

To Regina City Council, December 15, 2022

In support of 2023 budgeting to support Housing First Homeless Funding

My name is Kevin Vance, I am the lead pastor at Gentle Road Church of Christ in North Central Regina. I'm here to support the recommendation to include funding in the 2023 City of Regina budget to address our homelessness crisis. Thank you for taking the time to listen to us today. I would like you to know that I have invited several of my friends and members of our church to attend today and speak to this concern. As part of the faith community and the community of North Central Regina, this is very important to us.

In 2011, my wife and I and our three children moved from suburban Regina into North Central. We felt a strong calling from God to move into the neighbourhood and live among the people. Both my wife and I work in North Central as well. This has led us on a bit of an adventure, to say the least. The best part about it has been the people we have come to know and now call friends.

In preparing for this presentation, I made a quick list of people I know who have either been homeless or directly affected by it. I would like to share with you the last names of these people. However, since this is not permitted, I am going to tell you about some of them...

Many of these people have eaten at our table, and many have slept in our home. Two of them stayed with us for a year or longer. For their sake, I ask that you work together to end homelessness in Regina.

I want to tell you about one of these friends in particular. She was born at Sakimay First Nation and married a man from White Bear First Nation. She was a dear friend, who passed two years ago. One time about 10 years ago, she and I went to a soup kitchen for lunch. We sat together at our own table and we visited for an hour. By the end I was overwhelmed with sadness at listening to her story. She told me how she never went to residential school, because whenever the police came to get her, her parents told her to go and hide in the big bush. She would disappear for a couple of days and then come home. The hardest part though was hearing about the year she spent on the streets in Calgary. She was deep in her addiction then, running from a life of poverty and violence. I asked her if she spent the winter on the street, and she said yes. I asked her where she slept, and she said between the office buildings downtown, on the exhaust vents. She said sometimes she had a cat for company, and sometimes she didn't. She loved cats. She had a sign in her apartment that said, "The more I learn about men, the more I like cats."

The overwhelming feeling I had at the end of our visit was sadness. I had never experienced any of the hardships she had suffered in her life, and I likely never will. When we first met her years after her homeless time in Calgary, she was safely housed, sober and had her daughter

back. And she had a cat named _____. For the sake of our friend _____, I ask that you fully fund this Housing First initiative in 2023.

The last thing I want to say is, that what we spend our money on as a community is a reflection of our values. Several years ago we built a new stadium. I supported that initiative, and I am proud of our new stadium. It is a signature piece in our City. Now I am calling on us as a City and a community to spend \$15 million in 2023, in order to safely house the most vulnerable among us. That's the kind of city I want to live in, that's the kind of city I will be proud of. That will be a signature piece for us too!

Sincerely,

Kevin Vance
306-550-4441