



# Congregational Housing Action Guide

for Edmonton  
Religious and Spiritual Communities

PREPARED BY THE  
Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative  
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# **Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative**

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# Introduction

This Congregational Housing Action Guide follows from the commitment of Edmonton faith community leaders in their March 17, 2011 Interfaith Statement to find new and creative ways to address the issues of homelessness and affordable housing in our communities. It comes out of a series of conversations over the past year, with clergy and laity from different faith traditions, about homelessness and affordable housing. One immediate question is: what can people in local congregations actually do to make a difference? This question is especially relevant as Edmonton moves into Year Three of Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

This Congregational Housing Action Guide is a first step. It contains specific suggestions including education, fund raising, volunteer commitments, "Welcome Home" sponsorships, neighbourhood NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) debates, and political advocacy. Wherever possible, specific examples are cited and contact information is included. This is a first try. Much has been missed. Our hope is that it can soon lead to a more comprehensive second edition.

Please direct suggestions to the editor:

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# How to Get Involved: Eleven Approaches

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## 1 Learn more

- Learn more about homelessness in our community and what is being done through Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness: A Place to Call Home, [www.endedmontonhomelessness.com](http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com)
- Have your congregation view the DVD introducing Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness: A Place to Call Home. Learn about the progress achieved so far by viewing the DVD on the Edmonton Homeless Commission's Year One Report to the Community. These DVDs are short (under 10 minutes) and can be viewed in conjunction with a worship service or as a part of a congregational meeting. Invite a guest speaker from a front-line agency. (DVDs are available through [www.endedmontonhomelessness.com](http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com))
- Attend the annual November HomeFest concert event, [www.homefest.ca](http://www.homefest.ca)
- Join with the Edmonton Homeless Memorial Remembrance Celebration (usually held in January), [www.ecohh.ca](http://www.ecohh.ca)
- Read the Edmonton Street News, [www.edmontonstreetnews.com](http://www.edmontonstreetnews.com)
- Check out the website of Homeward Trust, [www.homewardtrust.ca](http://www.homewardtrust.ca)
- Attend the monthly "Explore" public education sessions at Mustard Seed. Contact Sarah Nicolai-deKoning, [sarahndk@theseed.ca](mailto:sarahndk@theseed.ca)
- Learn more about Aboriginal culture. Of the more than 1400 Housing First program participants, approximately 40% have been identified as Aboriginal. While several faith congregations have established strong ties to Edmonton's Aboriginal community, there is still much more to do and to learn.

## 2 See first hand

- Spend time at a "front-line" agency which serves those who are homeless. Meet and talk with people who are experiencing homelessness. Make it personal.
- Many congregations already have an ongoing relationship with a front-line agency. Often this involves serving a meal to those who are living on the street. Dozens of congregations are already on a roster to serve a Sunday brunch at Inner City Pastoral Ministry, an evening meal at Mustard Seed, or a lunch at Marian Centre. Many United Church congregations have a long-term relationship with the Bissell Centre and the George Spady Centre in the inner city. Several west-end congregations help out at the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre. Members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a lay Roman Catholic organization, have day to day experience responding to the needs of those who are poor and homeless in Edmonton. The Salvation Army Addictions & Residential Centre delivers a variety of services in the inner city including food hampers, clothing, weekly breakfast and lunch, as well as social events for its residents. Hope Mission provides an emergency shelter, housing and meals in the inner city. Boyle Street Community Services assists homeless men and women through several programs.
  1. ICPM (Inner City Pastoral Ministry) - [www.icpmedmonton.ca](http://www.icpmedmonton.ca)
  2. Mustard Seed - [www.mustard.ab.ca](http://www.mustard.ab.ca)
  3. Marian Centre - call 780-424-3544 or [mceedmonton@shaw.ca](mailto:mceedmonton@shaw.ca)
  4. Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre - [www.jphawc.ca](http://www.jphawc.ca)
  5. St. Vincent de Paul Society – call 780-471-5577



