



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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November 9, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), I urge the federal government to make housing for the poor and subsidized housing high priorities in the government agenda. When our church met in convention in June, delegates passed a motion asking me to share this concern with you and the Canadian Government.

Whether meeting a person sleeping on the street, or reading of the numbers of people who lack adequate housing and shelter in this country, it is disturbing to think of the many who lack a home. Feeling called to “love our neighbours as ourselves,” (Matthew 22:34-40) Churches 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 include soup kitchens, out of the cold programs, thrift shops, food banks, short term shelters and non-profit housing initiatives.

Frequently, Canada’s housing policy 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. 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 shelters 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. Housing, not shelter, is the prerequisite for home. It is elemental to the human spirit, not just a commodity.

Many partners are needed to deal with the homelessness crisis. The federal government has a leadership role to play in making affordable housing available to Canadians of the lowest income, especially those who face homelessness and impoverishment. In particular, our church is asking the federal government to:

- 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; and
- Integrate affordable housing into an overall poverty reduction strategy.

Federal money that supports affordable housing makes a difference in the lives of those most vulnerable to being priced out of the housing market. A federal strategy will help a variety of people and organizations to make a difference in the lives of our neighbours. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada urges the federal government to make housing for the poor and subsidized housing high priorities.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

cc: The Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development
The Hon. Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Hon. Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party
The Hon. Michael Savage, Liberal Critic for Human Resources and Skills Development
The Hon. Yves Lessard, Porte-parole du Bloc Québécois, Ressources humaines et développement social
The Hon. Denise Savoie, NDP Critic for Housing, Homelessness
Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate, The Anglican Church of Canada
ELCIC National Church Council