government was working to cost-share a wage boost for essential front-line staff that is making less than \$2,500 a month.

- Can the City advocate with the Federal Government that the CERB should be made available to inhabitants of shelters, homeless, and undocumented persons?

- **Staffing in long term care facilities**

According to a PMO readout, all on the call “agreed on the urgent need to ensure long-term care facilities have the resources they need to protect the health and well-being of their residents and workers.” There has been a chronic understaffing of long term care homes – that is only now coming to the surface. There is also a recognition of the dangers of spreading the disease by persons working in more than one facility.

- Can the City set an example for other operators of long term care homes and for the City by enhancing staffing levels so that residents of the City’s home personnel with the lowest acuity level (CMI) receive an average of 4 hours of front line hands on nursing and higher average hours of this care for residents of its other homes based on the proportion of those homes’ CMI to the CMI of the lowest acuity home?
- Part of the solution could be the conversion of staffing complement at its Homes for the Aged to a higher proportion of full time positions, and or in the meantime offer to the Union representing its part-time employees at these homes to amend the collective agreement to provide the part-time employees with the same benefits as are provided to full-time workers.

Commented [MFB5]: Should this just read ‘according to the Prime ministers Office’?

- **Proper accommodations**

- There also needs to be a heightened strategy in Senior homes to further isolate those residents who have tested negative for the Coronavirus by placing them in other locations, if they so chose, to ensure they are not exposed the virus. (e.g. Hotel space).
- The City should take the lead to provide greater transparency by publicizing each of its Homes and shelters where there has been an outbreak of Covid19.

How can the Faith communities and the City work with Financial Institutions to provide assistance to those in immediate need? How can the Faith Communities identify those families who are in desperate need of funds right now? What can the Faith Communities do to address the increasing level of anxiety in the Communities and Society? This is in terms of mental health and domestic violence. There is a need to provide more communications vis a vis context and background for the various 'instructions' issued re distancing, faith services and transparency on what is attempting to be accomplished.

## 5 PARTNERING WITH THE CITY AFTER COVID-19

The Poverty Eradication Summit originally planned for 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020 was going to address basic issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, income insecurity and all the sociological and psychological problems that go hand in hand and that will get much worse. Homelessness, Mental Health, and Addiction must be looked at holistically and not compartmentalized in future planning and budgeting. So a Summit in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> quarter is more necessary than ever.

Commented [MFB6]: F. Prakash input

Toronto has the largest homeless population in Canada with over 7,000 each night seeking shelter. This is a good time to think about what a post Covid19 world should look like.

In addition to addressing Poverty via a Summit and given the uncertainty about the future in terms of Economic Growth and Employment creation, how can Faith Communities get involved with the City in designing a better, more strategic economic development plan for the City and the GTA and contribute to Premier Doug Ford's initiative? Should there be a joint City/GTA/Province task team including representatives of the Faith Communities?

We are working to consolidate and gather all the constituent Faith organizations to work holistically on common areas of need and work together to prioritize where energies can be focused. By working with all the Faith Leaders and their organizations such as TAIC, Faith In The City (FITC) and others we can optimize efforts and speak with a united interfaith voice with the support of its volunteer base of foot soldiers available now to act as a support to essential workers.. This is beginning to become a reality with the efforts started with the Summit composition.

Commented [MFB7]: f. Prakash input

Through the Faith Communities interaction, we will look for Faith Communities, Public, Private, Government and Corporate resources to help with the needs of Society. Such effort with resources can evaluate the immediate and short term needs by working with the City. This will ensure there is alignment on those items that need addressing on a coordinated basis and use the available human resource the Faith Communities can bring. As Not-for-Profit organizations and with current charitable status applications, we believe we can work to augment resources.

## **6 ONGOING FOCUS ACTIVITIES**

1. Continue to develop a Consortium of Faith Leaders and Faith organizations with Community Support group leadership and Governmental representations as a single point of contact to represent the conscience of and advocate for our Communities' needs and priorities
2. Generate financial support from Faith Communities, Private and Public mechanisms, and corporate interests, to facilitate assistance with a strengthened organizational structure and supporting community needs and priorities
3. Continue to plan for the Eradication Poverty Summit to be held in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr. 2020
4. Work with all levels of Government to participate in future planning activities and align efforts with City strategic priorities