6. The Salvation Army Addictions and Residential Centre - [administration@SArmy.edmontonARC.org](mailto:administration@SArmy.edmontonARC.org)
7. The Salvation Army Community and Family Services - call 780-424-9222
8. Hope Mission – call 780-422-2018
9. Mosaic Centre – call 780-722-3247 or [mosaiccentre@shaw.ca](mailto:mosaiccentre@shaw.ca)

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- Some congregations regularly serve meals to those in need from their own church buildings on a weekly or a monthly basis such as St. Faith’s Anglican Church at 118 Avenue & 93 Street, or Robertson-Wesley United and Christ Church Anglican in the Oliver neighborhood.
- Some congregations organize a food bank outreach from their buildings. St. Theresa’s Catholic Parish in Mill Woods has been doing this for several years. Sometimes, a small group of “regulars” takes on this outreach on a continuing basis on behalf of their congregations. The learning can be expanded by getting new people involved. Some congregations set up a roster rotating through a mix of first-timers and veterans. One Catholic parish makes a point of including members of their teenage confirmation class in their scheduled visits to ICPM. There can be important growth in awareness when members of congregations take time for group sharing and reflection after a front line outreach experience.

### 3 Become part of the Welcome Home sponsorship initiative

The Welcome Home program is being organized through the Edmonton Homeless Commission. This program seeks to partner volunteers from faith and community organizations with families and individuals needing assistance and personal

support as they transition from homelessness into long-term, sustainable housing in neighbourhoods all across the city.

For more information contact:  
Jay Freeman, Edmonton Homeless Commission  
780-443-8361 or [jay.freeman@edmonton.ca](mailto:jay.freeman@edmonton.ca)

A somewhat similar program, All Roads Lead Home, has been operating successfully in Calgary, [www.neighbourlinkcalgary.com](http://www.neighbourlinkcalgary.com).

### 4 Join with faith groups already organizing in your area

In recent years, local faith congregations have been organizing into regional ecumenical/interfaith groups in different parts of Edmonton to address shared social concerns including homelessness. Community social workers employed by the City of Edmonton have often supported these groups. Examples include:

- West Edmonton Interfaith Coalition on Poverty - John Campbell, [johncam@telusplanet.net](mailto:johncam@telusplanet.net)
- 118 Avenue – Dorian Smith, [Dorian.Smith@edmonton.ca](mailto:Dorian.Smith@edmonton.ca)
- NE Interfaith Networking Group – Katie Walker, [Katie.Walker@edmonton.ca](mailto:Katie.Walker@edmonton.ca)
- South Edmonton communities - “Edmonton Do Likewise Society”, Pastor Pam Reichenbach, [pamelar@telus.net](mailto:pamelar@telus.net) or phone 780-439-3654
- SW Interfaith – Karen Lee, [karen.lee@edmonton.ca](mailto:karen.lee@edmonton.ca) or phone 780-496-5922

City centre churches have worked together through the E4C agency for forty years. E4C is expanding its scope city wide and is inviting participation by faith congregations throughout the city, [www.e4calberta.org](http://www.e4calberta.org).



## 5 Join with Habitat for Humanity to build homes

Habitat for Humanity is a community-based, non-profit, Christian organization working for a world where everyone has a place to live. Habitat's mission is to mobilize volunteers and community partners in building affordable housing and promoting home ownership as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty.

This work is accomplished largely through the work of volunteers. Individuals and groups can help. Students at one church college, volunteered at a building site for a day. One church women's group provides the lunch for the building crew at the construction site. Several years ago, three local churches in SW Edmonton partnered with Habitat for Humanity to build a new house from start to finish.

For more information contact:  
Habitat for Humanity (Edmonton)  
780-479-3568  
[www.hfh.org](http://www.hfh.org)  
[help.habitat@edmonton.org](mailto:help.habitat@edmonton.org)



## 6 Support the No Room in the Inn campaign

Since 1999 Christian churches, in a partnership with the Edmonton and District Council of Churches and the Quality of Life Commission, have organized a Christmas campaign called No Room in the Inn (NRII) in support of affordable housing. Each year a specific affordable housing project is chosen. In 2009, 54 church congregations raised over \$61,000 in support of Harry Holt Place, the latest project of Edmonton Inner City Housing Society. The 2010 campaign invited faith congregations to support a new 24 unit project being constructed by the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre for Housing First clients.

