



PRAYERS AT MUNICIPAL COUNCIL MEETINGS IN ONTARIO

 **BC HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION**
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ISBN PENDING

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COVER DESCRIPTION

In front of the Blue Water Bridge in Sarnia is a blue sign that reads "Open for *Unconstitutional* Business." In front of the sign are two men delivering prayers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was produced on the unceded and traditional territories of the xwməθkwəyəm and kʷikʷəłəm peoples, and the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, Heudenosaunee and the Mississaugas of the Credit River (including land covered by Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties), and W̱SÁNEĆ and ləkʷəŋən-speaking peoples.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the prevalence of prayers at municipal council meetings in Ontario since the 2015 *Saguenay* decision ruled the practice to be unconstitutional. We reviewed municipalities in Ontario with a population over 1000 (n=360). Of the 328 for which data was available for inaugural meetings, 156 (47.6%) opened those meetings with prayer(s) and 21 (6.4%) opened with a 'moment of silence.' Data was available for the regular meetings of all 360 municipalities. Of those 9 (2.5%) opened their regular meetings with prayer and 62 (17.2%) opened with a 'moment of silence.' Another 8 (2.2%) municipalities opened their regular council meetings with a 'reflection.' We provide a qualitative discussion of the types and religiosity of the prayers observed at various councils, from the overtly Christian, to attempts at non-sectarian ecumenicism. We demonstrate the need for greater recognition among Ontario municipalities of the Supreme Court's clear ruling prohibiting the practice of including prayers in council meetings. We call on those municipalities identified herein to update their practices.

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT

This is the third in a series of reports from the BC Humanist Association that explore compliance with the *Saguenay* decision. In compiling these reports, we encourage municipalities to make their council meetings more accessible and welcoming to people of all beliefs and none. Each report follows a similar model and methodology but explores issues specific to the practice relating to ongoing municipal prayer in those jurisdictions.

The first report found that 23 municipalities in British Columbia opened their 2018 inaugural meetings with prayers. The second report found that six municipalities in Manitoba included prayers on their 2018 inaugural meetings. We also noted 4 municipalities in Manitoba that were including prayer in their regular council meetings.

While our study in municipalities across Canada is ongoing, several emerging trends can be identified: (1) The number of municipalities including prayer in their meetings (regular or inaugural) has declined since *Saguenay*. Some municipalities responded to the ruling by changing their practices: sometimes abolishing the practice altogether, other times altering or adjusting their procedures. (2) Despite this reduction, prayer continues to be included in some municipal council meetings—particularly inaugural meetings—across the country. (3) These prayers are disproportionately delivered by Christian men.

Our project seeks to highlight violations of the *Saguenay* ruling with the goal of increasing compliance with the ruling, thereby strengthening the separation of religion and government in Canada and ensuring that all are welcome in municipal council chambers across the country.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The practice of opening a municipal council meeting with a prayer was clearly identified as unconstitutional in 2015 when the Supreme Court of Canada rendered its verdict in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (Saguenay)*. Despite this ruling, a shockingly large number of Ontario municipalities included overtly Christian prayers in their 2018 inaugural council meetings and several continue to include prayers in their regular council meetings.

This is the third report in the BC Humanist Association's (BCHA) ongoing research into prayer in municipal council meetings across Canada. Our previous work reviewed British Columbia (BC) and Manitoba. The breadth of violations we found in Ontario greatly exceeded that which we expected given our previous work and reveals a serious breach in the separation of religion and government in the province.

In this report, we considered the 360 municipalities in Ontario with a population over 1,000. Using publicly available sources, such as meeting minutes and direct communications with municipal council staff, we collected data on practices at the 2018 inaugural meetings of 328 municipalities, and the practices at regular council meetings of 360 municipalities.

We identified 156 (47.6%) municipalities that included prayer in their 2018 inaugural council meetings, seven of which featured multiple prayers (often by the same religious representative). Of the 167 prayers delivered at those meetings, 151 (90.4%) were overtly Christian in nature or were delivered by a representative of a Christian denomination. Two (1.2%) were categorized as secular or non-sectarian and we could not determine the religious affiliation of the remaining eleven prayers. Prayers at inaugural meetings were predominantly delivered by people identified as male, with men delivering 119 of 167 prayers (71.3%).

Additionally, nine (2.5%) municipalities include a prayer in their regular council meetings, with six of these municipalities including prayer in both regular and inaugural meetings. We identified 21 municipalities that opened their 2018 inaugural meetings, and 62 that opened their regular meetings, with a moment of silence.

Of the prayers delivered at regular meetings, five were delivered by the mayor, one by a rotating councillor, one was delivered by the city clerk, and one was a 'silent prayer.' Finally, the City of Hamilton invited members of the public interested in to apply to provide an invocation, although this practice was discontinued during the pandemic. A cursory review of invocations delivered through this system indicated that they were predominantly Christian.¹

Using video recordings, we were able to transcribe many of the prayers delivered at these inaugural and regular council meetings. A qualitative review of the content of these prayers revealed they ranged from the overtly Christian—with some integrating theocratic tones or

¹ See for example City of Hamilton. (2019 October 23). "City council minutes 19-019." Available at <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=208878> (Retrieved October 23, 2022).

involving coercive elements—to failed efforts at ecumenicism and inclusion. While some of these latter elements could be identified as broadly secular reflective statements, we also found those that we classified as ‘stealth prayers,’ that is, seeming efforts to surreptitiously engage in legislative prayer.

While we do not identify them as prayers, we also noted the inclusion of forms of Indigenous content (territorial acknowledgements, blessings, traditional welcomes, etc.) in the 2018 inaugural meetings of 64 municipalities. Building on our past explorations of the complexities raised by such agenda items, we include here a discussion of how these practices may be viewed through a lens desiring to promote substantive equality and reconciliation.

We repeat our recommendation that municipalities adhere to the ruling in *Saguenay* and eliminate religious rituals from their future council meetings. Specifically:

- Municipalities should remove ‘prayers’ or ‘invocations’ from meeting agendas,
- Inaugural meetings should not grant speaking time to representatives of religious organizations, and
- If a municipality opts to replace these elements with a moment of silence or secular reflection, they must be attentive to the Christian hegemony in which many such practices have developed. A moment of silence should be introduced in such a way as to avoid any perception of intent that it be used for prayer, and a ‘secular reflection’ should not be used to mask religious content.

THE SAGUENAY DECISION

In December 2006, Alain Simoneau, a resident of Saguenay, Quebec, raised a concern about the opening of municipal council meetings with prayer. As an atheist, Simoneau felt uncomfortable with the displays of religion while attending meetings and asked the Mayor to stop the practice.² After the Mayor ignored his request, Simoneau turned to the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ), a body that investigates violations under the Quebec Charter.³ After considering the alleged discrimination, the CJPD determined that the prayer was discriminatory on the basis of religion, but chose not to pursue further action.⁴

In July 2008, Simoneau, with the assistance of Mouvement laïque québécois (MLQ), filed a case with the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal (the Tribunal).⁵ The Tribunal ruled that the “prayer was religious and was a breach of religious neutrality,” ordered the prayer to cease, and awarded Simoneau \$30,000 in damages.⁶ The Quebec Court of Appeal reviewed the case and reversed the decision of the Tribunal. It concluded that state neutrality “does not require the state to abstain from involvement in religious matters,” and determined that Simoneau had not been discriminated against.⁷

In October of 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada reviewed the case and prior decisions made by the Tribunal and the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court ruled that the Tribunal was correct to order the Saguenay Council to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber.”⁸ Although the Canadian and Quebec Charters do not explicitly impose a duty for the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and belief, the Court ruled that in order to protect the “variety of beliefs” under the Canadian Charter, the state must maintain true neutrality.⁹ Justice Gascon, who authored the decision, elaborated that:

True neutrality is concerned not with a strict separation of church and state on questions related to religious thought. The purpose of neutrality is instead to ensure that the state is, and appears to be, open to all points of view regardless of their spiritual basis. Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain

² *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015, SCC 16 [2015] 2 S.C.R. 3, paras. 6 and 8.

³ *Ibid.* para. 8; and see Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ). (n.d). “La commission: Origine et mission.” Available at <https://www.cdpdj.qc.ca/fr> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

⁴ *Saguenay*, para. 10.

⁵ *Ibid.* para. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.* paras. 15–17.

⁷ *Ibid.* paras. 20 and 22.

⁸ *Ibid.* paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

⁹ *Ibid.* paras. 68 and 71.

from taking any position on this subject. Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is ‘inclusive,’ it may nevertheless exclude non-believers.¹⁰

Justice Gascon concluded that no matter how inclusive the prayer, the Mayor and Council used their public powers to engage in a practice where they “adopted or favoured one belief to the exclusion of others” while acting on behalf of the state, thus turning council meetings into a “preferential space for people with theistic beliefs.”¹¹ Furthermore, Justice Gascon elaborated that the state has a “democratic imperative” to pursue “true neutrality” as this ensures that institutions, such as municipal council meetings, are a “neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally.”¹² We provide a detailed exploration of the *Saguenay* decision in Appendix A: The *Saguenay* Decision. Ultimately, *Saguenay* was clear: regardless of the content, municipal council meetings cannot include prayer.

“Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject.” Justice Gascon¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.* para. 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.* paras. 113 and 120.

¹² *Ibid.* paras. 73–75.

¹³ *Ibid.* para. 137.



METHODOLOGY

Canada-Wide Municipal Prayer Survey

Given *Saguenay*, as of 2015, no municipal council meeting in Canada should begin with or include prayer. However, after receiving reports that several municipalities in BC included prayer as part of their 2018 inaugural meetings, we launched an investigation into the continued occurrence of the practice. Of the 162 municipalities in the province, we identified 23 that included prayer(s) in their 2018 inaugural meeting and detailed our findings in *Duty of Neutrality Beyond Saguenay*.¹⁴ Following this report, we expanded the scope of our investigation to examine municipalities in every province and territory. When we turned our attention to Manitoba, we identified six municipalities that include prayer in their 2018 inaugural meetings and four that included prayer in their regular meetings.¹⁵ This report features our examination of Ontario municipalities.

Ontario Survey

Due to the large number of municipalities in Ontario, we restricted our survey to those with populations equal or greater to 1,000 according to the 2016 Census.¹⁶ For each of these 360 municipalities, members of our research team visited the municipal website and located the agenda, minutes, and, where possible, an audio/video recording of the first council meeting following the most recent election held in 2018. We refer to these first meetings after an election as 'inaugural meetings.' These types of meetings typically included ceremonial elements including piping or drumming, inaugural speeches, and the swearing in of newly elected officials. The 2018 inaugural meetings were the first inaugural meetings held post-*Saguenay*.

These materials were then reviewed to verify whether the meeting included a prayer or prayers. Municipalities found to have included a prayer in their inaugural meeting were noted, along with information regarding the person who delivered the prayer, when available.

¹⁴ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Laurence, N., Prasad, R., Thom, A., Darveau-Morin, A., & Bushfield, I. (2020 September). "Duty of neutrality beyond *Saguenay*: Prayers at municipal councils in British Columbia." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/municipal_prayer (retrieved December 26, 2020).

¹⁵ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Thom, A., Prasad, R., & Bushfield, I. (2022 March). "In open defiance: Unconstitutional prayers at municipal councils in Manitoba." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/in_open_defiance (retrieved December 6, 2022). This number has been updated to three as of 2021, after the municipality of West St Paul discontinued opening meetings with prayer.

¹⁶ Population data based on: Statistics Canada. (2017a). Population and dwelling counts, for Canada, provinces and territories, and census subdivisions (municipalities), 2016 and 2011 censuses (table). Population and Dwelling Count Highlight Tables. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-402- X2016001. Ottawa. Released February 8, 2017. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/statscan2016> (retrieved July 20, 2022).

To verify whether regular meetings of councils included prayer(s), we randomly selected three recent meetings of the council (post-April 2015 and therefore after *Saguenay*) and examined the agendas, minutes, and, where possible, any audio/video recordings of these meetings for prayer(s).

If we were unable to find agendas, minutes, or recordings of inaugural or regular council meetings, we contacted the municipality directly by email and/or phone. When information was not available through these means, we did a search for news articles concerning 2018 inaugural meetings. We found that a few news stories reported on meeting participants, and often mentioned the person who had delivered a prayer.

We classified any agenda that included an 'invocation' as a prayer, given a common understanding that an invocation is "a prayer of entreaty."¹⁷ While we did not classify them as prayers, we made note of the inclusion of moments of silence, as well as Indigenous territorial acknowledgements and welcome ceremonies at inaugural and regular meetings. This was done to gain a better understanding of the extent to which Indigenous content is incorporated into municipal council meetings. While largely symbolic, these elements can serve to further the goal of reconciliation, and we see a benefit to contributing this data to the literature.

During our BC survey, we found several municipalities included Indigenous 'blessings' and 'invocations' as part of their inaugural meetings. Classifying these elements is complex, and the line between a traditional welcome, an invocation, and a blessing is often blurry. It is unclear as to whether an Indigenous 'blessing' should, or could, be considered equivalent to a prayer emanating from a proselytizing faith tradition, something we explore in greater detail later. We made note of these elements when gathering data but treated them as distinct from prayers in our analysis.

When prayers were identified, we recorded the name, affiliation, and gender of the person delivering the prayer. We also made note of any procedures and practices surrounding prayers, such as recording whether prayers were delivered by the mayor at the beginning of regular meetings, whether the task rotated among members, or if the prayer were delivered by a guest. To better understand the procedures surrounding these prayers, we examined additional meeting minutes and agendas, and if the procedures were still unclear, we contacted the municipality for clarification.

We transcribed the prayers when recordings were available to capture the specific content of the prayers. For prayers delivered at regular sessions, we randomly selected three meetings and transcribed those prayers (see Appendix B: Prayer Transcriptions). We found that most municipalities did not have recordings of meetings, and in many cases, agendas/minutes would only make note of the name (and often the affiliation) of the person who delivered the prayer. As a result, we were only able to transcribe prayers from 51 of the 156 municipalities that included

¹⁷ See Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). "Invocation." In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/invocation> (retrieved November 16, 2022).

prayers at their inaugural meetings. We also transcribed prayers from nine municipalities that featured prayers at regular council meetings, although four of those communities ceased including prayers (or renamed them to 'reflections') prior to publication. We could not find recordings for four municipalities.

We also wanted to determine whether municipalities changed their practices because of *Saguenay*. To accomplish this, we also inspected the minutes of the 2014 and 2010 inaugural meetings and the minutes of three randomly selected regular meetings prior to April 2015 for evidence of prayers, using the methods outlined above.

Based on the findings from our study of BC, we hypothesised that inaugural meetings were more likely to include prayer(s) as compared to regular council meetings.¹⁸ Inaugural meetings tend to include more ceremonial elements, such as presentations from visiting dignitaries, oaths of office, drumming or piping, and similar performative elements and protocol. Religious elements, such as prayers, are sometimes included as part of these ceremonial elements by those operating under the misperception that this somehow solemnifies the proceedings.

¹⁸ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2020.

QUANTIFYING PRAYER PRACTICES

Inaugural Meetings

Using data from the 2016 census, we identified 360 municipalities with a population of 1,000 or more. We could not find information on the inaugural meetings for 32 communities. Of the remaining 328 municipalities, 156 (47.6%) included a prayer in their 2018 inaugural meeting (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Ontario municipalities with prayer in their 2018 inaugural council meeting, including name, affiliation, religion, and gender of person delivering the prayer

Municipality	Prayer delivered by	Affiliation	Religion	Gender
Amaranth	Bill Barwick	Compass Community Church	Christian	M
Asphodel-Norwood	Rev Don McLean	Norwood Community Church	Christian	M
Aylmer	Maj Rick Shirran	Salvation Army	Christian	M
Barrie	Rev Dr Susan Eagle	United Church	Christian	F
Belleville	Fr John Hibbard ¹⁹	Holy Rosary Catholic Church	Christian	M
	Pr Sean Stickler ²⁰	Pentecostals of Quinte	Christian	M
Bluewater	Rev Nadine Schroeder-Kranz	St Peter's Lutheran Church	Christian	F
Bracebridge	Rev Michael Barnes	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian	M
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Rev Diane Knowles	Bond Head United Church	Christian	F
Brant County	Dr David Ralph	Brant Community Church	Christian	M
Brighton	Rev Ken Lewis	United Church	Christian	M
Brock	Rev Les Hills	United Church	Christian	M
Brockton	Rev Megan Purdy	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Burlington	Rev Emma Duncar	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Caledon	Pr Bryan Fox	Union Presbyterian Church	Christian	M
Cambridge	Rev Frank Squires	Trinity Anglican Church	Christian	M
Central Elgin	Rev Mark Perry	United Church	Christian	M
Central Frontenac	Pr Johnathan Asquith	Black Creek Baptist Church	Christian	M
Centre Hastings	Rev Harold Toews	Faith Baptist Church	Christian	M
Centre Wellington	Pr Michel Albano	Grace Christian Fellowship	Christian	M
Chapleau	Pr Dan Lee	Chapleau Pentecostal Church	Christian	M

¹⁹ Delivering prayers for Mayor Panciuk.

²⁰ Delivering a 'Benediction.'

Chatham-Kent	Fr Don Pumputis ²¹	Avon-Thames Catholic Family of parishes	Christian	M
	Pr Alan McIntyre ²²	Unknown	Christian	M
Clearview	Rev Ray Dobson	Christian Clearview Trinity Anglican	Christian	M
Cobalt	Evelynn Picard	Long time resident	Unknown	F
Collingwood	Rev Donna Wilson	Erie Street Community Church	Christian	F
Cramahe	Rev Anja Guignon	United Church	Christian	F
Dawn-Euphemia	Myrna Yakubovich	Senior of the Year	Unknown	F
Dryden	Pr Jacob Letkeman	Emmanuel Baptist Church	Christian	M
Dutton/Dunwich	Rev Andrew Thompson	St Andrews Presbyterian Church	Christian	M
Dysart et al	Rev Ken McClure	St George's Anglican Church	Christian	M
East Ferris	Tim Foster	St Thomas d'Aquin Church	Christian	M
East Gwillimbury	Don Sinclair	Retired Town Solicitor	Unknown	M
East Zorra-Tavistock	Pr Joyce DeGier-Vanderspek	Innerkip Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Elizabethtown-Kitley	Rev Lynne Gardiner	St. Andrew's United Church in Toledo	Christian	F
Enniskillen	Dn Rudy Terpstra	Branch 216 of the Royal Canadian Legion	Christian	M
Essa	Pr Chris Atkinson	Pinewoods Chapel	Christian	M
Fort Erie	Pr Julio Romero ²³	Trinity Lutheran Church	Christian	M
	Rev Dan Bennett ²⁴	St Paul's Anglican Church	Christian	M
	Rev Martha J Lockwood ²⁵	Central United Church	Christian	F
Fort Frances	Pr Brian Keffer	Fort Frances Lutheran Church	Christian	M
Georgian Bluffs	Pr Paul Lapsley	Shallow Lake Community Church	Christian	M
Georgina	Pr Bryan Vaughan	Hope for Today Fellowship	Christian	M
Goderich	Rev Kate Ballagh-Steeper ²⁶	Lakshore United Church	Christian	F
	Rev Kate Ballagh-Steeper ²⁷	Lakshore United Church	Christian	F

²¹ Delivering the opening prayer.

²² Delivering a closing prayer

²³ Delivering an invocation.

²⁴ Delivering a prayer of dedication.

²⁵ Delivering a closing prayer. Note that Rev Lockwood was also the emcee for Fort Erie's inaugural council meeting.

²⁶ Delivering an opening prayer.

²⁷ Delivering a closing prayer.

Grand Valley	Allan Taylor	Unknown	Unknown	M
Greater Madawaska	Rev William Griffiths	Calabogie Bible Fellowship	Christian	M
Grey Highlands	Rev Adam Nickell	Gentle Shepherd Church	Christian	M
Grimsby	Max Woolaver	Grace Christian Fellowship	Christian	M
Haldimand County	Tom Patterson	Former Councillor	Christian	M
Haliburton	Rev Beverly Hicks	Northland Faith Church	Christian	F
Hamilton	Fr Tony O'Dell	St Patrick's Parish	Christian	M
Hamilton (Township)	Sandra Bell-Buttars	Civil Marriage Officiant	Secular	F
Hanover	Pr Lyndsay McGregor	Hanover Missionary Church	Christian	F
Hastings Highlands	Rev Marilyn Zehr	United Church	Christian	F
Highlands East	Rev David Watson	Gooderham United Church	Christian	M
Howick	Pr Gary Goodkey	Gorrie Bible Fellowship	Christian	M
Huntsville	Maj Darren Wiseman	Salvation Army Community Church	Christian	M
Huron East	Pr Steve Hildebrand	Egmondville United Church	Christian	M
Huron-Kinloss	Marsha Roberts	St Andrews United Church	Christian	F
Ignace	Pr Tim Barker	New Life Church Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	Christian	M
Kawartha Lakes	Pr John Boyachek	The Lindsay and District Ministerial Association & Fairview Baptist Church	Christian	M
Kenora	Roy McMillan	Council member	Unknown	M
Kincardine	Rev Gordon Dunbar	Dunbar Parish Church	Christian	M
King	Rev Sheilagh Ashworth	Anglican Parish of Lloydtown	Christian	F
Kitchener	Fr Dan Lobsinger	Congregation of the Resurrection	Christian	M
Lake of Bays	Thomas Brown	Fire Chaplain	Christian	M
Lambton	Myles Vani	Inn Of The Good Shepherd	Christian	M
Lambton Shores	Rev Dr Kate Crawford	Grand Bend United Church	Christian	F
Lanark Highlands	Rev Shelley Roberts	Balderson United Church	Christian	F
LaSalle	Fr Stan Fraser	Windsor Fire and Rescue Padres Corner	Christian	M
Laurentian Valley	Pr Craig Smith	Unknown	Christian	M
Leamington	Rev Ruth Boehm	Grace Christian Fellowship	Christian	F
Leeds and the Thousand Islands	Pr Dan Massey	Pine Grove Community Church	Christian	M
Leeds-Grenville	Rev Myra Garvin	United Church	Christian	F

Lennox and Addington	Jim Hegadorn	Council member	Unknown	M
Loyalist	Rev Steve Ambury	United Church Odessa	Christian	M
Madawaska Valley	Suzanne Klatt	Chief Administrative Officer	Unknown	F
Malahide	Erica Unger-Grieve	Manager of Member Services, Kindred Credit Union, Aylmer Branch	Unknown	F
Markham	Imam Yūsuf Badāt	Islamic Foundation of Toronto	Muslim	M
Meaford	Maj Neil Parker	United Church	Christian	M
Melancthon	Rev Johanna Vanderspek	Keswick United Church	Christian	F
Middlesex Centre	Pr Blair Mercer	Gateway Church	Christian	M
Midland	Fr Michael Knox	Martyr Shrine	Christian	M
Minden Hills	Rev Canon Joan Cavanaugh	Anglican Church	Christian	F
Minto	Pr Phil DesJardine	Christian Evangelical Missionary Church	Christian	M
Mississauga	Msgr Owen Keenan	Roman Catholic Church	Christian	M
Mississippi Mills	Rev Mary Royal-Duczek	Almonte United Church	Christian	F
Muskoka	Rev Sue Woods	United Churches of Bala and Port Carling	Christian	F
Muskoka Lakes	Rev Sue Woods	United Church	Christian	F
New Tecumseth	Pr Darryl Price	Alliston Pentecostal Church	Christian	M
Newmarket	Fr Efren Alvarez-Pelayo	St John Chrysostom Parish	Christian	M
	Imam Mohammad Bemat	Islamic Centre	Muslim	M
	Rabbi Mendy Grossbaum	Chabad Newmarket	Jewish	F
	Pr Garry James	Valley View Alliance Church	Christian	M
Niagara Falls	Fr Chris Kulig	Mount Carmel Monastery	Christian	M
Niagara-on-the-Lake	Rev Rudy Dirks ²⁸	Niagara United Mennonite Church	Christian	M
	Rev Dorthy Hewlett ²⁹	Christ Anglican Church	Christian	F
Norfolk County	Pr Bill Wiebe	Port Rowan Community Church	Christian	M
North Bay	Rev Dr Ted Harrison	Trinity United Church	Christian	M
North Dumfries	Rev Canon Mario Hryniewicz	Holy Trinity Anglican Church	Christian	M

²⁸ Delivering an invocation.

