



# Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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## World Day of the Poor 2023

Dear People of God,

This Sunday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, is the World Day of the Poor. Pope Francis instituted the celebration of this Day in 2017 to encourage the Church to go forth beyond its own walls, to encounter poverty in the many ways in which it manifests in today's world.

The theme for this year's World Day is "*Do not look away from the poor*" (Tobit 4:7), and the Pope's message for the Day<sup>1</sup> is a reflection on the Book of Tobit. His message begins:

*The seventh annual World Day of the Poor is a fruitful sign of the Father's mercy and a support for the lives of our communities. As its celebration becomes more and more rooted in the pastoral life of the Church, it enables us to discover ever anew the heart of the Gospel.*

*Our daily efforts to welcome the poor are still not enough. A great river of poverty is traversing our cities and swelling to the point of overflowing; it seems to overwhelm us, so great are the needs of our brothers and sisters who plead for our help, support and solidarity.*

*For this reason, on the Sunday before the Solemnity of Jesus Christ King of the Universe, we gather around his Table to receive from him once more the gift and strength to live lives of poverty and to serve the poor.*

Here in Canada, the World Day of the Poor is closely followed by National Housing Day on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. National Housing Day was started in 2000 as a way of marking the challenges of housing insecurity in Canada. Today, many communities use this day to recognize the work that has already been done, and the work that still needs to be done to improve access to safe and affordable housing for everyone in Canada.

Living in the Diocese of Victoria, we are well aware of the devastating effects of the housing crisis in our communities. Response to this crisis is a moral imperative; our response could also create opportunities for the People of God to embark on a reconciling path with the Earth and with the poor in our midst.

We already have experience in our Diocese with using our land resources to create housing. In 1999, St. Clare Villa was built in Victoria on land previously occupied by the old Poor Clares Monastery and St. Patrick's Church; it offers 24 life-lease units for seniors. For the past five winters, St. Peter's Parish in Nanaimo has hosted the St. Peter's Winter Shelter, which gives those experiencing homelessness a safe sheltering option.

Most recently, Maitland Street Village in Port Alberni opened in 2021. Built on the site of the former Smith Memorial Catholic School, the energy-efficient family housing complex offers 46 units at various rates – market, rent geared to income, or subsidized. The project was a collaboration of the Diocese of Victoria, the Catholic Independent Schools of the Diocese of Victoria, and Holy Family Notre Dame Parish, and the Alberni Low Energy Housing.

Looking to other Christian communities we see more examples of stewardship. Brechin United Church in Nanaimo and Oakridge Lutheran Church in Vancouver are examples of newly-built churches that incorporate affordable and energy-efficient housing in their design. In Victoria, the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia hopes to build as many as 500 units of housing on the city block owned by Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria. As their Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee recently said, "*As a society, I think we have to look at how it's easier to find a place to park your car than it is to find a place to lay your head*".

<sup>1</sup> The Pope's full message may be read at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/06/13/0441/00986.html#in>



Most of the parish and school sites in our Diocese could accommodate the type of stewardship of the land that would allow them to participate with the poor and unhoused. Collaboration and communion will be necessary: parishes, schools, and the Diocese as a whole have limited capacity to do all that is needed to bring a project to completion, whether it is housing, a day care or preschool, worship space/church, or a church hall. However, in solidarity with other non-profit organizations and all levels of government, we can work together for the common good and well-being of all.

The Diocese of Victoria can create opportunities and solutions that align us to a reconciling path with the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. This is the offering, the fast that the Lord wants from us: *“to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house”* (Isaiah 58:7); then, he promises us, *“your light shall break forth like the dawn”* (Isaiah 58:8). In these dark times of global and local conflict, each of us can shine God’s love and hope into the world.

In Communion,

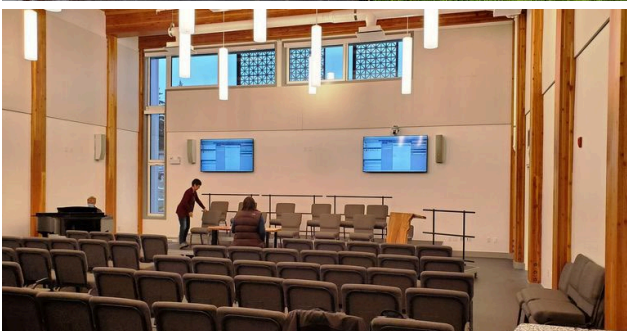
Most Reverend Gary Gordon  
Bishop of Victoria



St. Clare Villa, Victoria



Maitland Street Village, Port Alberni



Brechin United Church, exterior and interior



Oakridge Lutheran Church



Imagining church design incorporating housing