For more information on NRII contact:  
Bob McKeon at [sjustice@caedm.ca](mailto:sjustice@caedm.ca)



## 7 Join with the GEA (Greater Edmonton Alliance) in community organizing

Building on an earlier success at Ascot Gardens in NW Edmonton, the Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA), a broad-based organization of churches, labour unions, community organizations, and small business, developed an innovative approach to preserve affordable housing for low income tenants in Edmonton's Strathearn neighbourhood in 2008. When faced with a redevelopment proposal that threatened the loss of their homes, GEA assisted tenants to organize into an effective tenant's organization. GEA, together with the organized tenants, were able to successfully negotiate with the developer, and join together with Habitat for Humanity to obtain financial support from the City of Edmonton. This effort ensured that the new housing development would include 200 – 300 subsidized rental units with additional Habitat for Humanity sponsored units with home ownership opportunities for qualified working families.

The GEA model demonstrates a way for faith communities to support the struggles of those facing the loss of their homes to gain long-term

housing security for themselves and their families.

For more information contact:  
Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA)  
Laura Kate Jeffreys, Lead Organizer  
[laura@greateredmontonalliance.com](mailto:laura@greateredmontonalliance.com)  
[www.greateredmontonalliance.com](http://www.greateredmontonalliance.com)

## 8 Reach out in your own neighbourhood

The issues of homelessness and affordable housing are not confined to Edmonton's inner city neighbourhoods. The successful elimination of homelessness in Edmonton will require the commitment of individuals and organizations in all parts of Edmonton.

Sometimes the best place for a faith congregation to start is in its own neighbourhood. St. Alphonsus Catholic Parish on 118 Avenue provides a good example. Edmonton Inner City Housing Society (EICHS) announced a new housing development associated with Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness located a few blocks from the St. Alphonsus church building. The pastor spoke with his parishioners about how the parish



might get involved. With the help of the Parish Outreach Team of Catholic Social Services, the pastor convened parish meetings and invited the Executive Director of EICHS to speak with parishioners after a Sunday worship service. This led to a creative discussion about how the parish could help provide a community welcome for the new EICHS residents, and develop an ongoing mutually supportive relationship. The parish members saw this as a first step towards a wider commitment to address the issues of homelessness in their community.

For more information, contact:

Fr. Bob Kasun CSB, Pastor, St. Alphonsus Catholic Parish at [bkasun@basilian.org](mailto:bkasun@basilian.org)

Sr. Mary Clare Stack UJ, Catholic Social Services Parish Outreach Team at [sister.maryclare@catholicsocialservices.ab.ca](mailto:sister.maryclare@catholicsocialservices.ab.ca)

are engaged in the issue of affordable housing in the St. Albert community. Through collective effort and individual citizen representations, several members became active participants in public debates about a proposed Habitat for Humanity project in St. Albert. Because of the controversial nature of the Habitat project in the community and within each congregation, individual members of SACFSJ acting as St. Albert citizens, with the exception of one member representing his congregation, gave presentations at City Council, conducted conversations with local city politicians and wrote letters to the editor of the St. Albert Gazette.

For more information contact:

St. Albert Christians for Social Justice Wilf Borgstede at [huskie55@telus.net](mailto:huskie55@telus.net)

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has prepared a helpful information guide, **Housing in My Backyard**, for neighbourhoods and housing organizations encountering NIMBY discussions: [www.actprogram.com/CMFiles/CRA\\_ACT\\_NIMBYGuide\\_WebEN.pdf](http://www.actprogram.com/CMFiles/CRA_ACT_NIMBYGuide_WebEN.pdf)

## 9 Become an advocate – participate in neighbourhood housing conversations

Increasingly, developers of proposed low income housing developments face local opposition. This is often called NIMBY (Not In My Backyard). Often, a relatively small group of vocal local residents dominate neighbourhood conversations. Too often, local faith congregations remain silent in these neighbourhood debates.