²⁹ Delivering a benediction.

North Glengarry	Fr Ernest Leger	Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall	Christian	M
North Huron	Pr Dale Hussey	Unknown	Christian	M
North Perth	Rev Charmilia Ireland	St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Molesworth	Christian	F
North Stormont	Rev Lois Gaudet	Avonmore-Finch-Martintown Pastoral Charge	Christian	F
Norwich	Rev Sydney Elias	Norwich United Church	Christian	M
Oakville	Rev Jeff Ward	Oakville Interfaith Council, St Cuthbert Anglican Church	Christian	M
Orillia	Rev Gerry McMillan	Ontario Provincial Police Chaplain	Christian	M
Otonabee-South Monaghan	Rev Nancy Wilson	United Church	Christian	F
Parry Sound	Rev Nelson Small	Trinity Anglican Church	Christian	M
Pelham	Dr John Course	Holy Trinity Anglican Church	Christian	M
Pembroke	Dn Adrien Chaput	St Columbkille's Cathedral	Christian	M
Penetanguishene	Fr Silvio Eljuga	St Anne's Parish	Christian	M
Petawawa	Fr Steven Ballard	Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow	Christian	M
Petrolia	Pr Alex Craig	First Baptist Church	Christian	M
Pickering	Mel Finlay	Nation at Prayer	Christian	M
Point Edward	Rev Kristen Aikman	St Paul's Anglican Church	Christian	F
Prescott	Lynda Joannis	St Lawrence Academy	Christian	F
Prince Edward County	Rev Audrey Whitney	United Church	Christian	F
Quinte West	Fr Tim Harrison	St Peter's Catholic Parish	Christian	M
Ramara	John Appleby	Former councillor	Unknown	M
Red Lake	Pr Keith Graber	Grace Community Church	Christian	M
Richmond Hill	Rev James Ravenscroft	United Church	Christian	M
Rideau Lakes	Arie Hoogenboom	Mayor	Christian	M
Russell	Pierre Leroux	Mayor	Non-sectarian	M
Saugeen Shores	Pr David Baker	Southport Pentecostal Church	Christian	M
Sault Ste Marie	Sister Mary Sammor	Sisters of St Joseph of Sault Ste Marie	Christian	F
Selwyn	Rev Dr Anne Gowan-Blinns	Bridgenorth United Church	Christian	F
Shelburne	Rev Gord Horsley	Abiding Place Ministries	Christian	M
Simcoe County	Dennis Roughley	Past Warden	Unknown	M
South Bruce	Fr Michael Anderson	Immaculate Conception Church	Christian	M

South Dundas	Rev Jon Martin	Anglican Parish of South Dundas	Christian	M
South Glengarry	Rev John Noordhof	Christian Reformed Church	Christian	M
South River	Larry Jeffrey	Lay Minister & Chaplain of South River Branch 390 Legion	Christian	M
Southgate	Pr Chris Lang	Dundalk Wesleyan Church	Christian	M
Southwest Middlesex	Rev Deb Dolbear Van Bilsen	Glencoe Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Springwater	Rev Jonathan Turtle	St Paul's Anglican Church	Christian	M
St Catharines	Pr Craig Danielson	Calvary Church, Chaplain of Niagara Regional Police Services	Christian	M
St Marys	Rev Gwen Ament	St Marys Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Stratford	Fr Dick Bester	St Joseph's Church	Christian	M
Strathroy-Caradoc	Pr Peter Hoytema	Westmount Christian Reformed Church	Christian	M
Tay	Fr Michael Knox	Martyr Shrine	Christian	M
Tay Valley	Rev Shelley Roberts	Balderson United Church	Christian	F
Tecumseh	Fr Gary Goyeau	Roman Catholic Diocese of London	Christian	M
Thames Centre	Sr Pr Jeff Strokan	Dorchester Community Church	Christian	M
The Nation	Francois St Amour	Mayor	Unknown	M
Thorold	Bp John O'Mara ³⁰	Our Lady of the Holy Rosary	Christian	M
	Bp John O'Mara ³¹	Our Lady of the Holy Rosary	Christian	M
	Bp John O'Mara ³²	Our Lady of the Holy Rosary	Christian	M
Thunder Bay	Pr Nancy Ringham	Thunder Bay Council of Clergy	Christian	F
Timmins	Pr Sean Lee	Grace Bible Chapel	Christian	M
Tiny	Rev Elise Robitaille	Brethren in Christ Church	Christian	F
Uxbridge	Pr Andrew Allison	St Paul's Presbyterian Church	Christian	M
Wainfleet	Pr Brian Lofthouse	Port Colburne Brethren in Christ Church	Christian	M
Warwick	Rev Carey Wagner	Watford United Church	Christian	M
Wasaga Beach	Dr John Hamilton	Wasaga Community Church	Christian	M
Waterloo	Rev Brooke Ashfield	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian	F
Wawa	Dn Peter Chalykoff	St Monica's Roman Catholic Church	Christian	M

³⁰ Delivering an invocation.

³¹ Delivering an 'inspirational reading.'

³² Delivering a blessing.

Welland	Fr Raymond Fenech Gonzi	St Mary Catholic Church	Christian	M
West Lincoln	Rev Clarence Bouwman	Canadian Reformed Church	Christian	M
West Perth	Rev John G Procee	Free Reformed Church of Bornholm	Christian	M
Whitchurch-Stouffville	Rev Graham Clinton	In2one Community Church	Christian	M
Whitewater Region	Rev Kevin Moratz	St Andrew's United Church	Christian	M
Wilmot	Pr Ken Jacob	New Hamburg Christian Centre	Christian	M
Woodstock	Pr Robin Birch	Oxford Baptist Church	Christian	M
Woolwich	Pr Wendy Janzen	St Jacob's Mennonite Church	Christian	F
York	Pr Dr Mansfield Edwards	Adventist Chaplain of York Regional Police	Christian	M

Total: 156

Abbreviations used:

Bp: Bishop
Dn: Deacon

Fr: Father
Maj: Major

Msgr: Monsignor
Pr: Priest

Rev: Reverend

Nearly all the prayers, 151 (90.4%), were delivered by representatives of various Christian sects or referenced explicitly Christian sectarian language (see Figure 1). Here 'sectarian language' refers to explicit religious content, usually words but sometimes structure, belonging to a specific faith tradition. Of the remaining 16 prayers, only three (1.8%) were delivered by representatives of non-Christian faiths. Notably two of those prayers, one Jewish and one Muslim prayer, were delivered in Newmarket alongside two prayers delivered by Christian clergy. Another Muslim prayer was delivered in Markham.

We classified the prayer delivered by Pierre Leroux, Mayor of Russell, as 'non-sectarian' as it was simply a reading of the preamble to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: "Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection." We discuss this practice in greater detail below. Because the prayer in the Township of Hamilton was delivered by a civil marriage officiant, we classified it as secular. We could not determine the religion of the remaining eleven prayers.

During our review, we found seven municipalities—Belleville, Chatham-Kent, Fort Erie, Goderich, Newmarket, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Thorold—had more than one prayer or related religious practice, at their inaugural meeting. These included opening and closing prayers, Bible readings, benedictions or blessings on the council. Therefore, in total, 167 prayers were delivered in 156 municipalities.

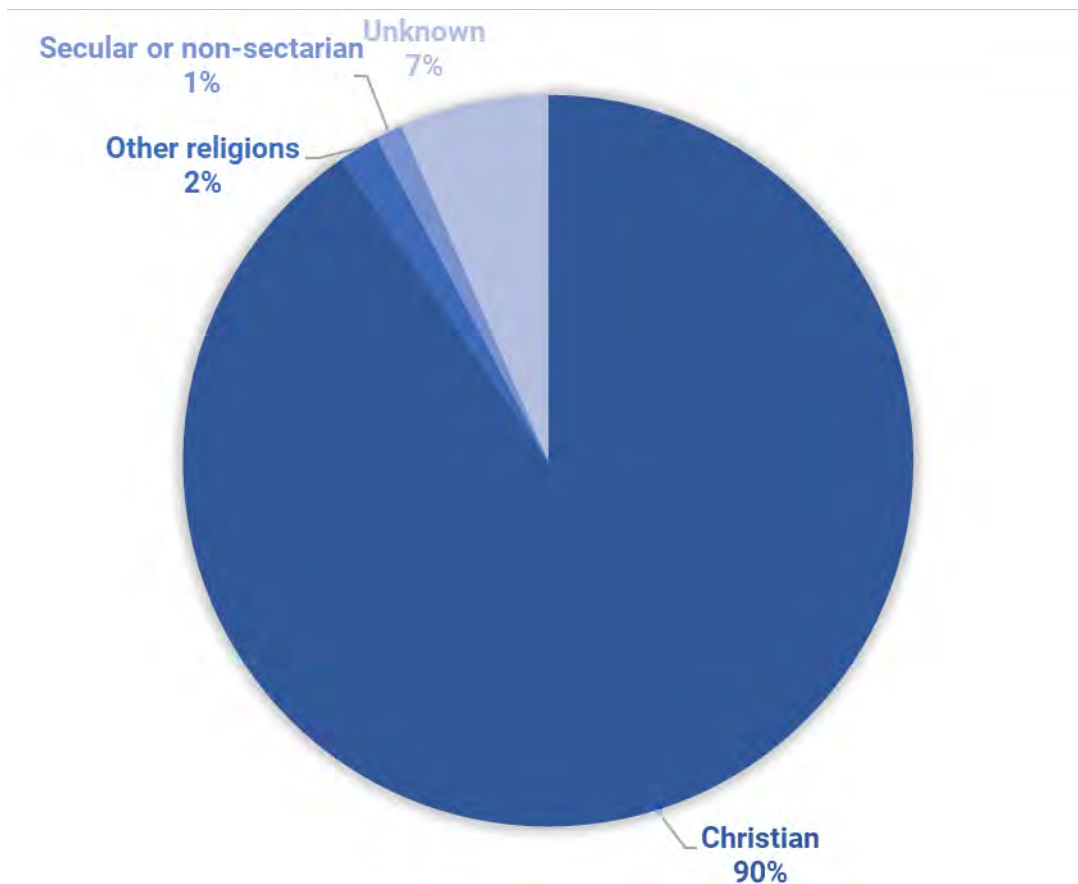


Figure 1 – Religious representation in Ontario's 2018 Inaugural Council Meeting Prayers

An overwhelming majority of the prayers, 119 (71.3%), were delivered by men. For reference, according to the 2016 Census, 48.8% of Ontarians were male.³³ The remaining 48 prayers were delivered by women. Five prayers were delivered by current or former members of municipal councils. Five other prayers were delivered by city staff or community members: A civil marriage officiant in the Township of Hamilton, the 'senior of the year' in Dawn-Euphemia, a retired town solicitor in East Gwillimbury, the chief administrative officer in Madawaska Valley, and a staff member of a local credit union in Malahide.

Additionally, 21 (6.4%) municipalities opened their 2018 inaugural council meeting with a moment or minute of silence (see Table 2). The Municipality of Tweed included an "Affirmation of Office" (see Figure 3).

³³ Statistics Canada. (2017b). Ontario [Province] and Canada [Country] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (retrieved August 15, 2022).

Table 2 – Ontario municipalities with moments of silence in their 2018 Inaugural Council Meeting

Alnwick/Haldimand	Kingsville	Port Hope
Brampton	Kirkland Lake	Rainy River
Deseronto	Lakeshore	Renfrew (County)
Douro-Dummer	Montague	Shuniah
Faraday	North Algona Wilberforce	St. Joseph
Guelph	Ottawa	Toronto
Kingston	Perth East	Wellesley

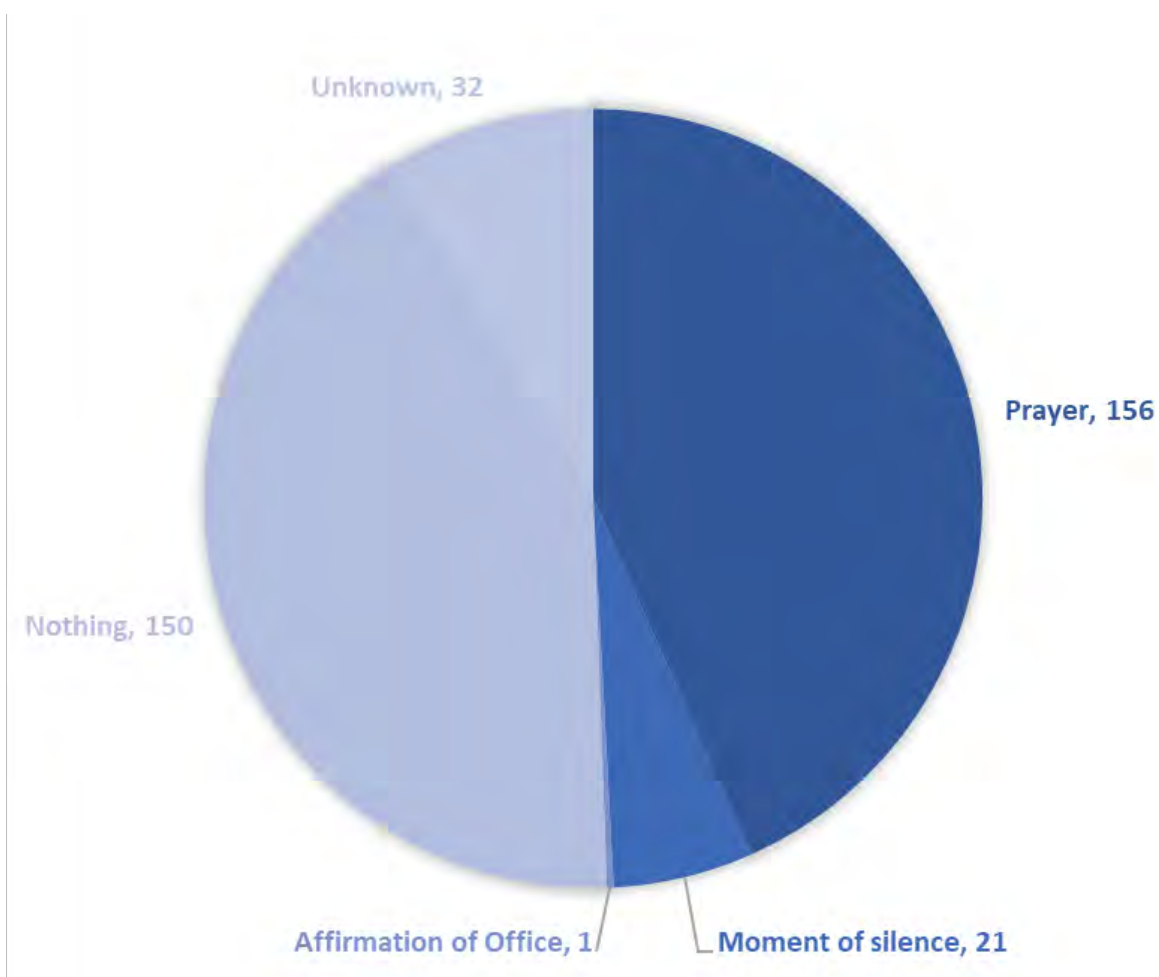


Figure 2 – Frequency of practices in Ontario municipalities inaugural council meetings

Regular Meetings

For regular council meetings, we found data for all 360 Ontario municipalities with populations over 1,000. While we found that most, 281(78.1%), began their business with no formal ritual, among those with a ceremonial element, there was significant variation in practice (Figure 3). We explore each of these categories in greater detail below.

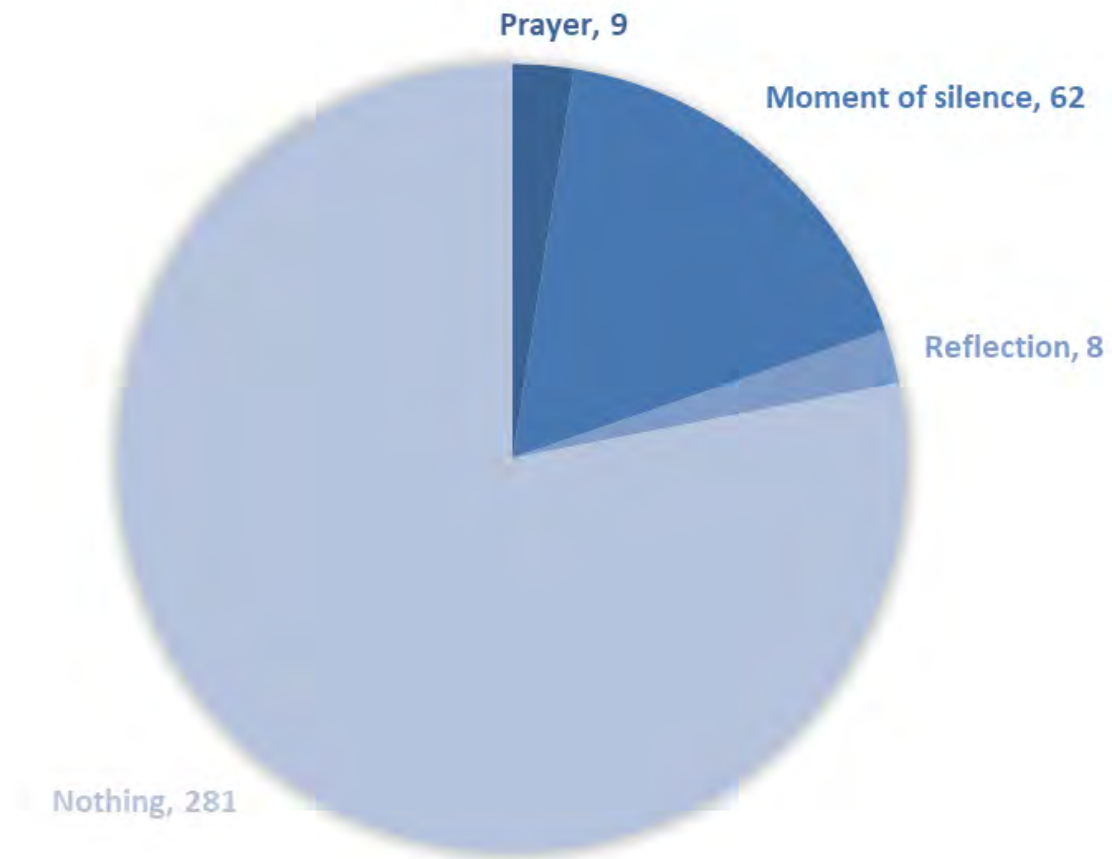


Figure 3 – Frequency of rituals opening regular council meetings of Ontario municipalities

Prayers

We found nine (2.5%) municipalities that featured a prayer in their regular council meetings. This included four municipalities whose agendas/minutes listed the item as an 'invocation.' Most municipalities (six) that included prayer in their regular council meetings also included prayer in their inaugural meetings. We lacked data on whether Atikokan held prayers during their inaugural meeting.

Table 3 – Ontario municipalities with prayer at regular council meetings.

Municipality	Delivered by	Description in Agenda
Atikokan ³⁴	None	Silent prayer
Brantford ³⁵	Mayor	Invocation
Clarence-Rockland ³⁶	Councillor	Prayer
Fort Erie ³⁷	Clerk	Invocation
Hamilton ³⁸	Clergy Member	Invocation
Laurentian Valley ³⁹	Mayor	Prayer
Pembroke ⁴⁰	Mayor	Opening Prayer or Reflection
Pickering ⁴¹	Mayor	Invocation
Whitewater Region ⁴²	All Council Together	Prayer

Total: 9

³⁴ Town of Atikokan. (2020 September 14). "Town of Atikokan council meeting agenda." Available at <https://atikokan.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/96009/?preview=99169> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

³⁵ City of Brantford. (2021 March 23). "City Council." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLT61whQwRc> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

³⁶ City of Clarence-Rockland. (2017 June 19). "Corporation of the City of Clarence-Rockland regular meeting minutes," Available at <https://clancerockland.civicweb.net/document/27665/> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

³⁷ City of Fort Erie. (2020 February 26). "Regular council meeting - February 18, 2020." Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jIMfJNpoul (retrieved October 10, 2022).

