

Forcible removals lack respect

Jesus cares about dignity and rights of everyone

By Pastor Quinn Strikwerda

As I'm sure many of you have been following the media reporting are aware, it has been a difficult time for people who sleep in informal shelters on Edmonton's streets. This is a complex issue.

At ICPM it is our fundamental belief that Jesus cares about the dignity and human rights of every person. In the Gospel texts he has a special concern for the poor, the marginalized, and the dispossessed.

ICPM staff and volunteers have watched in dismay in recent weeks as the people we love and care for have been kicked out of their shelters and forced to move, often in the bitter cold with little or no warning time to gather their possessions and plan next steps.

On top of this there is a lot of disinformation being presented in the media. This special edition of the



Many people who Inner City Pastoral Ministry serves were evicted from their informal settlements and their possessions taken during several events in January.

Straight from the Street newsletter has a twofold purpose: to add our voice to counter some of the myths about informal street settlements, and to invite you to our AGM on Thursday, March 21.



Informal settlements testify to the lack of social and affordable housing.

The AGM speaker this year will be Chris Wiebe who represented the Edmonton Coalition for Human Rights in their lawsuit seeking to stop the City of Edmonton from forcibly removing informal settlements.

It will be a thought provoking evening and a chance for you, our supporters, to hear more about the work ICPM continues to do in and around the Boyle-McCauley neighbourhood.

Thank you for your continuing support and prayers.

(**Quinn Strikwerda** is pastor of Inner City Pastoral Ministry.)

'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6.8)

NOTICE of Annual General Meeting

Dear Friends of Inner City Pastoral Ministry:

You are cordially invited to our **annual general meeting**. Current events surrounding campsites have shown drastically how challenging living in the inner city can be. We invite you to reflect with us on those challenges and how God calls us to respond.

We are excited to announce guest speaker **Chris Wiebe**. Chris was one of the lawyers that represented The Edmonton Coalition for Justice and Human Rights in the lawsuit they brought against the City of Edmonton challenging the right of the City and the EPS to tear down inner city campsites. He will share with us his experience launching the lawsuit and perspectives on camping in informal shelters and the law.

Date: **March 21, 2024, 7 p.m.**

Location: **St. Faith's Anglican Church,**
11725 - 93 Street NW, Edmonton

Finger food snacks will be served.



PROGRAM:

Doors open & gather: 6:30pm

Opening ceremony & guest speaker: 7:00pm

Business (reports, elections): 8:00pm

The **2023 annual report** will be available in hard copy at the meeting. It will also be available online at <http://www.icpm.edmonton.ca/wp/> closer to the date.

Please RSVP using one of the options below, so we have an idea of numbers.

We hope to see you on March 21st.

Yours in Christ,

The Board of Directors,

Inner City Pastoral Ministry Edmonton



RSVP: Please let us know if you are coming (and how many you are) by:

- Emailing us at icpm.edmonton@gmail.com, or
- Calling 780-424-7652 and leaving a message with your name and number of people, or
- Cutting off this strip and mailing it to us at:
Inner City Pastoral Ministry, 10527-96 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5H 2H6

YES, I will be attending: _ (name) _____

I will bring _____ additional people.

I would like to receive your email news: ___ (email address) _____

Eyewitnesses aid public awareness

People are contacting Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) asking for updates on what is happening about people who are camping on streets and parkland.

People who are camping are experiencing a ferocious assault on their human rights, safety, and dignity. After a small period when a court ruling required campers be given 48 hours notice before their shelters could be demolished, things have returned to the situation in place for years. With no notice, the City arrives and throws everything a person cannot salvage into a garbage truck and takes it away.

Worse, since Jan. 16 this has been happening at a much greater speed and frequency than has ever been seen before. At one location, the shelters were torn down on three different occasions between Jan. 3 and Jan. 22.

During the three-week period when notice was required, ECOHH could spread word of actions on social media. It was helpful to have significant media coverage as well as many ordinary people coming to see what happens at such times. Most expressed surprise and concern to see the reality was not as kindly and helpful as they had imagined.

