



**Province of Ontario
Ministry of Finance Pre-budget Consultations
Submission by Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto
January 18, 2016**

*(**Note: Cardinal Collins appeared at the Toronto session of the Ontario Ministry of Finance pre-budget consultations on January 18, 2016. This is a transcript of his presentation. Verbal submissions were limited to 3 minutes.**)*

I am grateful for this opportunity. As Archbishop of Toronto, I serve as the spiritual leader of close to 2 million Catholics who worship in more than 30 languages each week at 225 Catholic churches from Mississauga to Oshawa, and from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay.

I would invite the government of our province to reflect on how it can effectively address the issue of homelessness, an issue that has been so ignored by everyone that it has become a full blown crisis not only in our province but across the country.

The stark reality is that 150,000 Canadians use a homeless shelter at some point in their lives. In Toronto alone, 5,000 people live outdoors, in emergency shelters, and other such facilities.

I applaud the provincial government for establishing the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness to provide valuable recommendations that must be acted upon if we are to tackle this crisis. While we have heard many announcements and promises in the past, it is now time to act.

Faith based organizations are deeply engaged in this issue; whether it is Toronto's Good Shepherd Refuge serving more than 1,300 meals each day, or Covenant House offering a 94 bed shelter for young people, or members of the St. Vincent De Paul Society making daily visits, two by two, to those in need of food and friendship. I invite our elected officials to visit any of our Catholic Charities. You will meet the beautiful people we serve each day.

They may be homeless, and sometimes struggle with mental health issues, or suffer from disabilities, but each has a name and a story, deserving of our interest, care and support. We must love people and use things instead of loving things and using people. These vulnerable men, women and children have been used and often discarded far too long. It is time for bold leadership on this issue.

Building on the recommendations from the Expert Advisory Panel, I would invite the provincial government to include the following priorities in the next budget:

- 1) The investment of significant resources to end chronic homelessness in Ontario.
- 2) The investment of significant resources to construct social, supportive and affordable housing units across our province.
- 3) The immediate adoption of clearly outlined timelines and benchmarks, working with federal and municipal partners on a national housing strategy and a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

I will be asking the leadership of the 26 Catholic Charities' agencies in the Archdiocese of Toronto to personally appeal to their members of provincial parliament on this issue.

In addition to encouraging other faith leaders in our province to step forward in this chorus of compassion, I will also invite our Catholic community to do the same.

I recognize the many challenges that you must address in governing our province. Be assured of my prayers. I simply ask you to consider, as a guiding principle of your deliberations, that the worth of a community is defined by the way it cares for those of its members who are most vulnerable. Ontario is our home; may it truly become so for our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters, who are homeless.