³⁸ City of Hamilton (2019 February 13–14). "City Council minutes 19-003." Available at <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=184831> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

³⁹ Town of Laurentian Valley. (2020 July 21). "Township of Laurentian Valley - July 21, 2020 council meeting." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v48gaaA03UQ&t=550s> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴⁰ City of Pembroke. (2020 September 15). "City of Pembroke - combined committee & council meeting - September 15, 2020," Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwdegVHF0v4&t=5478s> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴¹ City of Pickering. (2020 September 28). "Electronic council meeting September 28, 2020." Available at <https://www.viddler.com/v/91b98336?secret=67981576> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴² City of Whitewater. (2019 November 20). "Regular council - 20 Nov 2019." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiyToN11IQo> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

Moments of Silence

During our review, we came across other (non-Indigenous) practices at council meetings that did not easily fit within the category of ‘prayer.’ In many ways, these practices represent attempts to secularize prayers—a process we consider in greater detail in the discussion of ‘stealth prayers’ below. The most common practice was moments of silence.

From our sample of 360 Ontario municipalities, we found that 62 (17.2%) included some version of a moment of silence at the start of their regular meetings (see Table 4). As the terminology varied quite significantly, we grouped together those practices where the words “moment” or minute” and “silence” or “silent” was included in the minutes or when there was an intentional silence in the recording of the meeting. We also included any “moments of reflection” where there was no recording, though we could not confirm if there was a specific statement read out in conjunction with, or announcing, the moment of reflection.

Table 4 – Ontario municipalities with moments of silence at regular council meetings.

Adelaide-Metcalfe	Fort Frances	Montague	Severn
Admaston/Bromley	Georgina	New Tecumseth	Shuniah
Alnwick/Haldimand	Greater Sudbury	North Algona Wilberforce	Simcoe (County)
Asphodel-Norwood	Guelph	Orillia	St. Joseph
Aylmer	Haldimand County	Oro-Medonte	Stratford
Bancroft	Hearst	Ottawa	Tay
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Kawartha Lakes	Perth East	Tecumseh
Brampton	Kingsville	Perth South	The Blue Mountains
Brock	Kirkland Lake	Peterborough	Thunder Bay
Chatsworth	Lakeshore	Port Hope	Tillsonburg
Cobourg	Lanark	Puslinch	Tiny
Cornwall	LaSalle	Rainy River	Toronto
Douro-Dummer	Meaford	Renfrew (County)	West Grey
Emo	Midland	Sarnia	Wilmot
Essex (County)	Milton	Scugog	
Faraday	Mississippi Mills	Selwyn	

Total: 62

As we did not have video recordings for many of these municipalities, we cannot quantify how all these moments were introduced. Where we were able to observe the practice, moments were most frequently led by the mayor, as chair of the meeting. The way in which these practices are introduced is significant and is something that we explore in greater depth below.

Other Non-Sectarian Practices

In addition to moments of silence, eight municipalities began their meetings with a “reflection” being read out (see Table 5). These practices varied significantly between each community and are discussed later.

Table 5 – Ontario municipalities that began their regular council meetings with a reflection

Ajax	Hawkesbury	Russell
Belleville	Petrolia	Wellesley
Clarington	Prescott and Russell	West Lincoln

Total: 8

Indigenous content in council meetings

While the intent of this report is to explore legislative prayer practices, we came across a growing number of councils that were opening their meetings with Indigenous content. This took many forms, such as an ‘Indigenous or traditional welcome ceremony,’ ‘territorial acknowledgement,’ or ‘Indigenous blessing.’ These elements often contained elements and language that would be associated with religion; however, we ultimately did not consider them to be equivalent to prayers, given the important symbolic component to reconciliation and the complex nature and significance of these types of elements. We will explore the complexities of these rituals in greater detail below.

We identified 64 municipalities that included Indigenous ceremonies or land acknowledgements in their inaugural meetings (Table 6). Of those, 34 also included a prayer or invocation. The content, duration, and significance of these elements varied considerably. In some cases, a territorial acknowledge was a short *pro forma* statement read by an official. In other cases, a lengthy and thought-provoking reflection on the relationship of the local Indigenous community and the nature of colonialism was delivered. Similarly, a traditional welcome can constitute a few brief words by an invited elder or entail an elaborate ceremony with various performative and musical elements such as drumming, dancing and/or songs.

As an example, the Town of Markham invited Suzanne Smoke, Golden Eagle Woman from Alderville First Nation sits with the Bear Clan, and her daughter Cedar Smoke, Ogima Geeziko Kwe, to its 2018 inaugural meeting to provide an opening land acknowledgment.⁴³ The City of Trent Hills had a member of the Alderville First Nations provide greetings and a smudging ceremony at their meeting.⁴⁴ The inaugural meeting for the Region of Waterloo included several Indigenous elements: a land acknowledgment, an educational presentation on the importance

⁴³ City of Markham. (2018 December 7). “Council minutes (inaugural meeting).” Available at <https://pub-markham.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=bd23074b-d2e6-4c5b-a029-4ca322ad1d9b&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴⁴ City of Trent Hills. (2018 December 3). “Council meeting - December 3, 2018.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1F9IWDIkduo> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

of tobacco in the region by Chair-Elect Redman, a 'Burning of Sage', and Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak singers from the Chi Meegwetch Nation singing 'The Seven Sacred Teachings.'⁴⁵

Table 6 – Ontario municipalities with Indigenous content in their 2018 inaugural council meetings

Ajax	Georgian Bay	Markham*	Owen Sound	Tecumseh*
Barrie*	Goderich*	Meaford*	Parry Sound*	The Nation*
Black River-Matheson	Gravenhurst	Midland*	Peel	Thunder Bay*
Brampton	Greenstone	Mississauga*	Peterborough	Tiny*
Burlington*	Guelph	Muskoka*	Prince Edward County*	Toronto
Cambridge*	Hamilton*	Neebing	Ramara*	Trent Hills
Clarington	Innisfil	Newmarket*	Renfrew (County)	Vaughan
Cornwall	Kincardine*	North Bay*	Sarnia	Region of Waterloo
Durham	Kitchener*	Northumberland	Sault Ste Marie*	Wawa*
Dysart et al*	Lennox and Addington*	Oakville*	Selwyn*	Whitchurch-Stouffville*
Faraday	Lincoln	Orillia*	Shuniah	Wilmot*
Fort Erie*	London	Oshawa	St Catharines*	Windsor
Fort Frances*	Manitouwadge	Otonabee-South Monaghan*	St Charles	

Total : 64

* indicates the municipality also included a prayer in its inaugural council meeting.

Municipal responses

Some municipalities ceased or altered their practices around prayer shortly after *Saguenay* in April 2015. Others continued to include a prayer but have discontinued the practice more recently. As previously noted, the City of Hamilton changed its practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The municipality of The Nation included an opening prayer delivered by the mayor in its meetings in 2019,⁴⁶ but in more recent years has discontinued this practice.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ City of Waterloo. (2018 December 5). "Regional council minutes." Available at <https://calendar.regionofwaterloo.ca/Council/Detail/2018-12-05-1900-Council-Inaugural/9f61156c-7bda-412a-b0f1-a9af00f4d77e> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴⁶ The Nation. (2019 January 21). "Procès-verbal | Meeting minutes." Available at <https://nationmun.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/pv21-janvier-2019.pdf> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁴⁷ The Nation. (2021 August 23). "The Corporation of The Nation municipality minutes." Available at <https://nationmun.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-08-23-Minutes.pdf> (retrieved November 16, 2022).

We hypothesized that the ongoing inclusion of prayer in some municipal council meetings may simply be due to a lack of awareness of the *Saguenay* decision. In summer 2022, to ensure municipalities had been informed of their duty of neutrality, we wrote to those municipalities that included prayer in their inaugural or regular meetings (see Appendix C: Email sent to Municipalities with Council Prayers). Specifically, we asked that steps be taken to ensure that future inaugural and regular sessions be made compliant with *Saguenay* and not include an invocation or prayer.

As of publication, we had received 25 responses (see Table 7 and Appendix D: Municipal Responses). Of these, seven municipalities confirmed that they would remove prayer from their future meetings (marked as 'Will change'). The responses we received from 11 were recorded as 'unclear,' meaning that they did not provide a direct yes or no, and for most of these cases, we were sent a simple acknowledgement that the message had been received. We marked the responses from six municipalities as 'disagreements' where the respondent contested whether their meetings did in fact included a prayer or disputed the exact nature of their practices. The Township of Russell replied that they had changed their practice from a "prayer" to a reflection (as discussed above), though the wording of the prayer, taken from the preamble of the Charter, remained unchanged.

Table 7 – Summary of responses from municipalities found having prayer

Municipality	Prayers?	Response Type
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Inaugural	Change
Caledon	Inaugural	Change
Georgian Bluffs	Inaugural	Change
Lennox and Addington	Inaugural	Change
South Glengarry	Inaugural	Change
Thorold	Inaugural	Change
Thunder Bay	Inaugural	Change
Huron East	Inaugural	Unclear
Lambton Shores	Inaugural	Unclear
Kenora	Inaugural	Unclear
Meaford	Inaugural	Unclear
North Dumfries	Inaugural	Unclear
Orillia	Inaugural	Unclear
Shelburne	Inaugural	Unclear
Simcoe (County)	Inaugural	Unclear
Southwest Middlesex	Inaugural	Unclear
The Nation	Inaugural	Unclear
Whitchurch-Stouffville	Inaugural	Unclear
Collingwood	Inaugural	Disagreement
Lake of Bays	Inaugural	Disagreement
Lambton (County)	Inaugural	Disagreement
Ramara	Inaugural	Disagreement
Selwyn	Inaugural	Disagreement
Tay Valley	Inaugural	Disagreement

Russell	Inaugural & regular	Nominal change to “reflection”
Total: 25		

We replied to municipalities when they disagreed about whether their meetings included a prayer. The correspondence we had with these municipalities were in and of themselves illuminating (see Appendix D: Municipal Responses). For example, the Town of Collingwood responded to our email: “Not sure where you received your information from but Collingwood has not included a prayer in any proceedings for the last 20 years. Any recognition provided at official events is non-denominational.”⁴⁸ However, when we examined transcripts of the 2018 inaugural meeting, it very clearly included the following prayer delivered by Reverend Donna Wilson of Erie Street Community Church:

Let’s pray. Our Father and our God, we thank you today for the privilege of inviting your presence to the inauguration of the Collingwood council today. And we ask for your gracious hand to be upon this ceremony. And it’s with our heartfelt thanksgiving we remember our rich history, including the dedication of those who have served our community to this day. And we offer support to those who will serve the people of Collingwood with great humility, courage, and discernment in all decisions. In God we trust. Grant us your peace, Amen.⁴⁹

While this prayer is ‘non-denominational’ in the sense that it does not necessarily denote a specific Christian sect, it is clearly a prayer and relies heavily on language associated with Christian prayer. Thus, it is revelatory of Christian hegemony; in this case, an ecumenical prayer is considered as acceptable and non-excluding, with those delivering it oblivious to the possibility of there being other religions and non-believers.

At times, the response we received was combative, highly argumentative, or even proselytizing. For example, Lambton Shores Councillor David Marsh replied with the following:

I believe in God and that He has unlimited power at His disposal. As I drive to every council meeting I pray for God's wisdom and guidance upon it. I recognize the state's duty of religious neutrality. My concern is that with in our world today that too many institutions and leaders have shifted into neutrality and are not realizing their full potential. God is not the enemy but desires a loving and constructive relationship with us. John 3:16 says it all...Best Regards...Dave.⁵⁰

Councillor Marsh did not commit to changing his municipality’s practice, but confusingly, he recognized “the state’s duty of religious neutrality.” Given this mixed message, we recorded the

⁴⁸ See Appendix D.6.

⁴⁹ Town of Collingwood. (2018 December 3). “Town of Collingwood - municipal meetings live stream.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8NtguyetSo&t=312s> (retrieved October 10 2022).

⁵⁰ See Appendix D.12.

response as unclear. We are still attempting to gain a better understanding of the meaning of this message; however, it does underscore the importance of religious neutrality as highlighted by *Saguenay*. In responding to concerns about religious neutrality, this councillor thought that proselytizing would be appropriate. Councillor Marsh is of course entitled to his own religious beliefs, but *Saguenay* is clear that he cannot use the state to endorse them.

At least one municipality took steps to remove prayers, despite not responding to our request. Staff recommended that the Municipality of Kincardine remove the inaugural prayer from their procedures bylaw in early September 2022.⁵¹ We cannot demonstrate that our letter was the cause of this change, but it followed our correspondence and we are happy that this municipality will have more inclusive inaugural meetings moving forward.

Saguenay's Legacy

Using the historical data, we can show that many municipalities across Ontario updated their procedures and bylaws following *Saguenay*. To be clear, in most cases we cannot necessarily demonstrate a causal connection between the ruling and changes to local procedures; it is possible that municipalities updated their practices notwithstanding the ruling. However, the decision received significant media attention and advice was issued by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to councils to review their practices.⁵² That advice stated in part:

While the court made its decision on the basis of the specific facts in *Saguenay*, the implication is that reciting a prayer in a municipal council chamber will generally breach the duty of neutrality.

Municipal governments in Ontario may wish to review their own council meeting practices in light of this decision. Some municipalities have initiated a review of whether their prayer reflects the principles of this decision and the test of neutrality (for both theists and non-theists). Some councils have a moment of silence and self-reflection.⁵³

Thus, we suggest that the *Saguenay* ruling was a major factor in motivating municipalities to remove prayer from their meetings, but we recognize that other factors could have also precipitated the change.

⁵¹ Town of Kincardine. (2022 September 7a). "The Corporation of the Municipality of Kincardine committee of the whole agenda." Available at <https://pub-kincardine.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=2ff31881-4c8f-4131-896d-f1812c50f08c&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English> (retrieved October 11, 2022).

⁵² Town of Kincardine. (2022 September 7b). "Procedure by-law amendments – Legislative Services-2022-26." Available at <https://pub-kincardine.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=18268> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

⁵³ *Ibid.* quoting Association of Municipalities of Ontario. (2015 April 16). "Supreme Court of Canada decision on prayer before council meetings."

The first inaugural meetings following *Saguenay* occurred in 2018; therefore, we compared minutes from the 2014 inaugural meetings with those from 2018. Fewer municipalities had minutes available from pre-2015, nevertheless we still had data for the inaugural meetings of 254 municipalities and the regular meetings of 274 municipalities. We had some data—either from inaugural or a sampling of regular meetings—for 276 municipalities.

We found that prior to the ruling, 176 of 254 (69.3%) municipalities included prayers in their inaugural meetings (see Figure 4). For regular meetings, prior to *Saguenay* 68 of 276 (24.9%) municipalities opened with prayer. Of the municipalities for which we have data, 59 that included prayers in their 2014 inaugural meeting did not include a prayer in their 2018 inaugurals and 63 stopped including prayers in regular meetings.⁵⁴ Some of these municipalities opted to adopt a ‘moment of silence’ following the decision; however, we did not record whether municipalities included moments of silence prior to 2015, and therefore we have omitted this category from Figure 4.

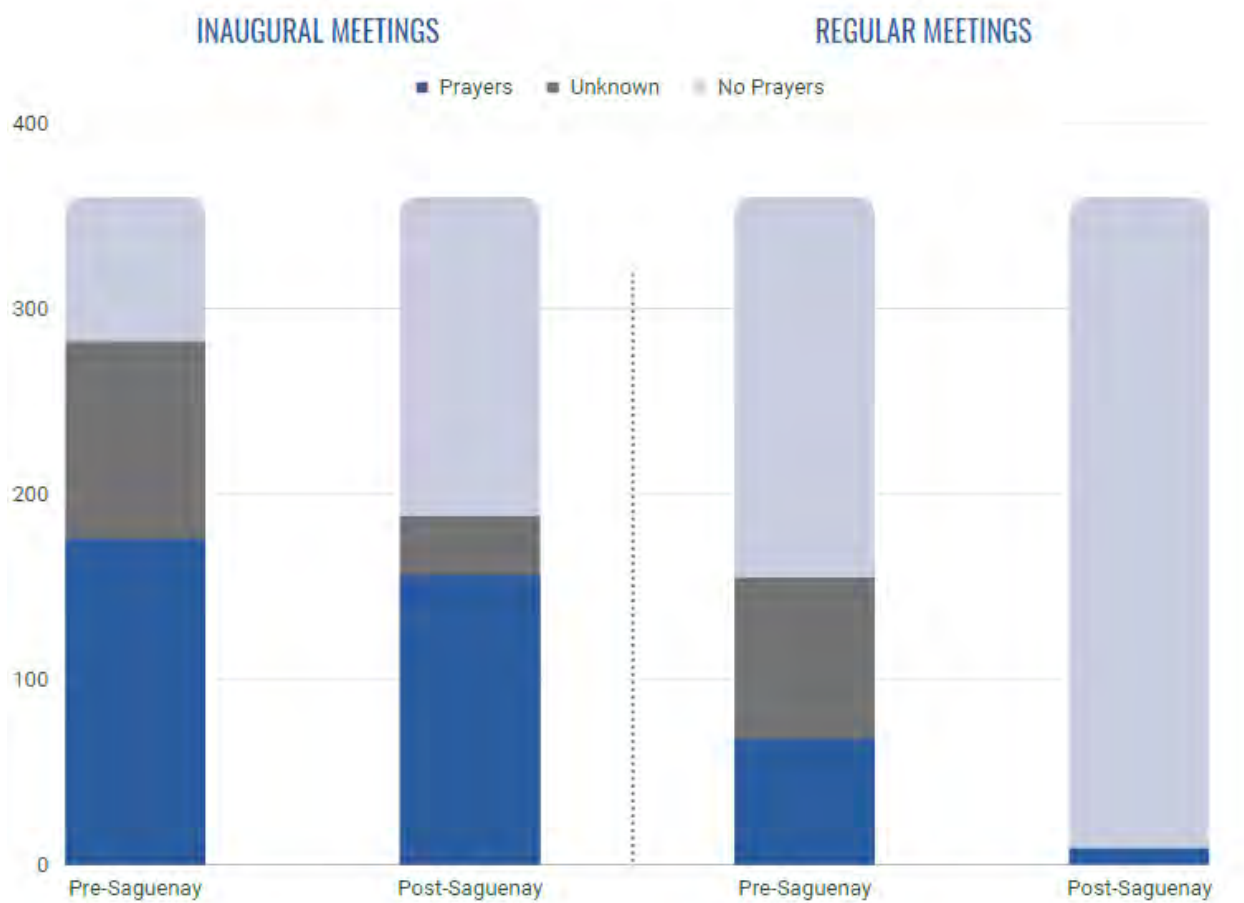


Figure 4 – Number of municipalities that changed their practice after Saguenay.

⁵⁴ Note that some of the communities that include prayers post-*Saguenay* come from the ‘don’t know’ category pre-*Saguenay*.

Notably, three communities—Russell, Tay Valley and Thorold—included a prayer or invocation in their 2018 inaugural council meetings, but not in 2014. Similarly, Brantford adopted the practice of the mayor reading an “Invocation” post-*Saguenay*. We discuss later how this might be argued as a secular practice.

These numbers show a major change that occurred in the years following *Saguenay*, especially with respect to prayers in regular meetings. The persistence of prayers in inaugural meetings is likely explained by the fact that these types of meetings usually include more performative and ceremonial elements (drumming, piping, inaugural speeches, oaths of office, etc.) and prayer is often included in this category of actions. It is also possible that municipalities may have believed that *Saguenay* only applied to prayer at regular council meetings. However, simply because a meeting is more ceremonial, it does not mean that the duty of neutrality is diminished. On the contrary, the increased attention that these meetings may receive underscores the importance of upholding the principles enshrined in *Saguenay*. Likewise, *Saguenay* clearly proscribed all prayer at council meetings, whether regular or inaugural.



DIGGING INTO THE CONTENT OF COUNCIL PRAYERS

Here we evaluate the content of transcripts of prayers delivered in Ontario municipal council meetings qualitatively, drawing out recurring themes, as well as conspicuous or particularly problematic elements. Recall that for prayers occurring at regular meetings, we transcribed the prayers delivered at three randomly selected from meetings after 2015. Reviewing these transcripts allowed us to identify themes ranging from endorsements of theocracy to proselytization to failed ecumenicism. We also look at the diversity of secular and non-sectarian practices, including moments of silence, that many councils have adopted. We were able to transcribe prayers delivered at 54 municipal councils (see Appendix B). This included 60 prayers delivered at inaugural meetings and 27 prayers delivered at regular meetings.

Hellfire and Curses

We begin our survey with some of the most egregious examples of sectarian religious language.

Mississauga's 2018 inaugural council meeting opened with an invocation from Monsignor Owen Keenan. He has since been forced to resign from his position with the Church after claiming that there has been some "good done" by the Roman Catholic Church in residential schools.⁵⁵ In his invocation, he defended legislative prayer, highlighting "the irreplaceable role that the public expression of faith and religion have in the building up and the betterment of the public square and the common good and common life of all."⁵⁶ Keenan continued later with the following story, seemingly threatening attendees with "hellfire and brimstone":

There was a story told about an old Irish priest who was sitting in the confessional one day and he was raging hellfire and brimstone and he said: 'Stand up in the church,' he said, 'all ye people in the church who want to go to heaven.' And everybody of course dutifully stood up and casting an eye across his pews he said, 'Very good, now sit down.'

Now I want you to stand up all ye people in the church who want to go to hell. And of course, nobody stood up except for O'Shaugnessy in the back pew and the priest raged: 'O'Shaugnessy you fool,' he says, 'do you want to go to hell?' And O'Shaugnessy said: 'No father I don't,' he says, 'but I couldn't bear to see you standing up there all by yourself.'

So, whether you would like to join me in blessing our Mayor and City Council or whether you just can't bear to see me standing up here all by myself, I ask you to stand.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Duke, B. (2021 June 26). "Priest resigns after saying 'good was done' at Indigenous Schools." *The Freethinker*. Available at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/thefreethinker/2021/06/priest-resigns-after-saying-good-was-done-at-indigenous-schools/> (retrieved July 1, 2022).