Members of local congregations can participate in neighbourhood NIMBY conversations. Challenge the myths about neighbourhood housing for low income people. Learn the facts. Move from NIMBY to YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard).

Members of an ecumenical social justice group, St. Albert Christians for Social Justice (SACFSJ),

## 10 Become an advocate – speak with elected government representatives about homelessness and affordable housing

Speak with politicians. Tell municipal, provincial, and federal elected representatives that you support Edmonton’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and the use of public funds to achieve its goals. As you learn more about these issues, be more specific in your communications with elected officials – state the specific government initiatives you support, and name what is missing or inadequate in present government housing programs.

The Edmonton Homeless Commission, [www.endedmontonhomelessness.com](http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com), is issuing annual report cards on the progress made in implementing Edmonton’s 10 Year Plan to End

Homelessness. Community organizations such as the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH), [www.ecohh.ca](http://www.ecohh.ca), and the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC), [www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca), provide timely analysis reports on government policies addressing homelessness and affordable housing. Consider becoming an individual or organizational member of ECOHH or the ESPC.

construction of new affordable housing units:

- Ottawa Multifaith Housing Initiative  
[www.multifaithhousing.ca](http://www.multifaithhousing.ca)  
Somerset Gardens, Ottawa – St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church
- Eastern Gate Manor, St. John's NL -  
St. John's First Assembly Pentecostal Church  
[www.cmhc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/sust/sust\\_041.cfm](http://www.cmhc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/sust/sust_041.cfm)

Churches can purchase additional land for housing development when developing new church sites. Housing can be an option when surplus church buildings in older neighbourhoods no longer serve as congregational worship space.

## 10 Financial and in-kind support for new affordable housing projects

### ***Garneau United Church/ Ashbourne Manor (Garneau Neighbourhood)***

A local congregation located on a prime real estate location decided to demolish their church building and partner to construct a high-rise providing long term care accommodations with a congregational worship space on the first floor.

### ***Christ Church Anglican Church***

For several years an Anglican congregation agreed to partner with E4C (a front line ecumenical social agency) and make available its vacant manse on the church grounds for transitional housing for women leaving the street who were pregnant or with young children.

### ***Calgary KAIROS, Acadia Place: A Place to Call Home Project***

Calgary churches are committing to raise \$1,500,000 as partners in an affordable housing project with 58 low income units.

For more information contact:

KAIROS Calgary

Frank Manzara at [fsmanzara@shaw.ca](mailto:fsmanzara@shaw.ca)

### ***CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation)***

The CMHC website provides examples of local faith congregations partnering through donations of land and funds to assist in the



# Other Canadian Multifaith Housing Organizations

## **Toronto, ON**

The Multifaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH)

[www.mfateh.ca](http://www.mfateh.ca)

## **Scarborough, ON**

Scarborough Interfaith Housing – The Caring Alliance

[www.caringalliance.ca](http://www.caringalliance.ca)

## **Ottawa, ON**

Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI)

[www.multifaithhousing.ca](http://www.multifaithhousing.ca)



## Other Cities

where faith communities are being invited to work together to address homelessness

## **Calgary Homeless Foundation**

[www.calgaryhomeless.com/users/folderdata/{C4EB039E-3A4F-4466-997D-D9961ADFBFAD}/CommunityProgramDescriptions\\_May2009.pdf](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/users/folderdata/{C4EB039E-3A4F-4466-997D-D9961ADFBFAD}/CommunityProgramDescriptions_May2009.pdf)

## **City of Toronto, Affordable Housing and the Faith Community**

[www.toronto.ca/housingportal](http://www.toronto.ca/housingportal)





## For further information: Some helpful books

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Dudley, Carl S. *Community Ministry: New Challenges, Proven Steps to Faith-based Initiatives*. Bethesda, Md: Alban Institute, 2002.  
(Guide for congregations initiating community ministries including housing)

Shook, Jill Suzanne, ed. *Making Housing Happen: Faith-based Affordable Housing Models*. Sr. Louis: Chalice, 2006.  
(Comprehensive description of US examples of faith groups initiating different models of affordable housing)





