

## Compassionate Committee for the Homeless in North Bay

### Article by Leah Pierce, Chairperson

There is a definite chill in the air by October in North Bay. It is not uncommon for Halloween to be snowy. During an Executive meeting of the Pro-Cathedral of the Assumption Catholic Women's League of Canada held in late October 2020, I shared a story of seeing a homeless person sleeping in a doorway of a downtown business. The man had two plastic bags at his side, no doubt holding all that he owned. The Holy Spirit visited the women in the meeting and filled them with compassion and a call to action.

Fatefully, a few days later the local media reported the findings of the Everyone Counts survey conducted in March which confirmed what we already knew, homelessness was on the rise in North Bay; and the fact that in the past 2 years it has risen 62% made it a crisis.

Five members of the Executive decided it was time to reach out to other churches in the community to form a Compassionate Committee for the Homeless in North Bay. This committee would include at least (1) representative from each church located in the North Bay downtown and beyond.

Fast forward to March 2021, the Compassionate Committee (what we call ourselves) has met twice, and our numbers have grown to seventeen volunteers including members from other CWL Councils in North Bay. It is evident that each committee member is passionate about addressing homelessness in North Bay. It is a spiritual calling.

As a committee, we researched what services the churches already offer, asked existing support services and organizations what gaps they feel need filling to address the immediate needs of the homeless, established a year-long strategic plan based on the identified needs (i.e. blankets in the winter, tents in the summer), and educated the various church parishes/congregations as to the needs of the homeless through the Good Samaritan Corner in each of the churches' bulletins, and encouraged them to support existing services and organizations through donations of clothing etc., monies and/or volunteering.



Ultimately, the goal is to find permanent housing for the 293 individuals that were counted as homeless in March 2020. We understand that to accomplish this goal we need to research existing successful models that address homelessness such as Built for Zero Canada and the Suswin Village Project developed from the Suswin Navigator Support

Program, provided by the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre. As well, to seek social justice, we will engage with community leadership. For instance, we have invited the chair of the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board to address the long-term needs of the homeless in North Bay, explain what we have found out through our research, and outline what models we think work best to address the homelessness crisis in North Bay.

Please keep the members of the Compassionate Committee in your prayers!