⁵⁶ See Appendix B.21.

⁵⁷ See Appendix B.21.

While this might seem like a funny story, underpinning the entire story is the threat of hellfire and damnation for non-believers. Such threats, subtextual though they may be, certainly outweigh attempts at accommodating other faith traditions. Threatening content such as this, even that which is delivered under the guise of a humorous story, illustrates yet again the problem posed by legislative prayer.

Not all threats were as subtle as Keenan's. Reverend Doctor Ted Harrison threatened to curse the mayor and the council of North Bay as part of his prayer delivered at their 2018 inaugural meeting. He introduced a lengthy story about the Archbishop of Dunbar with the following "And so as Jesus Christ demonstrated in his sermon on the plain as outlined in the Gospel of Luke, today I will remind us that via the present invocation that it is the purview of the faith communities not only to bless but also to curse." He then recited a lengthy (464 word) and detailed curse (see Appendix B.26) and concluded with the following:

What you just heard is but a small fraction of the sublime and extensive damnable curse of the Archbishop Dunbar, the greatest curse of all time, and it is in fact much longer in words and also in scope. But should this council, this council, prove to be cantankerous, uncivil or unmindful of the task to care for this land and especially its most vulnerable inhabitants, I shall be only too pleased to return to these chambers and share with you the full and unabridged text of Archbishop Dunbar's curse. Heed my words my friends, and may holy wisdom guide you in all your decision-making. And to this I say so be it, Amen.⁵⁸

While this type of language might seem to Harrison his co-religionists as nothing more than a funny story, for those outside of this faith tradition, it certainly appears as a threat, and not something that should be tolerated in a municipal council meeting.

Prayers for Theocracy

A similarly troubling selection of prayers included worrying language that arguably promotes the notion that citizens should see their government or public officials as ordained or guided by god, in other words, a theocracy.⁵⁹ This contrasts with democratic governance, where the authority to govern is granted by the will of the people, as expressed through free and open elections. Such an inclusion should strike most neutral observers as a strange element to feature in a speech given to a democratically elected body, particularly at the meeting directly following an election.

In Haldimand County, former Councillor Tom Patterson quoted Romans 13:1 in his prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting, noting that, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing

⁵⁸ City of North Bay. (2018 December 1). "Inaugural meeting of city council - Dec 1, 2018." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5uVm1trzFo> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

⁵⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica. (2020 April 28). "Theocracy." Available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/theocracy> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”⁶⁰

Pastor Darryl Price, of Alliston Pentecostal Church, delivered a lengthy prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting of New Tecumseth. Price also quoted Romans 13:1 at length:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. These authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authorities is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement upon themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended, for the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.

The well-ordered governmental structure came from God, He instituted it, He ordained it, He sanctioned it. Whether we are elected, acclaimed, or appointed, I do believe that whatever the case we have been selected by God Himself to actually fulfil a duty, a role, a calling, in a place where we are to bloom. Never take your responsibility lightly, or thoughtlessly. You have been chosen, and you have been placed in a specific role by God Himself.⁶¹

In his lengthy (1,174 word) prayer at the Whitchurch-Stouffville 2018 inaugural meeting, Reverend Graham Clinton of in2one Community Church said, “Thank you [God] for how you have organized an ordained government, the systems to care for your people. You have given us leaders to oversee, to manage, to protect and to care for people because of your deep love for them.”⁶²

Prayers like these express deeply anti-democratic sentiment, whereby governments are chosen and empowered by a god (namely a Christian one), rather than by the will of the people. This is highly divisive and represents an extreme example of religious belief. This is an exclusionary view of government that does not include non-believers or non-Christians as equal citizens.

The Overtly Christian

Though it was rejected in *Saguenay*, one of the arguments sometimes raised in support of legislative prayer is that it can be an inclusive moment of interfaith, interdenominational, or ecumenical reflection that can unify and ground a meeting. While some prayers we discuss below attempt such an interfaith approach, we found many examples of overtly Christian prayers, beyond those already discussed. The inclusion of overtly Christian content ranged

⁶⁰ See Appendix B.10.

⁶¹ See Appendix B.23.

⁶² See Appendix B.53.

considerably and included everything from the recitation of standard Christian prayers to lengthy sermons that included Bible quotes and common Christian phrases.

The specific phrase “In Jesus’ name” was used in at least ten prayers we transcribed.⁶³ The opening prayer of the City of Clarence-Rockland, which is published online, was bilingual and began “Notre Père” (Our Father).⁶⁴ Whitewater Region’s prayer was also available online and began “Almighty God.”⁶⁵ The Township of Laurentian Valley, for example, started their regular council meetings with the mayor reciting of the Lord’s Prayer.⁶⁶

Another explicitly Christian prayer was delivered by Reverend Clarence Bouwman at the 2018 inaugural council meeting of West Lincoln. At 1,583 words, the prayer was one of the lengthier ones transcribed, and it included a considerable volume of religious content.⁶⁷ Quoting it in part:

My brief purposes this evening then is to give you a word of encouragements. As you sit yourselves to fulfilling the task that's been given to you. I wish to seek God's blessing upon your work. For the word of encouragement, I like to read a portion of Holy Scripture, particularly tonight Psalm 8.⁶⁸

The prayer continued by quoting Psalm 8 and other portions of the Bible at length. This passage is concerned with praising the name of God.

Pastor David Baker of South Port Pentecostal Church delivered another overtly Christian prayer, which included the Lord’s Prayer, at the inaugural council meeting of the Town of Saugeen Shores:

And teach us to pray as you Jesus have taught us to pray through your word, the Bible. Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

⁶³ See Appendices: B.8 – Georgina, B.11 – Hamilton (two prayers), B.19 – Midland, B.23 – New Tecumseth, B.34 – Red Lake, B.37 – Saugeen Shores, B.40 – Shelburne, B.52 – Whitewater Region, and B.54 – Woodstock.

⁶⁴ City of Clarence-Rockland. (n.d.). “Prière d’ouverture / opening prayer.” Available at <https://cr-pub.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=12860> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

⁶⁵ See Appendix B.52; and Whitewater Region. (n.d.). “Prayer.” Available at <https://whitewaterregion.civicweb.net/document/34206/Prayer.docx?handle=673E7EC0CEF34536A92256C05C888D96> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

⁶⁶ See Appendix B.16.

⁶⁷ See Appendix B.51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Respecting all faiths, beliefs and traditions in attendance tonight, I pray this in the name of the one I serve, in Jesus' name, Amen.⁶⁹

We return to the irony of Baker's closing sentiment below.

In the Township of Uxbridge, Pastor Andrew Alton of St Paul's Presbyterian Church, delivered another prayer to Jesus for their inaugural council meeting:

Jesus, you said something about your joy being in us and our joy being complete. So, it seems like there's at least a possibility that all the good work that lies ahead of these leaders could actually be fun and bring joy. May it be so in this place. We pray by your name, Amen.⁷⁰

The inclusion of these prayers in meetings is a clear and overt violation of the state's duty of religious neutrality. It turns what should be a meeting that welcomes all people, regardless of their religious belief or lack thereof, to an opportunity for one religion proselytize or at the very least, to be spotlighted and therefor seemingly endorsed by the state.

Coercive Interactive Elements

Another common theme we observed was where the individual delivering the prayer would ask those present to participate in the practice in some ways. This typically included standard Christian practices, such as those present being asked to stand and/or bow their heads.

In regular council meetings of the City of Pembroke, the mayor asked those present to bow their head and to "each in their own way, each in their own words, silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings."⁷¹ This amounts to a prescriptive moment of silence, that is, a moment of silence combined with a prayer. It remains problematic, in as much as most atheists in attendance would not be silently asking anyone, or anything, for guidance in such a circumstance.

In the Township of Whitewater Region, after delivering a territorial acknowledgement, the mayor typically asked those present to stand, before reading the following prayer aloud together:

Almighty God, we give thanks for the great blessings which have been bestowed on Canada and its citizens, including the gifts of freedom, opportunity and peace that we enjoy. Guide us in our deliberations as Township Councillors and strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities. Grant us wisdom, knowledge and understanding to preserve

⁶⁹ See Appendix B.37.

⁷⁰ See Appendix B.46.

⁷¹ City of Pembroke 2020.

the blessing of this country for the benefit of all and to make good laws and wise decisions. Amen.⁷²

In this instance, beyond the mayor simply delivering a theistic prayer at the meeting, he included a request for active participation of all those present, asking them to participate in the recitation of the prayer. Given the power inherent in the mayor's position, this request can reasonably be seen as a command by those not wanting to participate in a prayer, crossing from tacit endorsement to outright coercion.

In the City of St Catharines, Pastor Craig Danielson asked attendees at the 2018 inaugural meeting to "stand with me" as part of a moment of silence:

Before I lead us in a benediction, I invite you to stand with me and I want to just take a few moments of silence in meditation and reflection on this very special occasion tonight. So would you stand with me and just meditate and reflect on what you have agreed with tonight in the City of St. Catharines and then I will lead us in a benediction.⁷³

Incredibly, Dr. David Ralph of Brant Community Church, asked religious—and irreligious—attendees to participate in a prayer at the Brant County inaugural meeting in 2018:

I just ask you to stand, bow your head, **whether you have any faith or you have a faith**, and just listen to the words that I pray. Dear God known by many names and beyond all names, we give you thanks for the many blessings we enjoy living in this country and in this county.⁷⁴ [Emphasis added]

More subtly, we noted several instances of the person delivering the prayer simply asking people to participate in the prayer by opening with statements such as, "Let us pray..."⁷⁵ or "would you pray with me?"⁷⁶ While this may be a linguistic feature common to prayers, it is a request for those present to participate.

Even the phrasing on the agenda can imply a certain amount of coercion to participate. The Town of Atikokan, as an example, opened its regular meetings with a "silent prayer." While there were no video recordings available to determine who leads this prayer and what specific practices were involved, simply using the terminology of 'prayer' imposes an expectation that those present engage in the practice, and that the practice is a religious one.

There are clear problems with asking others to participate in the prayer. It coerces those present, who may be of a different faith, practice their faith differently, or not follow a faith tradition, to actively participate in a sectarian ritual. Refusal to participate is also not a viable

⁷² See Appendix B.52.

⁷³ See Appendix B.41.

⁷⁴ See Appendix B.3.

⁷⁵ See for example Appendix B.8.

⁷⁶ See for example Appendix B.46.

option, as non-participation is brought into the spotlight. That is, those who do not want to participate are forced to either reveal their beliefs (or lack thereof) by visibly not participating, or to participate against their will. While in this case the coercion is not as overt as an actual law compelling action, as was the issue under consideration in *Big M Drug Mart*,⁷⁷ it is ominously like the issues at the heart of cases involving school prayer, such as *Zylberberg v Sudbury Board of Education*.⁷⁸

In that case, one of the major questions was whether prayer was permissible, or 'less intrusive,' if participation of those was voluntary. *Zylberberg* explored the matter of the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public school classrooms, even where students were given the option of being exempted from the practice. The majority concluded that:

The recitation of the Lord's Prayer, which is a Christian prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures from the Christian Bible imposes Christian observances upon non-Christian pupils and religious observances on non-believers... [the law] imposes on religious minorities a compulsion to conform to the practices of the majority, and the evidence in this case supports this view. Moreover, the exemption provisions discriminate against religious minorities.⁷⁹

They also stated clearly that the presence of an exemption allowing students to leave the classroom during the prayer did not make the practice permissible, and that it constituted a form of coercion. As the ruling noted,

the right to be excused from class, or to be exempted from participating, does not overcome the infringement of the Charter freedom of conscience and religion by the mandated religious exercises. On the contrary, the exemption provision imposes a penalty on pupils from religious minorities who utilize it by stigmatizing them as non-conformists and setting them apart from their fellow students who are members of the dominant religion. In our opinion, the conclusion is inescapable that the exemption provision fails to mitigate the infringement of freedom of conscience and religion...⁸⁰

As Justice Gascon summarized in *Saguenay*, in *Zylberberg*, "the court held that the existence of an exemption did not mean that freedom of conscience and religion was not infringed. The requirement that the exemption be requested meant that pupils and their parents were forced to reveal that their religious identity was different from that of the majority."⁸¹

⁷⁷ *R. v. Big M Drug Mart Ltd.*, [1985] 1 S.C.R. 295.

⁷⁸ *Zylberberg v. Sudbury Board of Education*, 1988 CanLII 189 (ON CA).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Saguenay*, para. 124.

A similar ruling was made in *Freitag v. Penetanguishene*, which was another case dealing with a member of the public objecting to the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in municipal council meetings. Here, Justice Feldman noted that the recitation of prayer was a:

'subtle and constant reminder' of [Freitag's] difference from the majority is what causes the appellant to feel intimidated and uncomfortable at council meetings. It has also deterred him from running for a council which proclaims and identifies itself as it does... Similarly, the appellant is clearly stigmatized by his decision not to stand and recite the Lord's Prayer, so that the fact that he is not prohibited from making that choice does not save the Town's practice from infringing his Charter right.⁸²

Ultimately, as was made clear in *Saguenay*, a municipal council meeting should be "a neutral public space free from coercion, pressure and judgment on the part of public authorities in matters of spirituality is intended to protect every person's freedom and dignity."⁸³ Asking people to participate in prayer is antithetical to this goal.

Whose Space?

In several notable examples, we found that the religious elements of the inaugural council meeting went beyond the inclusion of a singular prayer or invocation and effectively turned a secular governance ceremony into a religious meeting. This included frequent religious representatives and invocations to the venue of the meeting itself.

For example, for Fort Erie's 2018 inaugural meeting, the emcee for the event was Reverend Martha Lockwood of the Central United Church. She introduced two other members of the clergy throughout the event—a Lutheran pastor who delivered an invocation and an Anglican who delivered a 'prayer of dedication'—before concluding with her own prayer.⁸⁴ In this case, religion shifted from being a single element in the meeting, to a constant thread throughout the entire event. A citizen of Fort Erie would have to be reasonably forgiven if they thought they had mistakenly attended a Christian prayer gathering, rather than the inauguration of their local government.

The City of Thorold took this a step further and had Bishop John O'Mara deliver an invocation to begin the meeting, an 'inspirational reading' (which was from the Bible) in the middle, and a 'blessing' at the end of the meeting.⁸⁵ While Fort Erie at least varied the protestant representation at its meeting, having the same Catholic Bishop deliver three prayers in one meeting is far from appropriate in a diverse and multicultural community. Similarly, Goderich included an opening and closing prayer from the same member of the clergy,⁸⁶ while Niagara-

⁸² *Freitag v. Penetanguishene (Town)*, 1999 CanLII 3786 (ON CA), at para. 39–40.

⁸³ *Saguenay*, para. 74.

⁸⁴ See Appendix B.7.

⁸⁵ See Appendix B.42.

⁸⁶ See Appendix B.9.

on-the-Lake had a Mennonite and an Anglican deliver invocations and benedictions, respectively.⁸⁷

Beyond simply extending the religious content throughout a ceremony, in at least one example, the venue for an inaugural council meeting was overtly religious. We previously discussed Reverend Clarence Bouwman's extended and overtly Christian prayer for the incoming council of West Lincoln in 2018, but he also had the privilege of delivering it from the pulpit of his own Canadian Reformed Church.⁸⁸ At one point in his lengthy sermon, Bouwman encouraged attendees "who wish to follow along" to find "there are bibles in the pews with you or underneath the seat for the front bench."⁸⁹ In this instance, the wall separating church and state has been entirely knocked down and the two have become roommates. This should be blatantly problematic given the well-documented coercive nature of even holding polling stations in churches.⁹⁰

In this instance, the wall separating church and state has been entirely knocked down and the two have become roommates.

Othering Language

In the previous examples, the person delivering the prayer asked people to participate in some way or the atmosphere of the event contributed to religious coercion, but other language used in prayers excludes people of a different or no faith. In examining transcripts, we saw this repeatedly arise using language that implied collective, rather than individual, belief. In other words, when the person delivering the prayer implied that those listening were coreligionists, as opposed to speaking on behalf of themselves or perhaps their religion or sect. The effect is that

⁸⁷ See Appendix B.24.

⁸⁸ Audet, B. (2018 December 4). "West Lincoln's new mayor and council take oath at inaugural council meeting." *NiagaraThisWeek.com*. Available at <https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news-story/9065734-west-lincoln-s-new-mayor-and-council-take-oath-at-inaugural-council-meeting/> (retrieved November 23, 2022).

⁸⁹ See Appendix B.51.

⁹⁰ See *inter alia* LaBouff, J.P. (2020 September 10). "How balloting in churches sways attitudes and votes." *Scholars Strategy Network*. Available at <https://scholars.org/contribution/how-balloting-churches-sways-attitudes-and> (retrieved November 23, 2022); and see Lupton, A. (2019 October 22). "Sex assault survivor says churches shouldn't be polling stations." *CBC News*. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/sex-assault-survivor-says-churches-shouldn-t-be-polling-stations-1.5331007> (retrieved December 5, 2022); Blumenthal, J.A., & Turnipseed, T.L. (2011). "The polling place priming (PPP) effect: Is voting in churches (or anywhere else) unconstitutional?" *Boston University Law Review*, 91, 561-599; and see Pryor, B. (2016 February 29). "How different polling locations subconsciously influence voters." *Scientific American*, The Conversation. Available at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-different-polling-locations-subconsciously-influence-voters/> (retrieved December 5, 2022).

the person presenting the prayer establishes their religion—nearly always Christianity—as the truth and standard belief of the in-group, with all those not sharing that belief being relegated to an out-group. This could be something as subtle as referring to ‘our god’ rather than ‘my god,’ or saying, ‘we pray,’ rather than ‘I pray.’

One common practice was to open and close prayers with a collective statement. For example, Bishop Emeritus John O'Mara of the Diocese of St Catharines, opened his prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting for the City of Thorold by declaring “Oh God, our heavenly Father, we invoke your blessing on this inaugural meeting of the council of the City of Thorold,” and closed by saying “We ask this in all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our lord. Amen.”⁹¹ Father Silvio Eljuga, of St Anne's Parish, included the following in his prayer at the inaugural meeting of the Town of Penetanguishene: “So, we will start with a sign of our faith in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.”⁹²

In other instances, the statement might be more overt. For example, in his prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting for Whitewater Region, Reverend Kevin Moratz included the following:

Trials bring about the need for perseverance, but we can rest assured that in our struggles and challenges perseverance will always allow us to experience the hope and the love of God in new ways, for as followers of Christ let us truly be people of genuine hope. Let us pray. Loving God, source of true community, you call us together, be with us this evening and bless us in our meeting.⁹³

Another similar turn of phrase is the act of speaking on behalf of the collective, assuming the religion or belief of those present. This is a standard feature of many prayers, but it reinforces why it should not be part of municipal council meetings. For example, Reverend Rudy Dirks of the Niagara United Mennonite Church opened the 2018 inaugural meeting of Niagara-on-the-Lake with: “Lord God, creator of all things, as we gather to open this new session of the Niagara-on-the-Lake town council, we express our gratitude and ask for your blessing.”⁹⁴ Interestingly, in a second prayer delivered at that same meeting, Reverend Dorothy Hewlett of Christ Anglican Church, opened by asking people to “please bow your heads.”⁹⁵

At the 2018 inaugural meeting for the Township of Uxbridge, Pastor Andrew Alton of St Paul's Presbyterian Church ended his prayer by stating, “and so, Father, again, thank you for the privilege of having this night together, and the freedom of democracy that we have in this country. In your name we pray. Amen.”⁹⁶ This contrasts to Major Darren Wiseman of the Salvation Army Community Church's prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting for the Town of

⁹¹ See Appendix B.42.

⁹² See Appendix B.32.

⁹³ See Appendix B.52.

⁹⁴ See Appendix B.24.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ See Appendix B.46.

Huntsville Ontario, where he closed: “I pray in the name of your son Jesus Christ through your Holy Spirit, giving you thanks, amen.”⁹⁷ While this was a lengthy sermon (1,151 words) that quoted the bible twice, at least the Mayor offered the prayer on his own behalf, and not that of all those assembled.

Pastor Dan Massey of the Pine Grove Community Church seemingly attempted to use all the aforementioned language in his prayer at the 2018 inaugural meeting for the municipality of Leeds and the Thousand Islands. His prayer opened with, “We bow our heads. We thank you Lord for the municipality of Leeds and the Thousands Islands, for its beauty, and for its residence,” and closed with, “Lord in all these things may your name be honored and praised in the power of the Holy Spirit and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”⁹⁸ Statements such as these are antithetical to fostering an environment where all are welcome.

The othering language was not always overtly Christian. An arguably non-sectarian—though still theistic—example can be found in the statement delivered by City of Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan, before a regular council meeting:

Creator of all, we give thanks that we live in a place where all have freedom to pray. Help us to remember we are in a special place consecrated to the principles of democracy and service. Give us wisdom to perceive the right, courage to lead in times of confusion, patience to wait and listen for the hopes and aspirations of our citizens, and wit to devise creative ways of being a community. May we be as concerned for others as for ourselves, and compassionate for the needs of the less fortunate among us. At best may this city of ours be a special place. Amen.⁹⁹

Pickering’s practice still excludes all who do not believe in a ‘creator.’ It also represented a common practice where the mayor, or a member of council, would rotate who would deliver the prayer or invocation.

Failed Ecumenicism

Several prayers appeared to attempt to be inclusive of other religions, but they frequently still referenced only one faith tradition (almost always Christianity). These non-denominational prayers are still exclusionary as they typically presume a belief in a god. These serve to highlight the impossibility of crafting a prayer that does not in some way exclude.

In Burlington, the prayer delivered by Reverend Emma Duncan of Knox Presbyterian Church included the lines: “God of many names, god of all creation, we thank you on this day for the many blessings we have received.”¹⁰⁰ This religious language, while attempting to

⁹⁷ See Appendix B.12.

⁹⁸ See Appendix B.18.