With no notice, the City arrives and throws everything a person cannot salvage into a garbage truck and takes it away.

But with no notice required and sometimes several removals happening at the same time in different locations, it is difficult to share information and invite witnesses in time. ECOHH continues to urge anyone seeing a teardown happening to take photos and share them and to post the location on whatever social me-

Residents of inner city camps face ferocious assault on their rights, says **Jim Gurnett**



Jim Gurnett is interviewed by a reporter during the demolitions of inner city campsites in January 2024.

dia they use.

A major challenge created by the new accelerated approach is that people no longer have time to accumulate all the materials they need to make good shelters to resist the cold and wet of the weather. The simple little places being used now leave people exposed to more dangers than ever.

The repeated attacks are leading to some campers saying they have lost hope and to give in to discouragement, which is a threat to their mental well-being.

City council declared a housing emergency but has taken no actions

to assist people who are living in informal settlements. Continuing to contact elected people and call for real action is important. So too is sharing blankets, tarps, warm clothes, snack food, good footwear and other essentials.

Contact ECOHH for suggestions about how this can be done if you do not already have an organization to support. You can keep up to date with what is happening by using the ECOHH website (www.ecohh.ca) or the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness Facebook page.

(**Jim Gurnett** is the pastoral associate with Inner city Pastoral Ministry.)

Busting the myths about campsites

Low-income housing crisis needs solutions rooted in the facts

Spreading myths about campsites and those who live in them is reprehensible and stands in the way of arriving at solutions which respect the dignity of those who live in the campsites and serve the best interests of the wider community.

People who destroy the homes of those living on our streets often create divisions in the larger community.

Those who speak up for people who are homeless or who question the legality and morality of tearing down informal settlements are often labeled “bleeding hearts.”

FACT: We need to be concerned about people living outdoors.

FACT: No one chooses to be homeless.

FACT: Hundreds of Edmontonians live outdoors in conditions that are dangerous, unhealthy, and miserable. But for many, it’s a choice for survival.

Here are some myths used by those seeking to eradicate informal settlements:

1. Camps are dirty places full of garbage and needles.

FACT: Many people work hard to keep their shelters and surround-



City police prepare to break up an informal settlement in the inner city Jan. 3.

ings tidy. When sanitary facilities are provided, camps are often in a clean condition. Without possibilities for waste disposal, hazardous waste can build up.

FACT: Lack of mental health supports and medical care for injuries and traumas cause increased substance use.

FACT: Lack of facilities for small businesses like bicycle repair or bottle picking may cause some campsites to look disorganized and messy.

SOLUTION: Providing needed sanitation facilities and work spaces, with social service supports, would be more cost effective and humane than displacing people when their areas are deemed messy.

2. People who live in informal settlements are lazy and/or criminal.

FACT: Physical and mental health challenges prevent some residents from holding steady jobs.

FACT: Low-paying and insecure jobs don’t provide enough money for rent/basic needs.

FACT: People choose to live outside

with trusted relatives and friends.

FACT: People focused on survival are NOT hubs for criminal activity and possess little of interest to gangs.

FACT: Some items police have labeled as weapons in camps are commonly used tools – knives, axes, wrenches and screwdrivers.

FACT: Safety concerns as people try to stay warm could be addressed with safe heating.

SOLUTION: Providing housing and supports to maintain their community of family and friends is more cost effective than constantly employing police and clean-up crews to scatter people and destroy their belongings.

3. Emergency shelters have enough space for all who are homeless.

FACT: Shelters exist to provide temporary emergency accommodation. They are not a housing solution.

FACT: The number of shelter spaces over the years has usually been less than half the number of people who are homeless.

A Note on Terminology

Because the word “encampment” has been used by public officials and some media to stoke negative feelings among the public, we choose to call these makeshift living areas “informal settlements” or “campsites.”

Busting the myths (cont'd)

Continued from Page 4

FACT: The province now only provides the total number of shelter spaces without saying where they are located. Its numbers are impossible to verify.

