

ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Study Material for the Video on Housing Issues Background

Information

Affordable Housing

It is generally accepted by economists that a family or single person should spend up to one-third of income on buying or renting accommodation. To spend more than that is to restrict access to other necessities of a healthy life.

A large segment of our population have restricted incomes, generally through no fault of their own. Like everyone else they need a decent, healthy place in which to live. There is an obligation on our society to ensure that there are available units of housing which are available at prices that such people can afford. In our economy this can only be achieved by subsidizing the initial cost of the unit or reducing its rent through subsidy to a level

which is affordable to those on a limited income.

Supply of Affordable Housing

In Ontario there is not enough affordable housing available to meet the needs. The waiting period for such accommodation in the city of Toronto can be a matter of up to ten years. The same is true in many communities across the province. The result is that many people are living in sub-standard basement apartments or in rooming houses, which do not meet their basic needs. Some are in shelters or on the street.

Healthy Living

There is overwhelming evidence that healthy living depends on nutritious food, exercise and adequate shelter. In current circumstances, people are being forced to choose between having a place to live and having food on the table. The lack of affordable housing is causing health problems for many and putting additional strain on the health care system.

Format for a Workshop (two hours)

Prayer

The workshop should begin with a prayer related to the theme of the session, that is, housing and poverty.

Overview of the Issue (15-20 minutes)

The leader could outline the information supplied above and supplement it from their own knowledge and research. It would be helpful to discuss with participants their own experiences, and the experience of people they know, in the housing market.

The last five minutes of this section could be spent taking quick responses from the group to the question: "What would you do if you were informed that you were losing your current accommodation at the end of the month?"

The Video (one hour)

The video contains three stories (The Immigrant Family; The Single Mother; The Lady with Mental Health Issues). Divide the group into three and assign each group a story to follow and analyze. Show the video. Let the groups each respond for their segment to the following questions:

1. How did the family/person come to be in distress with regard to housing?
2. Was there any way in which they could, by their own efforts and given their circumstances, have avoided their difficulties?
3. What factors in the system caused them to be in distress?
4. Was the eventual solution a good one?
5. Is this a solution that would be applicable generally?

The whole group should listen to the reports and question each reporting group.

Generalization (30 minutes)

The last half hour should be spent in a general discussion addressing such issues as:

- What do we mean by "affordable housing"?
- Is affordable housing a "right"? Why or why not?
- How should our society try to organize the housing market?
- What is the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome and how would you address it?
- Where should housing rank in terms of priority for our governments with regard to other issues such as: health care, education, child poverty, foreign aid, the military, sports and the arts, accessibility for the handicapped?
- What lessons are there in these stories for public policy makers?

How could a group or an individual citizen take action on this issue, if so inclined?

Concluding Prayer