⁹⁹ See Appendix B.33.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix B.4.

accommodate a range of faith traditions, excludes the non-religious residents of Burlington. Reverend Doctor Susan Eagle of Barrie's Grace United Church used similarly exclusionary language while attempting to be ecumenical: "God of many names, Holy One, who in all faiths calls us to care for our neighbour and act with justice, we acknowledge the work of municipal government and ask your blessing on the Mayor and councillors of the City of Barrie."¹⁰¹ Not only do statements of this nature exclude the non-religious, but they would also exclude people from non-theistic faith traditions, such as some forms of Buddhism.

Reverend Gerry McMillan, the Ontario Provincial Police Chaplain, attempted to include everyone in his prayer for Orillia Council, including mention that he was "respecting all faiths and beliefs." He proceeded to undermine this nobler sentiment by continuing, "I pray these things in the name of the one I serve, Jesus Christ."¹⁰² Similarly, Pastor David Baker of South Port Pentecostal Church delivered a prayer for the 2018 Saugeen Shores inaugural meeting that undermined his stated desire to respect "all faiths, beliefs and traditions" by appealing directly to Jesus:

Father, Almighty God, Creator, known by many names and beyond all names, spirit of life, spirit of love, spirit of community, spirit of justice.... Respecting all faiths, beliefs and traditions in attendance tonight, I pray this in the name of the one I serve, in Jesus' name, Amen.¹⁰³

Notably, just before his closing line that ostensibly respected all beliefs, Pastor Baker read the Lord's Prayer as part of his invocation. Invoking Jesus and reading an overtly Christian prayer still excludes many "faiths, beliefs and traditions" that he was ostensibly respecting.

Seemingly aware that delivering a lengthy prayer in a council meeting might be problematic, Reverend Graham Clinton of the in2one Community Church began his prayer at the inaugural meeting of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville by asking the following: "When I was originally asked to do this, there was the indication that it would be more than a prayer. I just want to look for consultation, is that...? Thank you, I just wanted to make sure that we don't do anything out of line...."¹⁰⁴ With the go-ahead, he then proceeded to deliver a 1,176 long sermon/prayer that concluded by stating:

Lord Jesus you are the sovereign that all other leaders fall under. May you lead well here. Thank you for your presence and your power amongst us, even now. be honored in our choices, bless these that have chosen to serve and to lead this community. In Jesus' name, Amen.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ See Appendix B.1.

¹⁰² See Appendix B.29.

¹⁰³ See Appendix B.37.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix B.53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

What these examples make abundantly clear is that delivering a properly ecumenical, interdenominational, or interfaith prayer is incredibly challenging and may be impossible. Certainly, many clergy members struggled to keep their failed efforts free of irony.

Attempts at Inclusion Still Exclude

While the above examples are in many ways ironic, other attempts at ecumenicism and interfaith accommodation were arguably more successful, though they remain problematic.

In St Catharines, Pastor Craig Danielson of Calvary Church delivered a less explicitly religious prayer, but one that still took the form of, and borrowed the language from, Christian traditions:

See, for all of us we have our own source of strength and wisdom, and we pull that from different areas of our life. So, before I lead us in a benediction, I invite you to stand with me and I want to just take a few moments of silence in meditation and reflection on this very special occasion tonight. So would you stand with me and just meditate and reflect on what you have agreed with tonight in the City of St Catharines and then I will lead us in a benediction.¹⁰⁶

Dr David Ralph of Brant Community Church delivered a seemingly inclusive statement for Brant County's 2018 inaugural meeting, but his statement still made appeals to a higher power to which a large proportion of residents do not necessarily subscribe:

Remind them that everyone matters and all are equal no matter if they are black or brown or white; gay, straight or transgender; whether they're on a spiritual path or not; whether they're rich or poor; old or young, they all matter to you and they should matter to this council...May they all be treated equally.¹⁰⁷

These non-denominational prayers still fail to include the non-religious and therefore violate the state's duty of religious neutrality. Notably when the City of Saguenay attempted to defend its practices at the Supreme Court of Canada, they argued that the practice they adopted was 'non-denominational.' This claim was rejected by Justice Gascon as contrary to the facts, and he went on to conclude:

Second, even if it were accepted that the prayer at issue is *prima facie* a non-denominational practice, it is nonetheless a religious practice, as the respondents themselves conceded at the hearing in this Court. The respondents argue in this regard that a state that is "somewhat religious" can be tolerated in the context of state neutrality provided that it is inclusive, and that this tolerance can be justified on the basis of historical and traditional values. They add that the separation of church and state does not necessarily mean that the two are totally separate. I find that the respondents are on the

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix B.41.

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix B.3.

wrong track in this respect. True neutrality is concerned not with a strict separation of church and state on questions related to religious thought. The purpose of neutrality is instead to ensure that the state is, and appears to be, open to all points of view regardless of their spiritual basis. Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject. **Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is ‘inclusive,’ it may nevertheless exclude non-believers;** whether it is consistent with the Quebec Charter depends not on the extent to which it is inclusive, but on its exclusive nature and its effect on the complainant’s ability to act in accordance with his or her beliefs.¹⁰⁸ [Emphasis added]

Religious practices exclude non-believers. This should be as clear a statement as any government needs to change their practices, and yet there are many more examples yet to consider.

The City of Hamilton was a notable example, as it was the only municipality we found where members of the public could apply to deliver an invocation at regular council meetings. We should note that the practice was paused for the pandemic, and as of November 2022 had not yet resumed.¹⁰⁹ This nevertheless remains problematic: two of the three examples we randomly selected were Christian pastors, while the third was a Buddhist.¹¹⁰ In our report, *In Open Defiance*, we explored how the City of Winnipeg’s practice of merely rotating prayers among council members did not mean the council was religiously neutral: “The act of sharing an individual prayer on any given day is discriminatory in and of itself. Rotating through prayers does not obviate this fact.”¹¹¹ Further, the challenges presented by accepting applications to give an opening prayer raise many of the same issues faced by the clerk of the Legislative Assembly of BC in devising a set of sample prayers.¹¹²

Each of these examples relies on the mistaken idea that one can craft a singular prayer (or prayers) that would represent all faith traditions. Not all faith traditions have prayer or practice prayer. Some religions do not permit public prayer. Some do not permit prayers in the presence of certain people, or without the presence of certain people. Others impose restrictions on prayers such that they could not be delivered in a public meeting hall. We could go on. Treating prayer as something that is inclusive, or can be inclusive, is in and of itself a problem. As scholar Lori Beaman explains:

¹⁰⁸ *Saguenay*, para 137.

¹⁰⁹ Pilon, J. (personal communication with authors, November 7, 2022).

¹¹⁰ See Appendix B.11.

¹¹¹ Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2022: 23.

¹¹² Bushfield, I., & Phelps Bondaroff, T.N. (2020). “The arbiters of faith: Legislative Assembly of BC entanglement with religious dogma resulting from legislative prayer.” *Secularism and Nonreligion*, 9. Available at <http://doi.org/10.5334/snr.140> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

...certain groups, particularly religious minorities and the nonreligious, are excluded from the narrative of 'we' in the public sphere, and as contributors to nations in the present tense, the past, and potentially the future. What is worth preserving and protecting does not belong to them and does not originate with them.¹¹³

'Accommodating' other, non-Christian faith traditions or non-believers through a rotation, or including multiple prayers or invocations at a meeting, ultimately treats people of non-Christian faith traditions and non-believers as guests in that space. Saying something like 'everyone pray in your own way' may sound ecumenical, but looking beyond the surface level, we quickly see how such a statement necessarily excludes any non-believers, anyone who might be uncomfortable with public prayer, and anyone whose faith tradition does not include prayer.

A rotation of prayers that includes invocations, or simply replacing prayer with a more secular invocation, is still creating a space that is preferential to religion over irreligion because while the content might change, the structure remains the same. One is still trying to fit a secular peg in a religion shaped hole.

The medium is the message

Even examples of 'prayers' or 'invocations' devoid of any religious language can be seen as problematic based on the identity and affiliation of the messenger and the historical context of the practice.

In Waterloo, for example, Reverend Brooke Ashfield of Knox Presbyterian Church delivered a prayer that contained a few ostensibly inclusive elements and explicitly made a point of underscoring the importance of inclusion. However, the following was still delivered by the representative of a church:

And, as today as with the police service, all people are equal under the law and in civic rights. The days of exclusive privilege for any religion or ethnic group are long gone as we live in a world, a beautiful world, a rainbow world of many colours, many varieties of rich diversity. I am grateful for this opportunity to offer this reflection and wish you well as you serve with distinction. Thank you.¹¹⁴

Similarly, at Lambton's 2018 inaugural council meeting, Myles Vani provided an invocation that was devoid of any overtly religious language.¹¹⁵ Rather, it was a speech about leadership, including anecdotes about being a Scout leader. But Vani was on hand as the executive director of the Inn of the Good Shepherd and spoke to that church's work:

¹¹³ Beaman, L.G. 2020. *The transition of religion to culture in law and public discourse*. London, UK: Routledge.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix B.49.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix B.15.

At the Inn of The Good Shepherd, I have found that our success and accomplishments and serving those in need has been most successful by having a firm belief in our mission, building a talented and compassionate team of staff and volunteers, and being able to rally a deep community commitment to that mission of fighting poverty throughout the county. It has shown that strength and unity can accomplish so much.¹¹⁶

In another example, Reverend Kate Ballagh-Steeper of Lakeshore United Church delivered the following 'closing prayers' at the 2018 inaugural meeting of Goderich Council:

[inaudible] That those who are councillors will serve with honour. That those who are town staff may continue to serve with integrity. That those who are community members may serve with diligence and energy. And may we all be united in our desire to build a just and fair town where all are honoured and where we may be known not just as Canada's prettiest town, but also a town that honours the gifts of all of her citizens. Amen.¹¹⁷

Apart from the use of 'amen' at the ending, the statement does not appear on its surface to be religious. Notably, Ballagh-Steeper's opening prayers were more overtly religious, though still attempted to be non-denominational.¹¹⁸ The 'closing prayer' does not use religious language; instead, it reads more like an oath of office, or a statement of purpose. Nevertheless, the statement was still delivered as a 'closing prayers' and was articulated by a minister.

We were not able to transcribe the invocation delivered by Reverend Deb Dolbear-Van Bilsen of Glencoe Presbyterian Church at Southwest Middlesex's 2018 inaugural council meeting. Notably though, when we emailed city staff about that prayer, we were informed that the city's Chief Administrative Officer instructed Rev Dolbear-Van Bilsen "that prayers and religious overtones were not permissible at council meetings."¹¹⁹ Presumably if this is the case, Southwest Middlesex should update the term used in the agenda and may want to consider selecting a different person to deliver the statement in the future.

Ultimately, you cannot separate the message from the messenger: "The medium is the message."¹²⁰ A priest delivering an 'invocation' at a public meeting still conveys a message and arguably indicates the state's endorsement of that persons' faith, regardless of the content of the invocation spoken. Likewise, a member of city staff delivering a 'prayer' before a regular council meeting still implies a religious practice, even if the words have lost all appeals to the supernatural. Given the historical context of prayers—particularly Christian prayers—in opening government meetings, continuing to include a prayer at the start of an agenda, or granting the

¹¹⁶ See Appendix B.15.

¹¹⁷ See Appendix B.9.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See Southwest Middlesex in Appendix D.

¹²⁰ McLuhan, M. (1964) [1994]. "The medium is the message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press.

privilege of delivering a statement to a member of the Christian clergy, clearly seeks to reinforce Christian hegemony, even if the pastor in question is asked to 'keep it secular.'

These municipalities could have invited anyone from their community to add solemnity to the occasion, from a local sports celebrity, the president of Toastmasters, or a local artist or poet. In fact, we found examples where the 'senior of the year,' past politicians, or a local business leader were chosen to deliver a statement. Unfortunately, many chose to invite an ordained member of the clergy. While they are often prominent members of their communities and certainly have public speaking experience, these abilities are not the exclusive domain of religious officials. By opting to platform a member of the clergy, the public are more likely to interpret any statement delivered as prayer simply because of the person delivering it, regardless of its content.

By opting to platform a member of the clergy, the public are more likely to interpret any statement delivered as prayer simply because of the person delivering it, regardless of its content.

Secular invocations and reflective practices

We observed some practices at Ontario council meetings that we did ultimately consider to be secular. While these may still imply a religious cultural hegemony, as we explore in our discussion on stealth prayers below, these communities have seemingly tried to craft rituals that do not actively exclude atheists and the non-religious.

For example, the City of Brantford's 'invocation' at a recent regular meeting was:

As we come together today, we recognize the great responsibilities laid upon us. Our council will always strive to understand the needs of the people we serve and to use power wisely and well. Our purpose is to establish and maintain a city of prosperity and righteousness, where freedom prevails and where justice rules. Let us also not forget those who served our community who are no longer with us, so that we continue to do the work that we must in their memory.¹²¹

While this language is largely secular, some may take notice of the inclusion of the term 'righteousness,' which has religious connotations. Likewise, some citizens may disagree with that specific prescriptive purpose for the city.

¹²¹ City of Brantford. (2022 October 4). "City Council." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO-BhE2Sp2Q> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

Council meetings for the City of Belleville began with a ‘moment of reflection’ that included a statement read by the City Clerk:

May we be worthy custodians of all that has been entrusted to us. Help us be concerned only for what will promote good government. May we bring to our council chamber minds that think and hearts that feel, always having respect for others so that we may serve the people of our city in a helpful manner and for the good of all.¹²²

The first sentence of this statement is vague as to who or what has entrusted the councillors as ‘worthy custodians.’ Giving the city the benefit of the doubt, we could assume it was the voters of Belleville, though a theist could read into it that their god has assigned that task to them.

The clerk also began regular meetings in Wellesley with a standard reading:

Let us be mindful of the needs of all our citizens and advance only those causes that will ensure peace and harmony in our community now and always.¹²³

In Clarington, a standard reflection was led by a different councillor at each meeting:

Please join me in a moment of reflection. May we cherish and protect the freedom and peace that we enjoy in Clarington. May we be mindful of the cost of freedom and peace. May our deliberations be respectful and may our decisions be informed and wise. May our work be focused on and lead us toward the betterment of our communities.¹²⁴

This was followed by a land acknowledgement, typically read by the same councillor.

The Town of Hawkesbury opened its regular council meetings with a councillor reading “the Town’s vision” in French:¹²⁵

Given its strategic location and bilingual status, Hawkesbury will be known as the core area for industrial, commercial, cultural, tourism and recreation

¹²² City of Belleville. (2022 October 11). “Regular council.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfUuAzy5TtM> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹²³ City of Wellesley. (2020 September 1). “Closed session and council meeting w/WNH.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l-Ni2Ag4us> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

¹²⁴ Municipality of Clarington (2022 May 30). “Council minutes.” Available at <https://pub-clarington.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=99de65f8-3d4e-456c-be5d-15428cfad734&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹²⁵ Town of Hawkesbury. (2022 June 27). “Regular meeting of council minutes.” Available at <https://pub-hawkesbury.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=11655> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

activities, whose emerging synergy will characterize Hawkesbury as a place to discover in Eastern Ontario.¹²⁶

The United Counties of Prescott and Russell also began with the reading of their vision, in both French and English:

Prescott and Russell will continue to be a community united by its traditions and cultures, working towards the prosperity of all its residents.¹²⁷

While one can debate the level of inspiration generated by the recitation of corporate vision statements, the practice is certainly a secular one.

The Town of Petrolia began its regular meetings with an “inspirational message.” An example can be found at the January 10, 2022 regular meeting of council, where Councillor Souch read a quote from Marie Curie to the rest of council: “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more so that we may fear less.”¹²⁸ Notably, Petrolia records the message itself in its minutes.

The Township of West Lincoln opened their regular meetings by singing ‘O Canada,’ followed by a land acknowledgement, and then those present were asked to stand for the reading of an ‘opening petition,’ read by a member of council on a rotation. The petition varied depending on the councillor who delivered it. For example, both Councillors Mike Rehner and Terry Bell opened meetings with:

We gather to make decisions for our community. May we use only our best skills and judgement, keeping ourselves impartial and neutral as we consider the merits and the pitfalls of each matter that is placed before us, and always act in accordance with what is best for our community and our fellow citizens.¹²⁹

However, at a more recent meeting, Councillor Harold Jonker’s petition was slightly less secular, using the religious terminology of ‘blessed’ and ‘our faiths’:

¹²⁶ Town of Hawkesbury. (n.d.). “Vision and mission.” Available at <https://www.hawkesbury.ca/en/town-hall/the-municipal-council/vision-and-mission> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹²⁷ Prescott-Russell. (n.d.). “Corporate vision and mission.” Available at https://en.prescott-russell.on.ca/stay/corporate_services/corporate_vision_and_mission (retrieved November 17, 2022); and see Prescott-Russell. (2022 September 28). “2022-09-28.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZUqdnpaedI> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹²⁸ See Town of Petrolia. (2022 January 10). “Minutes.” Available at <https://petrolia.civicweb.net/document/52070/> (retrieved November 24, 2022); and Town of Petrolia. (2022 January 10). “Town of Petrolia regular council meeting.” Available at <https://youtu.be/2GR6BK2wlak?t=310> (retrieved November 24, 2022).

¹²⁹ See Appendix B.51.

We gather here today with the intent on doing good. We seek to represent fairly and well those who have given us this task. May our efforts be blessed with insight, guided by understanding and wisdom. We seek to serve with respect for all. May our faiths give us strength and guidance to act honestly and well in all matters before us.¹³⁰

We note that prior to the pandemic, the Town of Ingersoll started their regular council meetings with the mayor asking those present to stand before the mayor read the following reflection aloud:

We are truly fortunate to grow up in a country as free as Canada, work in a province as great as Ontario, to prosper in a county as productive as Oxford, to live in a community as beautiful as Ingersoll. Let us take this moment to reflect in what we have and what we have to give.¹³¹

They continued to stand for a moment, and, at the end, the mayor crossed himself. However, more recent council meetings have not included that reflection.

Tweed's 2018 inaugural meeting included an 'Affirmation of Office,' which we did not consider to be a prayer in our quantitative analysis above. This was delivered by Wendell E White, a Padre for the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 428 and a Civil Marriage Officiant for the municipality. It was also described in the minutes as a 'non-denominational affirmation,' but unfortunately no video recording exists.¹³²

Finally, the Town of Ajax featured a 'Community Greeting' in its 2018 inaugural meeting.¹³³ The minutes state:

Lakdinu Silva, Ajax resident, introduced himself and offered greetings and well wishes on behalf of Ajax residents. Mr. Silva discussed the importance of diversity and inclusion to Ajax's rapidly growing population, and the opportunities afforded to youth in Ajax to participate and contribute to the community. Mr. Silva thanked Mayor Collier and members of Council for their

¹³⁰ Township of West Lincoln. (2022 September 26). "Council." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8ebCd1W8iY> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹³¹ Town of Ingersoll. (2020 January 13). "Ingersoll Town Council - January 13, 2020." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa0pf5QV5f8> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

¹³² Municipality of Tweed. (2018 December 4). "Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the council." Available at: <https://tweed.ca/photos/custom/21%20Inaugural%20Meeting%20Minutes%20December%204%202018.pdf> (retrieved November 16, 2022).

¹³³ Town of Ajax. (2018 December 3). "Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Council." Available at <https://events.ajax.ca/Meetings/Detail/2018-12-03-1900-Inaugural-Council-Meeting/2d258663-3a50-4c85-8a24-a9ba009c3e8b> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

commitment and service to Ajax and wished them well in their upcoming term of office.

However, the Community Greeting at the previous Ajax inaugural meeting in 2014 was delivered by Cecil Ramnauth of the Sankat Mochan Hauman Mandir & Cultural Centre, a local Hindu temple.¹³⁴ The minutes describe his comments in secular terms such as “greetings and well wishes” and an emphasis on “the need to govern on the basis of transparency, accountability, and trust.”¹³⁵ By contrast, in 2010, the town’s inaugural meeting was opened with an Invocation Prayer by a local Presbyterian minister.¹³⁶

Nomenclature Matters

How the item was labelled in the meeting’s agenda was also significant. While we identified examples that included ‘opening petitions,’ ‘inspirational messages,’ and ‘moments of reflection,’ some secular statements were still labelled as ‘prayers’ in the meeting’s agenda.

For example, in Wellesley, the clerk opened regular meetings with the following:

Let us be mindful of the needs of all our citizens and advance only those causes that will ensure peace and harmony in our community now and always.¹³⁷

While this statement is strictly secular, it was delivered under the agenda item labelled as ‘prayer.’

Similarly, the clerk in Fort Erie read the following in the ‘prayer’ portion of their regular council meetings:

We meet to serve our community and endeavour to be worthy custodians of all that has been entrusted to us. Let us be concerned only for what will promote good government. May we bring to our council chamber minds that think and hearts that feel so that in our deliberations we may display imagination, wisdom, and courage, and the will to do our work for the good of all. Thank you.¹³⁸

These ‘prayers,’ secular though they may be, demonstrate vestigial religiosity, and show how the practice of opening a meeting with an invocation, reflection, or similar element is still one drawn

¹³⁴ Town of Ajax. (2014 December 1). “Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Council.” Available at <https://events.ajax.ca/Meetings/Detail/2014-12-01-1900-Inaugural-Meeting-of-Council/f6cb3367-437b-4b2f-9a83-a9a500aaaff9> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Town of Ajax. (2010 December 6). “Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Council.” Available at <https://events.ajax.ca/Meetings/Detail/2010-12-06-1900-Council-Meeting/41f51f15-b392-4fd2-bd5b-a9a500aaafd2> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

¹³⁷ See Appendix B.50.

¹³⁸ See Appendix B.7.

from religious traditions. A practice that was likely intended to be secular and inclusive thus remains exclusionary simply by the language used to identify it in the agenda.

The Myriad Approaches to Moments of Silence

Beyond the secular statements and passages in those municipalities, we also found that 21 municipalities opened their regular meetings with a moment of silence. These practices are in many ways inherited from religious traditions but represent an attempt to secularize the ritual start to a meeting.