FACT: The number of available shelter spaces changes daily based on staff availability and weather conditions.

Providing detailed counts of those in need of shelter would help the public understand the need for governments to build supportive and affordable housing.

4. Shelters are a good option for people who do not have housing.

FACT: Not all shelters are open 24/7. Those who stay do not have control over outside commitments, rest, or activity. They may have to leave in the morning and return by a certain time to re-register.

FACT: Shelter users report feeling unsafe due to bullying, theft, harassment, and violence.

FACT: Shelters are crowded, offer minimal personal space (other than a sleeping mat), little privacy, quiet, or darkness for sleep.

FACT: Shelters that accept family groups and pets are uncommon, posing extra challenges.

FACT: Shelters have poor accommodation for many with diverse disabilities.

FACT: Those who use shelters report unsanitary, unhealthy, and crowded conditions, with limited access to washrooms and showers.

FACT: Shelters are understaffed. Those employed often do not receive adequate training and support to assist people with complex needs.

FACT: Rules in shelters are strict, non-negotiable, and not always applied equally.



FACT: Shelter schedules lack flexibility for people with outside commitments and do not accommodate personal routines for rest or activity.

FACT: Shelters have little space for people to keep and protect personal belongings.

5. The only solution for informal settlements is to forcefully remove them.

FACT: Tearing down campsites has NOT reduced the number of those choosing to live outdoors but causes significant loss of personal belongings and further trauma.

FACT: Campers often return to cleared sites within days, sometimes hours.

Many communities have developed better, healthier solutions than traditional shelters. Such solutions include security, sanitation facilities, electrical heat sources, personal care, and support from cultural and professional helpers on site.

People can enjoy the benefits of living in small communities of their choosing, with the dangers of camping significantly reduced.

Conclusion

The answer to homelessness is housing for all – enough safe, affordable, secure, and suitable homes.

The government's failure to provide such housing is where the public's energy needs to be directed. Until such housing is built, better short-term solutions are available:

- Better, smaller and more varied shelter facilities than are presently available.
- Stricter shelter standards for safety, sanitation, and staff training.
- Camping alternatives like tiny homes, camp trailers and insulated tents in well-maintained and secure sites.

Current blinkered insistence on dismantling and eliminating informal settlements violates human rights and morality. It must end.

Support your neighbours who are homeless by contacting elected officials. Look for opportunities to volunteer and support people who are homeless. Stay informed and engaged by connecting with the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness.

Further reading:

<https://make-the-shift.org/resources/>

<https://allard.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-10/Rush%20to%20Judgment%20Report%20Oct%202023.pdf>

<https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/complex-needs-banning-research-project/>

https://theyee.ca/Opinion/2024/01/19/Evictions-To-Nowhere-Must-Stop/?utm_source=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=190124

Tent cities key part of local heritage

City sold licences permitting settlers to erect temporary homes in valley

By the 1900s Edmonton was growing quickly, and high housing costs and low availability forced many people to find diverse ways to live.

A 1907 survey conducted by the *Edmonton Bulletin* showed that there were 1,098 tents in Edmonton, sheltering 3,294 people. Considering Edmonton's population in 1906 was just over 14,000, this was a staggering number.

In 1907, there were 3,294 tenters in Edmonton.

Tent communities developed all over Edmonton, including in Fraser Flats (Riverdale), Gallagher Flats (Cloverdale), past the

Canadian Pacific Railway tracks (109th Street) in the west end (Oliver), behind the Dreamland Theatre on Jasper Avenue, and east of 95th Street near the Canadian Northern Railway tracks (between 104th and 105th Avenues).

Reacting to the growing number of tent dwellers in the city, council passed Bylaw 121, stipulating that people could live in tents, but only if they applied for a licence and paid a \$1 fee.

These tents would then be known by health officials and would have to conform to the local health code.

In 1912 the *Edmonton*



Three gentlemen stand in front of a tent on Fourth Street in Edmonton in 1912. (City of Edmonton Archives EB-21-71). An earlier tent from 1906 is shown below. (EA 10-2790).