In our survey, we found that municipalities varied significantly in the terminology and practice that was involved in these ‘moments.’ The following examples taken from regular council meetings illustrate this range:

- The Town of Aylmer began with “a moment of reflection and respect.”¹³⁹
- The Township of Alnwick/Haldimand included a “Moment of Silence for our Fallen Soldiers and Citizens.”¹⁴⁰
- Bradford West Gwillimbury opened with “a short moment of private contemplation.”¹⁴¹
- The City of Brampton included a “moment of personal reflection” following O Canada where those in the chamber stood in silence.”¹⁴²
- Essex did the opposite, with a silent “moment of reflection” before the singing of O Canada.¹⁴³
- Cornwall included a “moment of personal reflection,” which is simply a moment of silence.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Town of Aylmer. (2020 September 24). “Agenda regular council meeting 7:00 PM - Monday, September 14, 2020.” Available at <https://aylmer.civicweb.net/document/76132/20200914-Council-Agda-Virtual.pdf?handle=11530FA81844461B9A76305A4DC0D65D> (retrieved November 20, 2022).

¹⁴⁰ Township of Alnwick/Haldimand. (2016 June 2). “The Corporation of the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand regular meeting of Thursday, June 2, 2016 - 12:30 P.M.” Available at <https://alnwickhaldimand.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/62106/?preview=66236> (retrieved November 20, 2022).

¹⁴¹ Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. (2022 October 4). “Regular council, Oct 4.” Available at <https://youtu.be/eQOUq-KJd6s?t=151> (retrieved November 24, 2022).

¹⁴² City of Brampton. (2019 July 23). “City council meeting - January 23, 2019.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klmYvdhxiE8&t=75s> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

¹⁴³ County of Essex. (2022 January 19). “Essex County regular meeting minutes.” Available at <https://coe-pub.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=cb4ecd5b-46f8-4603-8cd2-cd5425f0fda2&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁴⁴ City of Cornwall. (2020 January 27). “In-camera session / Rise and report from the in-camera meeting of Monday, January 27, 2020.” Available at <https://pub-cornwall.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=098d20bf-2c32-45d2-bd29-5584b8f335e1&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=2> (retrieved November 20, 2022).

- The Town of Cobourg included a “moment of reflection” where those in attendance (and able to do so) were asked to stand and “pause for a moment of reflection,” which was followed by a period of silence.¹⁴⁵
- The Municipality of Lakeshore similarly includes a silent “moment of reflection.”¹⁴⁶
- The Town of Fort Frances included a “moment of meditation.” Prior to February 2020, the minutes included a “Prayer or Silent Meditation” and for a brief period read “~~Prayer~~ Moment of Meditation.”¹⁴⁷ The word prayer was physically struck out on the agenda.
- Lanark County observed a “moment of silent meditation” following O Canada.¹⁴⁸
- The Township of Oro-Medonte began with a “Moment of Reflection” where a staff member read a territorial acknowledgement, followed by a silent pause.¹⁴⁹
- The Township of Perth East included a “Moment of Reflection” that began with the mayor asking everyone to “please bow their heads” followed by a period of silence.¹⁵⁰
- The Town of Rainy River began with a “Moment of Silence and Salute to the Queen,” which will presumably be updated following the death of Queen Elizabeth II.¹⁵¹
- The Country of Simcoe included “A Moment of Private Contemplation” after the anthem.¹⁵²

Some municipalities changed their practice to accommodate the necessity of virtual meetings in the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic. While many have returned to their previous practice, at least one has seemingly permanently altered its procedure. In December 2017, the Municipality of Grey Highlands included a “Personal Moment of Silence or Prayer” after the

¹⁴⁵ Town of Cobourg. (2022 August 22). “Regular council meeting minutes.” Available at <https://pub-cobourg.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=72c8fdc8-a2ab-45c9-97d5-b67312b47ac5&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁴⁶ Municipality of Lakeshore. (2022 September 13). “Regular council meeting.” Available at <https://lakeshoreon.swagit.com/play/09142022-722> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁴⁷ Town of Fort Frances. (2020 February 24). “Regular council meeting – 24 Feb 2020.” Available at <https://fortfrances.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1201> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

¹⁴⁸ Lanark County. (2022 September 7). “County Council minutes.” Available at <https://lanarkcounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1249> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁴⁹ Township of Oro-Medonte. (2022 November 9). “Council meeting.” Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkQDzT1CBF0> and minutes available at <https://oromedonte.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1239> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁵⁰ Township of Perth East. (2022 November 1). “Regular meeting of council.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u7dWc5OMM8> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁵¹ Town of Rainy River. (2020 February 10). “Schedule A to Bylaw 1735-20.” Available at <http://nebula.wsimq.com/f2c35e0f323d9540a23188c39b8607a6?AccessKeyId=2EAF50CBB311ADF432D0&disposition=0&alloworigin=1> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁵² Country of Simcoe. (2022 June 14). “Minutes.” Available at <https://simcoe.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Id=760> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

singing of the national anthem.¹⁵³ In January 2018, the item was changed to a “Personal Moment of Reflection.”¹⁵⁴ When the pandemic started, the council adopted amendments to its procedural bylaw to allow for the omission of the anthem and moment of reflection.¹⁵⁵ The anthem and reflection are no longer regularly included in council meetings.¹⁵⁶

We also observed that some municipalities changed from prayers to moments of silence following *Saguenay*. This practice is not necessarily exclusionary. When Green Party MLA Kevin Arseneau proposed replacing the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, he argued that “a moment of silence would generate... inclusivity and give everyone a chance to reflect in their own manner.”¹⁵⁷ We have made similar arguments, noting that:

by not being prescriptive, [a moment of silent reflection] avoids the risk of imposing on the rights and freedoms of [the] individual... By not including any overt statements, this approach avoids the risk of the state violating its neutrality by endorsing a particular belief and creating a space favouring one belief over others.¹⁵⁸

In this way, we recognize that a move towards moments of silent reflection is a step in the right direction, but it also underscores the importance of how these moments are introduced.

A moment of silent reflection can give all those present the opportunity to prepare themselves mentally for the proceedings—to ‘get their head in the game’—in whatever way they deem fit. Moments of silence are still prescriptive, in so far as those present may have other, less silent,

¹⁵³ Municipality of Grey Highlands. (2017 December 6). “Minutes Regular Meeting of Council.” Available at <https://greyhighlands.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1371> (retrieved December 7, 2022).

¹⁵⁴ Municipality of Grey Highlands. (2018 January 17). “Minutes Regular Meeting of Council.” Available at <https://greyhighlands.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1382> (retrieved December 7, 2022).

¹⁵⁵ Municipality of Grey Highlands. (2020 March 25). “Bylaw No. 2020-031 A By-Law to amend the Municipality of Grey Highlands Procedure By-law 2018-009 due to Emergency Legislation passed on March 19, 2020.” Available at <https://greyhighlands.civicweb.net/FileStorage/BFC1D7BCA5B0450086170E423923C24B-A%20By-law%20to%20amend%20the%20Municipality%20of%20Grey%20High.pdf> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁵⁶ Municipality of Grey Highlands. (2022 October 5). “Minutes.” Available at <https://greyhighlands.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/186561/?expanded=277207&preview=298469> (retrieved November 17, 2022).

¹⁵⁷ The Canadian Press. (2019 April 8). “Green legislator calls for replacement of New Brunswick legislature prayers with silence.” *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-green-legislator-calls-for-replacement-of-new-brunswick-legislature/>.

¹⁵⁸ See *inter alia* Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2019: 80.

ways of preparing themselves, or might not wish to participate, but they do not necessarily violate the state's duty of religious neutrality.

Not all moments of silence are created equal, however, and much depends on the context in which a moment of silence is introduced. As Delahunty explained, "the silence of a Buddhist temple is not the silence of a Christian church, for the silence of each enclosure swarms with the spiritual gestalt of each tradition."¹⁵⁹ The way a moment of silence is introduced can quickly transform an inclusive practice into one that could arguably coerce attendees into a religious practice. This can be subtle, such as when people are asked to bow their heads, or more overt, such as when people are asked to take a moment to pray silently, or when a moment of silence is included within a sermon.

Not all moments of silence are created equal, however, and much depends on the context in which a moment of silence is introduced.

There is an important difference between the mayor simply asking people to join in a moment of silent reflection and the mayor asking people to bow their heads and "silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings."¹⁶⁰ The latter combines a moment of silence with a prayer.

Prayer is not the only stated purpose for moments of silence. At a regular council meeting for the Township of Whitewater in November 2022, the mayor deviated from the typical practice of opening meetings with prayer and asked those present to "please stand for a moment of silence in recognition of November 11."¹⁶¹ Given the proximity to Remembrance Day, this would appear to be reasonable and is certainly more inclusive than opening with prayer. In Peterborough, Mayor Diane Therrien read the territorial acknowledgement and then asked councillors to "take 30 seconds of silent reflection to reflect on those principles," that is those principles outlined in the acknowledgement.¹⁶² This leaves less ambiguity as to what the purpose of the moment of silence, but it also appears to be a religiously neutral request. Of course, there is no guarantee that those present are taking the time to reflect on the suggested topic—nor are they required to—they could be contemplating the importance of peace, order, and good government, or thinking about their favourite 90s milk cap games. Freedom of thought and belief are equally protected fundamental freedoms under the *Charter*.

¹⁵⁹ Delahunty, R.J. (2006). "'Varied carols': Legislative prayer in a pluralist polity." *Creighton Law Review*, 40, 540.

¹⁶⁰ City of Pembroke 2020.

¹⁶¹ Township of Whitewater. (2022 November 2). "Whitewater Region - regular council - 02 Nov 2022." Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94RoldAWf_c (retrieved November 4, 2022).

¹⁶² City of Peterborough. (2022 September 26). "City Council meeting." Available at <https://pub-peterborough.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=13b8deb9-2622-439b-b05b-841a0205c0de> (retrieved November 24, 2022).

In addition to directing the topic of contemplation, directing physical actions to be taken as part of the moment of silence can be problematic. In the Township of Perth East, the mayor asked members of council to bow their heads for a moment of silence. This strongly resembles the acts associated with various forms of religious prayers.¹⁶³ Similarly, in Adelaide-Metcalf attendees were asked to stand for a moment of silence.¹⁶⁴ In both cases, people are asked to engage in an activity that is commonly associated with prayer and a traditionally religious practice.

Whether or not a particular moment of silence is inclusive or an arguable violation of the state's duty of religious neutrality will depend on context and the specific facts relating to how the moment is introduced.

Stealth prayer

As we have seen, following *Saguenay*, many municipalities that had previously included prayer in regular or inaugural meetings pursued several different courses of action in response to the decision. Some (a) ended the practice of opening their meetings with prayer entirely; (b) replaced the prayer with a moment of silent reflection; (c) adjusted their practices around prayer to make them appear more inclusive, such as having members of the public submit prayers/invocations (e.g. Hamilton) or rotating among councillors who delivered the prayer; (d) opted to instead open their meeting with a secular statement or (e) continued to open meetings with prayer. While many municipalities that continued to include prayers in violation of *Saguenay* did (and do) so openly, some seemingly took measures to obscure their actions, engaging in what we describe as 'stealth prayer.'

A stealth prayer is an effort to surreptitiously engage in legislative prayer, and it can take a few forms. In our exploration of moments of silence, we identified two different types of prescriptive moments of silence: instances where people were asked to pray silently and instances where people were asked to reflect on a secular subject. The former is a clear violation of the spirit of *Saguenay*, while the latter is not. Beyond prescriptive moments of silence, we observed different forms of stealth prayers in Ontario municipal council meetings.

A stealth prayer is an effort to surreptitiously engage in legislative prayer.

The Township of Russell, in a relatively novel approach, seemed to be trying to use a secular subject (the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*) to furtively introduce prayer into the meeting. Inaugural and regular meetings of Russell council began with the mayor reading the following

¹⁶³ Town of Perth East. (2020 June 2). "Regular meeting of council." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zzuZ2Rk9pQ> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

¹⁶⁴ City of Adelaide Metcalfe. (2020 February 18). "Adelaide Metcalfe February 18 2020 regular council meeting." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3cibZ1jTul> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

statement in French and English: “Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection.”¹⁶⁵ Unlike aforementioned Peterborough, where those present are requested to reflect on a territorial acknowledgement and the meaning of reconciliation, the Mayor of Russell is drawing attention to specifically religious language from the preamble of the *Charter* in what seems like a sneaky attempt at smuggling prayer into the meeting. This argument is bolstered by the fact that this practice was described as a ‘prayer’ in the agenda and minutes of Russell council meetings until August 2022, when Russell formally amended its procedures bylaw.¹⁶⁶ Now the item is referred to as a ‘moment of reflection,’ though the wording has not changed.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* begins with the statement: “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.”¹⁶⁷ Defenders of legislative prayer—including the Mayor and City of Saguenay—have argued that “the preamble of the *Charter* professes a theistic faith and in so doing establishes Canada as a theistic nation.”¹⁶⁸ This so-called ‘god of the preamble’ argument was thoroughly rejected in *Saguenay*, wherein Justice Gascon explained that

The reference to the supremacy of God in the preamble to the Canadian Charter cannot lead to an interpretation of freedom of conscience and religion that authorizes the state to consciously profess a theistic faith. The preamble, including its reference to God, articulates the ‘political theory’ on which the Charter’s protections are based.¹⁶⁹

Presumably, Mayor Leroux and the Township of Russell would argue that the inclusion of ‘god’ in their meetings merely articulates the ‘political theory’ on which their council is based. However, as Justice Gascon continued:

Thus, the reference to God in the preamble cannot be relied on to reduce the scope of a guarantee that is expressly provided for in the charters. Professor L. Sossin explains this as follows in “The ‘Supremacy of God’, Human Dignity and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (2003), 52 U.N.B.L.J. 227, at p. 229:

“The reference to the supremacy of God in the Charter **should not be construed so as to suggest one religion is favoured over another in Canada, nor that monotheism is more desirable than polytheism, nor that the God-**

¹⁶⁵ Township of Russell. (2020 March 2). “Regular council meeting - 2020_03_02.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZATP1vPL8w> (retrieved October 10, 2022).

¹⁶⁶ Township of Russell. (2022 August 15). “Minutes.” Available at <https://russell.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/42034/?preview=160595> (retrieved November 24, 2022).

¹⁶⁷ *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part 1 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11.

¹⁶⁸ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2019:30.

¹⁶⁹ *Saguenay*, para. 147.

fearing are entitled to greater rights and privileges than atheists or agnostics. Any of these interpretations would be at odds with the purpose and orientation of the Charter, as well as with the specific provisions regarding freedom of religion and conscience under s. 2.” [Emphasis in original]¹⁷⁰

The specific facts relating to the practice in Russell have not been tried by any Canadian court, so the practice poses a possible legal conundrum as to whether this is a viable loophole to *Saguenay*. Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that the Township of Russell is making a good faith effort to include the members of its community who do not believe in god. Mayor Leroux is clearly attempting to obscure the fact that he is using his position as mayor and chair of Russell Council to assert his belief in the existence and authority of his god over all those present.

It is hard to argue that the Township of Russell is making a good faith effort to include the members of its community who do not believe in god.

Returning to some of our previous examples of municipalities that read ‘mission statements’ prior to meetings, Reverend Kate Ballagh-Steeper’s closing prayers at the 2018 Goderich inaugural council meeting could be interpreted as a mission statement or a positive affirmation.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, it is called a prayer in the minutes and shares the structure of an intercessory prayer. While this is not the place for a deep dive into theology, the statement is asking for something on behalf of others, which begs the question of who is it asking?

Combining these considerations of the form of the statement given with our previous discussions of the effect of the positionality of the person delivering the opening remarks and the nominal framing of those remarks, we can have a practice that may appear from various perspectives to be secular, but when considered from a distance is clearly religious. By focusing only on individual aspects of a practice, we risk missing the forest through the trees. However, when you have a member of the Christian clergy, delivering the ‘opening prayers’ at a ceremony and giving a statement that is structured as a prayer, it is reasonable to judge it as a religious practice.

Perhaps some of these practices might pass judicial consideration; however, as with Russell, we should be holding our politicians above and beyond a standard of technically following the constitution. Rather, for the values of inclusion and multiculturalism that are enshrined in *Saguenay* to be given true life, the state should not only be formally neutral when it comes to matters of religion but should actively work to appear so. This is similar to conflict-of-interest regulations, where not only must we concern ourselves with actual conflicts, but also perceived

¹⁷⁰ *Saguenay*, para. 148.

¹⁷¹ See Appendix B.9.

conflicts. We need politicians that are willing to establish norms that enshrine secularism in the practices of government to demonstrate a fulsome respect for all beliefs and none.

The state should not only be formally neutral when it comes to matters of religion but should actively work to appear so.

Finally, the practice of starting a meeting with a reflection, introspective, or reflective element is a practice that is most associated with certain religious traditions. That it should be considered as a cultural practice divorced from this religious nature only goes to underscore the hegemony of those religious traditions. Beaman wrote about the “tainted neutrality of the secular,” whereby ‘secular’ is simply “another name for a vague Christianity.”¹⁷² Here, we see the practice of opening a meeting with a prayer nominally change to opening it with an invocation or reflection, but the ultimate form is still the same. It is prayer with more steps, or stealth prayer.

In her recent book, Beaman talked of the “the ancestral ghost of majoritarian religion [that] continue to haunt present-day iterations of the boundaries of religious freedom.”¹⁷³ As Bushfield and Phelps Bondaroff argued, quoting Beaman, the act of opening a meeting with an invocation is:

ultimately an exclusionary practice, which entrenches a specific and narrow understanding of an acceptable “vision and version of a history that belongs only to a particular segment of society, which is in turn located at the apex of a hierarchy of citizenship and belonging.”¹⁷⁴

Beaman explores the blurring of the lines between religion and culture, and while this is not the place for a deeper exploration of the subject, many Ontario municipalities seen to have attempted to side-step *Saguenay* by having their prayers fly under the radar masquerading as ‘cultural practices.’ While in some cases there may be some room for debate around the extent to which a secular invocation is still a prayer, in other cases, we see a clear violation of the state’s duty of religious neutrality.

¹⁷² Beaman 2020, quoting Jakobsen & Pellegrini 2004: 114.

¹⁷³ Beaman 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Bushfield & Phelps Bondaroff 2020; and see Beaman 2020.



FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

The Patriarchy of Prayer

In examining the prayers delivered at inaugural council meetings, we recorded the gender of those giving the prayers and found a considerable disparity between women and men. Of the 167 prayers, 119 (71.3%) were delivered by men, even though men make up slightly less than half of the population of Ontario.¹⁷⁵ This was also a recurring theme presenting itself in our past reports on BC and Manitoba.¹⁷⁶

Misogyny and male exceptionalism are deeply embedded within many religious traditions, which has led to the oppression of women for centuries.¹⁷⁷ We see misogyny across numerous faith traditions: from menstrual taboos, sumptuary regulations, restrictions on learning or teaching, prohibitions of women serving in leadership roles, and even women being treated as chattel.¹⁷⁸ Given that numerous faith traditions continue to prohibit or restrict women from serving in leadership roles, it is little surprise that the prayers in Ontario municipal council meetings were predominantly delivered by men. While this may explain the discrepancy, it does not excuse it.

Contrary to this, gender equality is deeply embedded in Canada's constitution. Beyond being guaranteed the equal protection of the law based on sex under Section 15 of the *Charter*, gender rights and freedoms are further enshrined as a fundamental pillar of Canadian democracy within Section 28.¹⁷⁹ This section is not subject to Section 33, the notwithstanding clause, underscoring the importance of these freedoms.¹⁸⁰ That is to say, no government can simply disregard the equality of the sexes in any law or regulation. Of course, gender-based

¹⁷⁵ Statistics Canada 2017b.

¹⁷⁶ Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2020; and see Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2022.

¹⁷⁷ Wood, H.J. (2019). "Gender inequality: The problem of harmful, patriarchal, traditional and cultural gender practices in the church." *HTS Theological Studies*, 75(1), 1–8.

¹⁷⁸ See *inter alia* Gottlieb, A. (2020). "Menstrual taboos: Moving beyond the curse." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. Eds. Bobel, C., Winkler, I.T., Fahs, B., Hasson, K.A., Kissling, E.A., Roberts, T.A. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan; Perales, F., & Bouma, G. (2019). "Religion, religiosity and patriarchal gender beliefs: Understanding the Australian experience." *Journal of Sociology*, 55(2), 323–341; Nzwoyo, G.E. (2019). "Christianity, misogyny and women." *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 16(3), 164–181; Mohl, A.S. (2015). "Monotheism: Its influence on patriarchy and misogyny." *Journal of Psychohistory*, 43(1), 2–20; Radford Ruether, R. (Ed.). (1998). *Religion and sexism: Images of women in the Jewish and Christian traditions*. Eugene, USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers; Elisheva Fonrobert, C. (2000). *Menstrual purity: Rabbinic and Christian reconstructions of biblical gender*. Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press; Etengoff, C., & Lefevor, T.G. (2021 August). "Sexual prejudice, sexism, and religion." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 40, 45–50; Homan, P., & Burdette, A. (2021). "When religion hurts: Structural sexism and health in religious congregations." *American Sociological Review*, 86(2).

¹⁷⁹ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 28.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, s 33.

discrimination and violence is still, regrettably, omnipresent in Canadian society. According to a study by the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, 44% of Canadian women report experiencing some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, a number that rises to 61% for Indigenous women.¹⁸¹

Given this clear constitutional requirement, one would expect local governments to aspire to ensure gender equity in their practices and procedures; however, given the existing contradictions, it is unsurprising that many fail to reach that potential. Undoubtedly, if challenged, some municipalities might consider creating an opportunity for more gender equality in prayers at their meetings, perhaps through the invitation of additional clergy or by rotating through different representatives. Nevertheless, as we will explore, this is an impossible target.

Firstly, as we have established, most of the prayers analyzed were delivered by men. This reflects the systemic misogyny inherent in many religious traditions. By granting time on formal agendas for representatives of these traditions, the state becomes complicit in the oppressive ideologies entrenched in these worldviews. It goes beyond violating the duty of religious neutrality to promoting gender discrimination.

By granting time on formal agendas for representatives of these traditions, the state becomes complicit in the oppressive ideologies entrenched in these worldviews.

We can see deep underlying tones of inequality inherent in many aspects of the traditions of the major Abrahamic religions, down to the very use of pronouns to describe god or the patriarchal nature of a deity. It is seemingly not possible to deliver a prayer to such a deity that would not reinforce patriarchal or misogynistic beliefs without bowdlerizing that prayer beyond recognition and meaning. The state should not be putting itself in a position that it could be seen to be endorsing such beliefs.

Efforts to screen candidates for delivering an invocation are doomed to failure as well. A well-meaning clerk or civil servant tasked with organizing their municipality's inaugural council meeting might seek to select a representative of a faith tradition whose views on gender align with the values enshrined in the *Charter* or they may opt to attempt to direct the official as to what would be permissible areas to preach about. However, as Bushfield and Phelps Bondaroff have explored at length, this creates multiple legal and pragmatic difficulties that are not easily

¹⁸¹ Cotter, A. (2021). "Intimate partner violence in Canada, 2018: An overview." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00003-eng.htm> (retrieved November 28, 2022).

overcome.¹⁸² Simply put, the state cannot—and should not—dictate dogma to the religious. The separation of religion and government cuts both ways.

Further, it would also be impossible to respect the nature of some religious practices surrounding the different genders, while also maintaining a space that respects gender equality.¹⁸³ This would necessarily restrict prayer at municipal council meetings to a select number of religions and exclude others. For example, it is standard practice for male and female Orthodox Jews to pray separated by a *mechitza* so they cannot see one another.¹⁸⁴ Several religions prohibit prayer during menstruation or in the presence of those who are menstruating.¹⁸⁵ Representative of these religions could never deliver a prayer to a municipal council.

Even if all these problems could be overcome, efforts to ensure statistical gender equality will inevitably fail to represent the full spectrum of sexual and gender identities. Were a municipality, for example, to invite one man and one woman to deliver successive invocations at the same inaugural meeting, they would still be excluding representation from trans, non-binary, and diverse gender diverse communities.

Municipal prayers are clearly proscribed by *Saguenay* because they infringe the state's duty of religious neutrality; however, our exploration here shows that even were a municipality to ignore the Constitution and attempt to proceed with an ecumenical or multi-faith invocation that it would still raise serious gender equity concerns under Sections 15 and 28 of the *Charter*. The exclusionary practice of religion and its misogynistic roots have no place within any level of government.

Religious Diversity (or lack thereof)

Based on the 2021 census, 52.1% of Ontarians were Christian, 31.6% no religious affiliation, 6.7% Muslim, 4.1% Hindu, 2.1% Sikh, 1.4% Jewish, 1.2% Buddhist, 0.6% another religion and 0.1% identified traditional Indigenous spirituality.¹⁸⁶ Each successive census in recent history has shown significant growth in those with no religion and religious minorities in Ontario.

Despite these statistics, Ontario municipalities that had prayers at their inaugural meetings almost exclusively included a Christian prayer or had the prayer conducted by a representative

¹⁸² See *Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem*. (2004). 2 S.C.R. 551, 2004 SCC 47; and see Bushfield & Phelps Bondaroff 2020:8.

¹⁸³ Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Wolosky, S. (2009). "Foucault and Jewish feminism: The *Mehitza* as dividing practice." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 17, 9–32.

¹⁸⁵ See for example Gottlieb 2020; Elisheva Fonrobert 2000.

¹⁸⁶ Statistics Canada. 2022. (table). *Census Profile*. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released October 26, 2022. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed November 28, 2022).

of a Christian organisation (90.4%). Out of the 87 transcriptions we examined, “Jesus” appeared 34 times, “Amen” appeared 68 times, “Lord” appeared 76 times, and “God” appeared 149 times.

What is clear from our examination of the content of the prayers and the affiliation of the person delivering the prayers at these to council meetings was that the religious diversity of the province was not reflected in the practice. What we see instead is Christian hegemony. In what way does a cavalcade of Christian prayers at municipal council meetings represent a multicultural Canada?

*In what way does a cavalcade of Christian prayers at
municipal council meetings represent a multicultural Canada?*

Here, Newmarket and Markham provide exceptions that seemingly prove the rule. In 2018, Markham invited Imām Yūsuf Badāt to deliver the “inaugural prayer.” In 2014, however, the prayer was delivered by Father Marcos Marcos of St Mark Coptic Orthodox Church.¹⁸⁷ Given inaugural meetings are held only once every four years, it seems dubious that were Markham to continue rotating through faith traditions that it could meaningfully represent the world’s major traditions within the lifetime of most residents of the city.

Newmarket’s inaugural meeting included an Indigenous blessing that was followed by prayers from four different religious representatives:

- Father Efren Alvarez-Pelayo delivered a Catholic prayer,
- Imam Mohammad Bemat delivered an Islamic prayer,
- Rabbi Mendy Grossbaum delivered a Jewish prayer and
- Pastor Garry James delivered a Christian prayer.¹⁸⁸

This attempt at interfaith inclusion is highly problematic for several reasons. First, this short list in no way represents the religious diversity of the community. Nor do these individuals reflect the religious diversity within their broader faith traditions. For example, by some counts, there are over 33,000 sects of Protestantism alone.¹⁸⁹ It is noteworthy, and a further example of Christian hegemony, that (a) two prayers were delivered by members of the Christian clergy, and (b) that all those delivering prayer represented monotheistic religions.

This list, interfaith though it may seem, reinforces the hegemony of monotheistic faiths over other faith traditions. Though these prayers were delivered by leaders of different faiths, the

¹⁸⁷ City of Markham. (2014 December 1). “Council minutes.” Available at <https://pub-markham.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=b42e0810-dbc4-4cdb-9f21-7d5f1d890a97&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English> (retrieved November 28, 2022).

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix B.22.

¹⁸⁹ Barrett, D.B., Kurian, G.T., & Johnson, T.M. (eds.). (2001). *World Christian encyclopedia: a comparative survey of churches and religions in the modern world* (2nd Ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

content of the prayers are remarkably similar. Pastor Garry James even acknowledged the similarities of the prayer's by telling the audience that "if prayers sound repetitive let it remind us that we have more in common than in difference as a community."¹⁹⁰

This show of interfaith inclusion ironically sends problematic and exclusory messages. It seemingly indicates that monotheistic Abrahamic religions are welcome to pray in Newmarket, while other faith traditions are not. It sends an even stronger message to non-believers, atheists, and humanists: Newmarket is open and welcoming to people of (some) faith(s), but not to the irreligious. The message is that religion is important and something worth elevating, so much so that we invited more than one religious representative to pray at a meeting.

The absence of other 'major' non-Abrahamic religious traditions like Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism from prayers delivered in Ontario municipal council meetings was telling. However, even if these religions were represented, the diversity of sects within them could never be justly represented, and a wide range of smaller, minority faith traditions would still be completely excluded. Again, Bushfield and Phelps Bondaroff explored these pragmatic—as well as legal—challenges in greater detail in *Arbiters of Faith*.¹⁹¹

Considering the significant obstacles to achieving representation of religious diversity in municipal prayer, adding or rotating the religions represented in municipal prayer is an unreliable method of achieving adequate representation of the religious diversity in Ontario. Achieving inclusion of people of all faiths and none is only possible with adherence to religious neutrality as outlined by the Supreme Court in *Saguenay*.

Indigenous Content

The lines between religion, spirituality, and culture are often blurred—especially where practices that differ from Judeo-Christian rituals, beliefs, and traditions are involved. Categorizing the myriad of Indigenous content that we encountered as 'religious' or 'spiritual' would be problematic and inaccurate. It would have resulted in the omission of Indigenous content that lacked elements to be classified as conventional religion, such as artistic, cultural, and diplomatic practices. We therefore separated these acts from prayer.

Prevalence and Diversity of Indigenous Practices

Given the frequency we noticed these practices, however, we wanted to know the extent to which Indigenous content, beyond individual words, was being included in council meetings. Data were less available for these practices, particularly as many individuals would insert territorial acknowledgements into their speeches without it being formally included in meeting minutes or on the agenda (for example, at the start of a mayor's inaugural address). Nevertheless, we identified at least 12 municipalities that had designated time in their inaugural council meetings for Indigenous content (such as land acknowledgments, prayers/blessings or other ceremonies) prior to their 2018 meeting: Toronto, Peel, Mississauga, Durham, Brampton,

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix B.22.

¹⁹¹ Bushfield & Phelps Bondaroff 2020.

Hamilton, Waterloo (Regional Municipality), London, Markham, Vaughan, Kitchener, and Windsor. By 2018, this had increased to 64 municipalities.

There was considerable diversity in the types of Indigenous elements that were included in inaugural meetings, for example:

- The City of Toronto had a 'special blessing and song' from Anishinaabe Indigenous Leader and Knowledge Keeper Bob Goulais.¹⁹²
- The Town of Durham had 'Opening remarks to members of Council' that were delivered by Chief LaRocca of the Scugog Island First Nation.¹⁹³
- The City of Brampton had a 'Smudging ceremony and song of acknowledgment/prayer' by Anishinaabe Traditional Grandmother Kim Wheatley.¹⁹⁴
- The City of Markham had Suzanna Smoke and Cedar Smoke from Alderville First Nation give a land acknowledgment.¹⁹⁵
- The City of Windsor had Knowledge Keeper and Elder Theresa Sim give a 'First Nations Presentation Welcome (song of welcome and friendship).'¹⁹⁶
- Prior to the four prayers that were delivered at Newmarket's 2018 inaugural meeting, Miriam Youngchief of the Ninoskombucha Tin Native Cultural Centre of York Region and South Simcoe delivered a "prayer of invocation."¹⁹⁷

Some of these practices, such as territorial acknowledgements, are clearly secular. We classified content as a territorial acknowledgement when the speaker acknowledged specific Indigenous nations or peoples and their stewardship over their territory. We should note that we did not assess the accuracy of these statements. As we noted in *In Open Defiance*,

The modern adoption of territorial acknowledgements and traditional welcomes is largely rooted in efforts aimed at acknowledging the harms caused by colonialism, in preserving traditional cultural practices, and in recognizing the work required in the journey towards reconciliation.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² City of Toronto. (2018 December 4). "Minutes." Available at <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilMinutesReport&meetingId=15089> (retrieved November 21, 2022).

¹⁹³ Town of Durham. (2018 December 5). "Minutes of the first meeting of regional council." Available at <https://calendar.durham.ca/meetings/Detail/2018-12-05-1000-Regional-Council-Meeting/30b068a0-c8e3-4e96-9fe9-a9b300f67f6b> (retrieved November 21, 2022).

¹⁹⁴ City of Brampton. (2018 December 3). "Inauguration of Council - December 3, 2018." Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHLUC5ovPeM&list=PLwPpn41MA71RKbftt_pHLtTmDXTEETjnC&t=826s (retrieved November 21, 2022).

¹⁹⁵ City of Markham 2018.

¹⁹⁶ City of Windsor. (2018 December 3). "Inaugural meeting of the 2018-2022 Windsor City Council." Available at <https://citywindsor.ca/cityhall/City-Council-Meetings/Council%20Minutes/Documents/2018/December%203.%202018.pdf> (retrieved November 21, 2022).

¹⁹⁷ Town of Newmarket 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2022:25.

Similarly, traditional welcome ceremonies and protocols can take many forms, and while they may contain spiritual elements, these elements are also interwoven with cultural, political, artistic, and diplomatic content. As is explored in greater detail in *In Open Defiance*, “defining Indigenous gatherings, rituals and ceremonies as either religious or not, is in and of itself politicized and complex,” and “deeply entwined with colonialism.”¹⁹⁹ Further,

Assigning traditional Indigenous practices like a welcome, ‘blessing,’ or territorial acknowledgement as belonging exclusively in the category of ‘religion’ fails to accurately describe these practices. As Nadeau explains, “to consider spirit and ceremony abstracted from the culture, values, protocols and laws of a tradition, as well as from the social, political and economic spheres of life, distorts a tradition.” Or, as one anonymous Mohawk activist explained to Nadeau, “his tradition was not a ‘religion’ but a way of life.”²⁰⁰

While the terminology may be different, it is difficult to differentiate a traditional blessing from a welcome, though the term ‘blessing’ may be more closely associated with religious practices. Likewise, both blessings and welcome ceremonies may include language that would typically be associated with religion, but conflating them with, or describing them as, prayers would not accurately capture the other elements of which they are comprised. Many traditional welcomes are protocol-laden ceremonies used by Indigenous communities to welcome guests, and as such, they contain cultural, political, and diplomatic elements. Describing them as a religious practice does not accurately describe them and fails to capture their complex natures. Additional factors further confound our understanding of these practices.

To highlight the complexity of these practices, consider Elder Victor Pelletier of Fort Williams First Nation’ “Prayer and Smudge Blessing Ceremony” performed at the 2018 inaugural council meeting of Neebing. The minutes state:

After sharing his story with those present, Elder Pelletier blessed himself, then asked for blessing on this Council and its term. After the prayers, a smudging purification ceremony took place.²⁰¹

Further blurring categories, Elder Pelletier is also a Deacon of St Anne Parish, a Catholic Church in Fort William First Nation.²⁰² He was identified in the minutes as “Elder, Deacon, Fort William

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2022:26, citing Nadeau, D. (2016). “Decolonizing religious encounter? Teaching ‘Indigenous traditions, women and colonialism.’” *Mixed blessings: Indigenous encounters with Christianity in Canada*. Ed. T. Bradford & C. Horton. Vancouver: UBC Press, 164-182, p.165.

²⁰¹ Municipality of Neebing. (2018 December 3). “Minutes of the inaugural meeting of council.” Available at <https://events.neebing.org/meetings/Detail/2018-12-03-1800-Special-Meeting-of-Council/c1504c8a-a4c7-4323-bf93-abd700ba0bd0> (retrieved November 22, 2022).

²⁰² See for example St Anne Parish. (2022 May 22). “Sixth Sunday of Easter.” Available at: <https://indigenouscatholic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/St-Anne-Bulletin-6th-Easter-2022.pdf> (retrieved November 16, 2022).

Nation.”²⁰³ The prayer was not included on the initial agenda and seems likely it was intended to be an Indigenous welcome, rather than as an opening prayer.²⁰⁴ We therefore opted to exclude this as a prayer.

Among the prayers we transcribed, we identified three that included territorial acknowledgments during the inaugural council meeting: Reverend Gordon Dunbar of Kincardine, Pastor Bill Wieve of Norfolk County, and Reverend Jeff Ward of Oakville.²⁰⁵ Additionally, Reverend Kate Ballagh-Steeper of Goderich acknowledged Indigenous stewardship over the land as well as treaty relationships, however she did not acknowledge specific nations or peoples.²⁰⁶

For regular council meetings, we found at least 64 (17.8%) out of 360 municipalities included territorial acknowledgments at the start of each meeting. It is likely we missed many municipalities as the data presented is generally reflective of the periods during summer 2020 and 2021 when we collected our data. We recognize that there are ongoing changes to municipal proceedings. It is worth noting as well that territorial acknowledgments sometimes took place in the council meetings but were not included in the minutes or agenda.

As we have not consistently collected data on Indigenous content in our reports, we cannot directly compare Ontario municipalities to those in British Columbia or Manitoba. As our work on Ontario spanned several years (2020-2022), we did notice municipalities that did not previously include Indigenous content begin to do so while we were in the process of verifying and crosschecking other data, which suggested that the practice is becoming more widespread.

Open Secularism and Substantive Equality

As another way of conceptualizing the decision to exclude Indigenous content as examples of legislative prayer, we present here an argument derived from substantive, as opposed to formal, equality. In essence, if the purpose of secularism is to ensure that people of all faiths and none can participate equally in the public sphere, then we should be open to practices that attempt to redress historical (and contemporary) injustices.

A straightforward conception of secularism is based on the intuitively straightforward concept of formal equality: The state should treat all people the same. This approach would thus claim that a prayer is a prayer is a prayer, regardless of whether the prayer was delivered by the Pope or by a local Indigenous elder. With respect to formal equality, the context is unimportant as the goal is a rigid exclusion of religious and spiritual practices from the public sphere.

²⁰³ Municipality of Neebing 2018.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ See Appendices B.14, B.25, and B.28.

²⁰⁶ See Appendix B.9.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission, established by the government of Quebec to examine reasonable accommodation for religions and cultural differences,²⁰⁷ described this as a rigid secularism where society accords “more importance to the principle of neutrality than to freedom of conscience and religion, attempting to relegate the practice of religion to the private and communal sphere, leaving the public sphere free of any expression of religion.”²⁰⁸ While Ahmet Kuru described this form of secularism as a situation whereby “state excludes religion from the public sphere and plays an ‘assertive’ role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain.”²⁰⁹ As Jukier and Woehrling note, “this concept of secularism is obviously less compatible with religious accommodation, as well as antithetical to the recognition of the place of pluralism in the modern state.”²¹⁰

This rigid secularism is not the only approach to secularism, however.²¹¹ The other dominant approach is open secularism, which Kuru describes as a situation where the “state play[s] a ‘passive’ role in avoiding the establishment of any religions, [and] allows for the public visibility of religion.”²¹² Under this version of secularism, the goal is to “maintain state neutrality toward various religions.”²¹³ Or in the words of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, as explained by Jukier and Woehrling,

A more “flexible” or “open” secularism, on the other hand, is based on the protection of freedom of religion, even if this requires a relaxation of the principle of neutrality. In this model, state neutrality towards religion and the separation of Church and State are not seen as ends in themselves, but rather as the means to achieving the fundamental objectives of respect for religious and moral equality and freedom of conscience and religion. In open secularism, any tension or contradiction between the various constituent facets of secularism should be resolved in favour of religious freedom and

²⁰⁷ Officially the Quebec Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. See Bouchard, G., & Taylor, C. (2008). “Building the future: A time for reconciliation.” Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d’accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles, Government of Quebec. Available at <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/1565995> (retrieved December 5, 2022).

²⁰⁸ Bouchard-Taylor Commission, cited by Jukier & Woehrling 2010:158.

²⁰⁹ Kuru, A.T. (2007). “Passive and assertive secularism: Historical conditions, ideological struggles, and state policies toward religion.” *World Politics*, 59(4), pp. 568-594, 572; see also Forbes 2012:4.

²¹⁰ Jukier, R., & Woehrling, J. (2010). “Religion and the secular state in Canada.” In *Religion and the Secular State: National Reports*. Eds. Javier Martinez-Torron & W. Cole Durham. International Center for Law and Religious Studies, p.158.

²¹¹ See for example Jukier, R., & Woehrling, J. (2010). “Religion and the secular state in Canada.” In *Religion and the Secular State: National Reports*. Eds. Javier Martinez-Torron & W. Cole Durham. International Center for Law and Religious Studies, p.155–191, 157–158; Forbes, L. (2012 August). “To pray or not to pray, is that the question?: How the increasing desire for state neutrality affects prayer before council meetings in Canada.” *Regulating Religion E-Journal*, 1–18, 4.

²¹² Kuru 2007:571.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

equality. This conception, which sees secularism as directed at state institutions rather than individuals, does not strive to neutralize or erase religion as an identity marker in society.²¹⁴

The Commission ultimately endorsed open secularism, given the reality that “secularism and pluralism are both realities of Canadian society.”²¹⁵ Here, it is important to note that the duty of religious neutrality applies to the state. Individuals are free to express their own religions and cultures as they see fit, but “the government expresses no preference for any way of life, and individuals or groups are precluded from using ‘the coercive apparatus of the state to win for themselves greater liberty or greater distributive share on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value.’²¹⁶ As Justice Gascon outlined in *Saguenay*, “a neutral public space does not mean the homogenization of private players in that space. Neutrality is required of institutions and the state, not individuals.”²¹⁷ Council members are welcome to prayer on their own time and can even express religious sentiment when debating motions and policies. The issue with formal prayer is when it is included in the agenda of a meeting and therefore endorsed by the state.

“Neutrality is required of institutions and the state, not individuals.”
Justice Gascon²¹⁸

Open secularism, with its respect for religious accommodation, maintains space for efforts to redress past injustices, including to religious (and spiritual) minorities. This can be considered through the growing body of Canadian jurisprudence that seeks to promote substantive equality, which “is the recognition that not all people start off from the same position and that these unequal opportunities make it more difficult for some to be successful.”²¹⁹ It is based on the idea that equal treatment under the law can still result in unfair outcomes based on historical and present inequalities.

These are not new ideas. Section 15 of the *Charter*, which guarantees everyone’s equal treatment under the law, includes a second provision that permits “any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups.”²²⁰ This subsection protects measures designed to combat discrimination and “[s]ections 15(1)

²¹⁴ Jukier & Woehrling 2010:158.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Madeley, J. (2003). “European liberal democracy and the principle of state religious neutrality.” *West Europe Politics*, 26(1), 1-22, 6, citing J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971.

²¹⁷ *Saguenay*, para. 74.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Government of Canada. (2019 November 21). “Jordan’s Principle: substantive equality principles.” Available at <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1583698429175/1583698455266> (retrieved November 28, 2022).

²²⁰ *Charter*, s 15(2).

and 15(2) work together to promote the vision of substantive equality that underlies s. 15 as a whole.”²²¹

In this framework, context is essential. One needs to consider the history and present systemic issues that marginalize an identifiable group, and whether a program can be designed to ameliorate those disadvantages. Given the historical context of discrimination against Indigenous peoples by the Canadian state—which we recognize as genocide²²²—including Indigenous ceremonial practices can likely be squared within the goal of substantive equality and Section 15(2). This is particularly relevant, as for long periods of Canada’s history, Indigenous spiritual practices were criminalized.²²³

Ultimately, the question raised by these difference conceptions of secularism comes down to what goal secularism is trying to achieve. As explained by Justice Gascon in *Saguenay*, the duty of neutrality “helps preserve and promote the multicultural nature of Canadian society enshrined in s. 27 of the *Canadian Charter*. Section 27 requires that the state’s duty of religious neutrality be interpreted not only in a manner consistent with the protective objectives of the *Canadian Charter*, but also with a view to promoting and enhancing diversity.”²²⁴ It is further “based on a democratic imperative.”²²⁵ If the point of the duty of neutrality is promoting diversity, multiculturalism, and democratic inclusion, then actions that foster the inclusion of *marginalized* communities can be reconciled with secularism.

Ultimately, the question raised by these difference conceptions of secularism comes down to what goal secularism is trying to achieve.