Bulletin published another survey, counting 2,671 tenters in the city. <https://www.edmonton.ca/city-government/edmonton-archives/early-tent-communities>

From the [Jan 18, 2024 newsletter](#) of the [North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society](#), reprinted with permission: See the society's website at www.edmontonrivervalley.org.



Our Mission: Inner City Pastoral Ministry is an interdenominational Christian Ministry of Presence. In partnership with the community, and guided by the Spirit of God, we walk with the people of the inner city of Edmonton.

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Gov'ts' social housing failures have left the poor out in the cold

By Maria Kruszewski

Speak out! Your voice makes a difference



Pastor Quinn (far left) takes down our friend's tent before the city cleanup crews arrive.

When the Edmonton Police and City clean-up crews worked next to the Bissell on Jan. 3 to demolish the informal settlements that homeless folks pulled together so they could stay warm within their communities, Pastor Quinn and I helped a member of ICPM's Community of Emmanuel to move.

Our friend had a decent tent covered with a couple of triple-layered tarps, two camping cots with pillows and sleeping bags for his girlfriend and himself, a dog bed for his 14-year-old dog (Billy-Bob), a cooler, hibachi, and bins of other belongings.

We did what we could to sort items and get them onto a couple of rolling carts before workers in hazmat suits came to throw peoples' belongings into a garbage truck crusher.

As city trucks moved down the street toward us, we folded up the tent and piled it onto a cart. But our friend could only move one cart at a time. He took his most important cart (with Billy Bob on top) to the next block, where he started setting up again. I had to leave, so I don't know if he collected his two other carts before the crews tossed his belongings.

Most people living in encampments are "people trying to survive together"

when they can't afford high-priced housing in our cities. If there were enough affordable and supportive housing, no one would be homeless.

Until 30 years ago, our governments invested in social housing. But now they have a lot of catching up to do for ignoring the need for the last 30 years. They have to be reminded that they have a responsibility to "people over profit," because homelessness is an issue that affects all the systems that support our society.

Quinn and I later met with our MLA, Marlin Schmidt, and asked what grassroots folks who care can do when governments ignore the lack of social and affordable housing. Marlin said, "Keep writing letters. Keep making noise. Tell your governments that we're not doing enough."

Please contact your elected officials. Remind them that housing is a human right and that governments must ensure that everyone is housed. Even a one-sentence letter/phone call packs a punch.

Prayer in the midst of uprooted campsites

Holy God of mercy and justice, Some of us lost our homes and continue to lose them. We are afraid and upset. We don't know where to go. We don't know if we will survive. Oh God, help!!! Please, give us strength and keep us safe. Thank you for being with us, especially in moments of stress, fear, and injustice. Thank you for every act of kindness. God, give us homes that work for us. Maintain our communities. Give us health. Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

SOME OF US hear and see stories about "encampments" and are upset, confused. We are full of emotions and questions. And maybe guilt, for sitting in a comfortable chair in a warm room. Oh God, help!!!

Give us wisdom to understand and to act. Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

GOD, WE PRAY for our city, politicians, society, which allows this to happen. And for those who have to do the dismantling. Oh God, help!!!

You know each heart, God. Help us to see each others' humanity and not turn away.

We seek understanding and compassion. We pray for courage to speak up in our place, for generosity, for political will.

We ask for affordable housing of all types, including permanent supportive. Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

WE SEEK YOUR peace on us and all creation. In Jesus' name we pray: Amen.

INNER CITY PASTORAL MINISTRY

Straight From The Street

10527 96 St. NW

Edmonton, AB T5H 2H6

**ICPM:
Now,
More
than
Ever**

ICPM Needs Your Support:

- **Donate Online:** www.canadahelps.org. Search for "Inner City Pastoral Ministry"
- **By cheque:** Inner City Pastoral Ministry, 10527-96 St NW, Edmonton, AB T5H 2H6
- **Etransfer to icpmgiving@gmail.com** through your banking app. Please put your name and address in the message to receive a charitable receipt.

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