Differentiating an ‘Indigenous Blessing’ from a Prayer

Proponents of a more rigid secularism may bristle at the above approach, which seemingly opens the door open to legislative prayers of any group that can claim to be marginalized. And given even some Christians have claimed they have been persecuted in Canada, then surely any prayer can be justified.²²⁶

²²¹ *R. v. Kapp*, (2008) 2 S.C.R. 483, 2008 SCC 41, at para. 16.

²²² See BCHA. (2019 November 25). “Issues summary: Colonialism & systemic racism.” Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/issues_summary#1.6 (retrieved November 28, 2022); and see National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019 June 3). “A legal analysis of genocide – supplementary report.” Available at https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Supplementary-Report_Genocide.pdf (retrieved November 28, 2022).

²²³ Lutz, John (1992). “After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890”. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. 3 (1): 69–93. doi:[10.7202/031045ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/031045ar)

²²⁴ *Saguenay*, at para. 74.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* at para. 75.

²²⁶ See *inter alia* International Christian Concern. (2021 June 7). “Ten Canadian Churches Targeted by Vandals.” Available at <https://www.persecution.org/2021/07/07/ten-canadian-churches-targeted->

The answer to this dilemma is to return to the question of context. We can—and should—differentiate between a Christian legislative prayer that is based in a supremacist worldview and an Indigenous practice meant to reflect the convergence of two autonomous governing peoples. For example, the Mayor of Saguenay explicitly declared his reasons for promoting prayers at council:

[translation] I'm in this battle because I worship Christ.

When I get to the hereafter, I'm going to be able to be a little proud. I'll be able to say to Him: "I fought for You; I even went to trial for You". There's no better argument. It's extraordinary.

I'm in this fight because I worship Christ. I want to go to heaven and it is the most noble fight of my entire life.²²⁷

Canada is a country established with the religious authority granted to the British and French empires by the Church of England and the Vatican, respectively. Quoting the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls:

Claiming land for European monarchs was also tied to the practice of claiming souls for God. In the case of Christianity, and, in particular, early Catholicism, core beliefs brought to communities by missionaries challenged Indigenous notions of gender and relationships between men, women and gender-diverse people, as well as their leadership, as well as women's leadership within communities. They directly impacted the rights to culture, as well as associated political and social rights as enjoyed by women and gender-diverse people within their communities prior to colonization.²²⁸

As we argue in *Decolonizing Legislative Prayers*, the historic practice of opening legislative meetings "is thus connected to efforts to propagate a Christian worldview as dominant" and that mindset informed the colonists who established the Canadian state.²²⁹ In other words then, Christians legislative prayers are about power, whereas the inclusion of non-Christian practices are more akin to efforts to foster diversity. That is, a Sikh or Muslim delivering a prayer at a

[vandals/](#) (retrieved December 7, 2022) and Boot, J. (2020 September 28). "On the Brink: The Criminalization of Christianity in Canada." *Ezra Institute*. Available at <https://www.ezrainstitute.com/resource-library/articles/on-the-brink-the-criminalization-of-christianity-in-canada/> (retrieved December 7, 2022).

²²⁷ *Saguenay* at para. 116, quoting Quebec Human Rights Tribunal, 2011 QCTDP 1, [2011] R.J.Q. 507, [2011] AZ-50722559, [2011] Q.H.R.T.J. No. 1 (QL), 2011 CarswellQue 7400 (WL Can.), at para. 88.

²²⁸ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). (2019). "Reclaiming power and place: the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls." Vol 1a. Available at https://www.mmiwgffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf (retrieved December 7, 2022), p 236.

²²⁹ Phelps Bondaroff, T, Bushfield, I, Marshall, K, Prasad, R & Laurence, N (2020). "Decolonizing Legislative Prayers." BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/decolonizing_legislative_prayers (retrieved December 7, 2022).

public function in Canada aren't there with the force of the state but more at the mercy of the state. That is, the state isn't necessarily endorsing those beliefs but merely making space for them.

As we have discussed at length though, such prayers can and do still exclude the nonreligious. Which is where the subtle (and not so subtle) differences in Indigenous practices matter. As mentioned, there's a diplomatic element in many cases and reconciliation is in many cases about shared governance of these lands. Incorporating meeting practices from local First Nations accomplishes that goal.

With regards to the inclusion of minority faiths, such inclusion is in many ways a disservice to members of those communities. Rather than granting them equal standing, merely rotating among faiths or including one as a part of a multifaith panel is a clearly tokenistic act and further serves to 'other' members of that faith tradition. It also inevitably excludes the full religious diversity of the community, given the highly individualistic nature of religious faiths.

Indigenous communities, by contrast, do have distinct Nations and traditional governance structures with which local governments can interface with. The Region of Peel, for example, recognizes that it shares territory with the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, particularly the Anishinabek, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Ojibway/Chippewa peoples, as well as the Metis and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.²³⁰ The Region can thus directly interface with representatives of each of those Nations, through their established hierarchies.

Toward a Decolonized Secularism

Taking this approach a step further, many have made the case better than we can that we should consider Indigenous spiritual traditions uniquely as compared to other religious traditions. For example, building off the work of Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor on 'open secularism,' Professor Carlos Colorado has argued that:

Advocating for the unique treatment of Indigenous spirituality is not a call for the hierarchical preference of an Indigenous vision of the good life over other worldviews. That would render secularism and its position on state neutrality internally inconsistent. Instead, an emphasis on harm brings to the fore the demand to respond in substantive ways (i.e. through government policies, through social practices, through education, etc.) to the history of colonization and [Indian Residential Schools]. Underscoring harm in this way allows for a unique approach to freedom and equality that emphasizes the need to repair relationships and atone for past wrongs as a nation. It helps to carve out the political space needed to attend to cases in which tension between freedom and equality requires mediation, while also enabling Canadians to respond to

²³⁰ Region of Peel. (n.d.). "Indigenous Land Acknowledgement." Available at <https://www.peelregion.ca/council/indigenous.asp> (retrieved December 7, 2022).

the enduring and systemic impacts of coloniality. This reimagining of the secular and the unique treatment of Indigenous sacrality rest upon an acknowledgement that though an open secularism approach and an emphasis on harm may very well take on different guises in other political contexts and territories, that the [Calls To Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission] provide some obvious parameters for how Canadian secularism must be shaped if it is to be shorn of its coloniality.²³¹

Colorado noted that “decolonizing the secular at its most radical level may ultimately mean a rejection of secularism altogether and the championing of Indigenous models of public life and deliberation to engage cultural and religious difference.”²³²

“Decolonizing the secular at its most radical level may ultimately mean a rejection of secularism altogether and the championing of Indigenous models of public life and deliberation to engage cultural and religious difference.”

*Carlos Colorado*²³³

As secularism remains a fundamental humanist value, we are not wont to endorse quite such a radical position. Thankfully, Colorado ultimately returned to an approach that attempts to incorporate reconciliation with the concept of ‘open secularism’:

A decolonized secularism must be 1) compatible with the mandate and findings of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission]; 2) congruous with the [Calls to Action], including those calls that insist on self-determination for Indigenous peoples as it pertains to spirituality and religion; 3) respectful of Indigenous sovereignty more broadly, acknowledging that Reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples necessarily exists alongside and intertwined with movements of Indigenous resurgence; and 4) attentive to the ways that Canadian Constitutional law exists alongside Indigenous law, the latter of which rests on sacred stories and spiritual concepts.²³⁴

Notably, this approach should not be seen as limited to the development and inclusion of Indigenous territorial acknowledgements or welcoming ceremonies at the start of city council meetings. The long-term path toward reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization will necessarily involve the review and overhaul of much of our traditional ways of governance. Nevertheless, these acknowledgements are often a straightforward place to begin.

²³¹ Colorado, C. (2020). “Reconciliation and the secular.” *Social Compass*, 67(1), 72–85.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

As evidence of this, we can consider the recent decision by the District of West Vancouver, BC, to cease reading a territorial acknowledgement at the start of each regular council meeting. The decision was met with vocal disappointment from representatives of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw Council chairperson Khelsilem told Global News “It’s a symbolic way to practise reconciliation in a small sense.... When we see governments pulling back from these gestures, which really should be understood as an entry point to further work, it starts to feel like we’re drifting backwards.”²³⁵ Territorial acknowledgements are clearly an important first step, but not the final step, in the path toward reconciliation.

Considering the aspirations of truth and reconciliation, Indigenous voices and practices should not only be present, but prioritised in all levels of government—including municipalities. In the data gathered, we found a staggering lack of Indigenous representation in municipal proceedings. Here we hope to have built constructively upon our growing writing on the complexities posed by the inclusion of Indigenous practices in colonial governance structures. We remain confident that we should not simply conflate Indigenous content with prayer and that efforts to bring municipal councils into compliance with *Saguenay* should not interfere with equally important efforts to further the process of reconciliation.

²³⁵ McSheffrey, E. & Agahi, E. (2022 November 22). “Squamish Nation ‘displeased’ by West Vancouver council dropping oral land acknowledgements.” *Global News*. Available at <https://globalnews.ca/news/9295007/west-vancouver-council-dropping-oral-land-acknowledgements/> (retrieved November 28, 2022).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Potential sources of error

Despite exhaustive searches of municipal council websites, writing directly to municipalities, and direct phone calls to municipal clerks and staff, we were unable to find information regarding the contents of the inaugural meetings of 32 municipalities. Historical records from pre-Saguenay were even more spotty. Additional archival work may make this information available in the future.

For the jurisdictions where data were available, it is still possible that prayers were overlooked. However, as agendas and minutes typically document all dignitaries involved in the ceremonies in some detail, we concluded it unlikely we missed a significant number of prayers at inaugural council meetings. Since we only reviewed recordings of regular council meetings where we had identified a prayer (or a similar practice) through a notation in that meetings agenda, it is also possible that we overlooked prayers that were not included in the formal agendas of meetings. This would represent another form of stealth prayer and one that would need to be identified by those attending meetings in person or watching livestreams or recordings of meetings.

As we explored above, we encountered an incredible diversity of practices across Ontario municipalities. Our team may have missed other edge cases, such as the “Reading of the Athenian Pledge” by all members of the newly elected Brantford City Council at their 2018 inaugural meeting.²³⁶ We attempted to account for this with some random spot checks of meeting minutes but acknowledge our limitations given the size of the present dataset.

It is also possible that some councils included a prayer prior to their meetings but that this element was not explicitly referenced or itemized in the agenda or minutes of that meeting. Despite its ubiquity, prayer has often been considered a private practice, and while it continues to open daily sessions of the House of Commons and Senate, members of the public are excluded from the chambers during prayers.²³⁷ And as we note in *House of Prayers*, “the private nature of prayers is further reinforced by a common practice across most Commonwealth legislatures of not recording the content of prayers in Hansard.”²³⁸ Given our approach, it would not be possible to identify such prayers if they occurred.

²³⁶ City of Brantford. (2018 December 3). “Inaugural Meeting Minutes.” Available at <https://calendar.brantford.ca/meetings/Detail/2018-12-03-1800-City-Council-Inaugural-Meeting/615449f8-9c60-4362-b476-a9e700d4c06f> (retrieved December 7, 2022).

²³⁷ Fizet, C. (2010 June 2). “Reopening the discussion on the use of ‘the Lord’s Prayer’ in the Ontario Legislature.” Paper presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, p. 2.

²³⁸ Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2019; and see also Bueckert, C., Hill, R., Parisotto, M., & Roberts, M. (2017). “Religion, faith and spirituality in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.” Canadian Parliamentary Review, (Spring), 25–29; and Boissinot, J. (2015 April 17). “The end of prayer in the councils of the nation.” *The Globe and Mail*. Available at

Ultimately, our study was focused on formal practices. Informal or unofficial practices will always be difficult to identify and may come and go with each election or even more frequently. Other than inaugural meetings, it is possible that our approach overlooked one-off prayers—situations where a council decided to include prayer in a meeting to respond to current events, such as include a prayer or moment of silence in a meeting in recognition of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. These individual moments, while remaining problematic, would not be identified by our approach.

With respect to informal prayers, councillors praying on their own or in a small group in private prior to a meeting may also occur, but as a largely private practice, it would not likely violate the state's duty of religious neutrality as outlined in *Saguenay*.

Finally, we also recognize that municipal bylaws and procedures are constantly being updated. All the data represented in this report were gathered from the years 2015 to 2021. While we were able to identify a few more recent changes to procedures through cross-referencing and verification, it is entirely possible that changes made to procedures in 2022 would not be captured in this report. Given the scope of this report, we were forced to push our target publication date until after the 2022 inaugural meetings, which means many practices may have already been updated.

If any of the municipalities identified herein as having prayers have subsequently updated their practices, we appreciate the change, and would encourage others to follow suit. If you identify an error in our data, please reach out to us so that we may update our data set and findings.²³⁹

Future research

There are certain aspects that we did not have the capacity to study fully, or that extended beyond the scope of our project. A key component of this study was examining prayer in 2018 inaugural council meetings. The most recent municipal elections concluded on October 24, 2022, and this has subsequently led to a new wave of inaugural meetings. One potentially insightful area for future research, therefore, would be examining these most recent inaugural meetings for the inclusion of prayer and similar elements. This would allow us to track changes in levels of compliance with *Saguenay* over time.

Prior to 2022 elections, the BCHA wrote to municipalities that had previously included prayer in their inaugural or regular meetings and informed them that the practice was unconstitutional. Studying the prevalence of prayer in 2022 inaugural meetings would serve to evaluate the effectiveness of these letters.

While a wide range of factors likely contribute to a municipality violating *Saguenay*, further research into the demographics, locations, and other features could yield insight into broader

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/the-end-of-prayer-in-the-councils-of-the-nation/article24010902/> (retrieved December 6, 2022).

²³⁹ Email: info@bchumanist.ca

trends and contribute to our understanding of why a municipality would choose to include prayer in a meeting post-*Saguenay*. Given the smaller number of municipalities, we identified in BC and Manitoba this was not possible.

As noted above, some municipalities altered their practices concerning prayer post-*Saguenay* to have prayers delivered by council members on a rotation. A rotation of prayers where council members can devise the content themselves present an interesting research opportunity, allowing one to replicate the methodology we employed in *House of Prayers*, our study of prayers delivered in the Legislative Assembly of BC.²⁴⁰ Coding and analyzing the content of a larger sample of prayers would provide a greater understanding of whether the prayers were representative of the diversity of the broader electorate. Such a data set of prayers also presents numerous research possibilities to those interested in exploring legislative prayer in greater detail, from factors like length, language, religiosity, prayer type/goal, and other factors.

Our exploration here, and in our past work on legislative prayers, on the intricacies of integrating Indigenous practices while maintaining a respect for the state's duty of religious neutrality is still very preliminary. These are important questions for the future of Canada and its relationship with Indigenous peoples. There is significant work to be done further quantifying the prevalence of these practices and qualitatively exploring their subtle differences. Much of that work can follow the basic methodology of the Canada-Wide Municipal Prayer Survey, although additional theoretical and philosophical work will also be necessary to provide more fulsome answers to the questions raised by these issues.

Finally, Ontario municipalities are not the only place where one can find legislative prayer in Canada. The practice remains unfortunately widespread, at municipal, provincial, and federal levels—most provincial legislatures continue to open with overtly Christian prayers, as does the House of Commons and the Senate.²⁴¹ This ongoing practice provides many avenues of research. The BCHA will continue to investigate legislative prayer in all these contexts.

²⁴⁰ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2019.

²⁴¹ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2021.



CONCLUSION

Since the *Sagueany* decision in 2015, we expected to see municipal councils adhering to the strictures established by the Supreme Court of Canada. Nevertheless, an astonishing number of municipalities in Ontario appear to have violated this ruling: 156 (47.6%) municipalities included prayer as part of their 2018 inaugural meetings, and at least 9 (2.5%) included prayer in their regular council meetings.

By comparison, in British Columbia, we found 23 (14.2%) municipalities that included prayer in their 2018 inaugural council meetings and none in regular meetings,²⁴² while in Manitoba we found six (5.9%) municipalities that included prayers in their 2018 inaugural meetings and four (3.9%) in their regular meetings.²⁴³

Some of these violations were the most serious of any we have examined thus far. Many of the prayers we transcribed from Ontario municipalities included overtly Christian content, such as the Lord's Prayer, which was read at every Laurentian Valley council meeting.

There were some promising findings. The number of Ontario municipalities that included prayer in their meetings declined following *Sagueany*, and a significant number of municipalities have shifted to moments of silence: 62 municipalities included a moment of silence in their 2018 inaugural meetings, and 21 in regular meetings.

While some municipalities adapted their practices to make them more inclusive, we identified a few municipalities that adopted measures designed to obscure their continued violation of *Sagueany*. We described these as 'stealth prayer,' and Ontario is the first jurisdiction where we identified these practices. We view this emerging trend with concern as it represents some municipalities intentionally taking measures to conceal discriminatory practices.

Despite progress, additional action is needed to ensure that municipal council meetings are welcoming to everyone, regardless of religious belief or lack thereof. Specifically:

- Municipalities should remove 'prayers' or 'invocations' from meeting agendas, including inaugural meetings.
- City councils should not grant speaking time to representatives of religious organizations at regular or inaugural meetings.
- If a municipality opts to replace these elements with a moment of silence or secular reflection, they must be attentive to the Christian hegemony in which many such practices have developed. For example, a moment of silence should be introduced in such a way as to avoid any perception that it should be used for prayer.

Finally, we noted many municipalities working to include Indigenous territorial acknowledgements and related content in their meetings. This was an encouraging sign of

²⁴² Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2020.

²⁴³ Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2022.

efforts at reconciliation, but we recommend municipalities approach such practices with respect for both the desires of local First Nations and the state's duty of religious neutrality.

We remain cautiously optimistic going forward, even as a resurgent Christian nationalism becomes more politically prominent in the United States and around the world.²⁴⁴ Among the examples we studied included many encouraging trends toward inclusion, diversity, and secularism. While there were notable exceptions and dissentient councils, we observed an overall trend following *Saguenay* of councils dropping prayers altogether or in favour of moments of silence.

There is still much work to be done in Ontario and now is more a time than ever to vigilantly defend the separation of religion and government. We hope that the findings of this study highlight the importance of verifying compliance with court decisions and the role for ongoing research into issues of secularism. This also underscores the importance of advocacy—many municipalities continue to include prayer out of ignorance or path dependency, and advocacy by civil society actors, like the BCHA, can help lead to change.²⁴⁵ Such research-informed advocacy will play a critical role in protecting our society from the influence of harmful religious rhetoric, while also promoting a more diverse and inclusive democracy.

²⁴⁴ Vegara, C. (2022 October 17). "Opinion: How Christian nationalism is taking root across the world." *Politico*. Available at <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/10/27/global-far-right-christian-nationalists-00063400> (retrieved November 30, 2022).

²⁴⁵ See for example BCHA. (2022 October 18). "BCHA reminds newly elected councils not to open meetings with prayers." Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/local_prayers_2022 (retrieved December 6, 2022); and see BCHA. (2022 November 7). "Update: Invocation cancelled in Creston following complaints by Humanists." Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/creston_invocation_2022 (retrieved December 6, 2022).

APPENDIX A: THE *SAGUENAY* DECISION²⁴⁶

Section 2(a) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees Canadians the “freedom of conscience and religion.”²⁴⁷ Through a growing body of jurisprudence, the Supreme Court of Canada has established that in order to protect this freedom, governments have a “duty of religious neutrality.”²⁴⁸ In 2015, the scope of this duty was delineated in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*. In its unanimous decision, the Court ruled that the City of Saguenay, Quebec breached its duty of religious neutrality by including the recitation of religious prayer at the beginning of council meetings. Writing for the majority,²⁴⁹ Justice Gascon stressed the ‘democratic imperative’ for officials acting in positions of state power to maintain neutrality by not engaging in any form of religious practice.²⁵⁰

The Initial Complaint

Alain Simoneau was a resident of Saguenay, Quebec who regularly attended council meetings. He witnessed the mayor open council meetings by reciting a prayer after which the mayor would cross himself. Other council members and members of the public would follow suit. As an atheist, Simoneau felt ‘uncomfortable’ with the displays of religion while attending meetings and asked the mayor to stop the practice.²⁵¹ After the mayor ignored his request, Simoneau, with the assistance of Mouvement laïque Québécois (MLQ), turned to the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ).

In March 2007, the Commission opened an investigation into the alleged discrimination on the basis of religion, in violation of sections 3 and 10 of Quebec’s *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.²⁵² The following May, the Commission concluded that the prayer was discriminatory. Simoneau and the MLQ filed a case with the Tribunal in July 2008.²⁵³

While the Tribunal was reviewing the case, the Saguenay Council passed a bylaw that codified the opening prayer, amended the wording of the prayer in a manner that was intended to make it

²⁴⁶ Reproduced from Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2022.

²⁴⁷ *Charter*, s 2.

²⁴⁸ *Saguenay*, para. 71; and see Boissinot 2015.

²⁴⁹ Eight justices signed on to Justice Gascon’s decision, while Justice Abella wrote a concurrence, supporting the decision but disagreeing with the majority on the standards of review, see *Saguenay*, paras. 165–173.

²⁵⁰ *Saguenay*, para.75.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, paras. 8 and 9. Section 3 of the *Charter* states that: “Every person is the possessor of the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.” Section 10 states that: “Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap. Discrimination exists where such a distinction, exclusion or preference has the effect of nullifying or impairing such right.” See *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, CQLR c C-12.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 11.

‘non-denominational,’ and provided a two-minute recess afterwards in order to allow those who chose to abstain from prayer and thus absent themselves, to join the meeting.²⁵⁴ This bylaw was added to the complaint.

The Tribunal’s conclusions were unequivocal. They concluded that the “prayer was religious and was a breach of religious neutrality” and it was a ‘substantial’ infringement of Simoneau’s rights “to freedom of conscience and religion without discrimination.”²⁵⁵ Further, the bylaw was for a “religious purpose” and therefore also a breach of neutrality.²⁵⁶ The Tribunal ruled that the bylaw should be “inoperative and invalid” – the practice of opening meetings with prayer should cease, and that Simoneau be awarded \$30,000 in damages.²⁵⁷

The Appeal and Standards of Review

The City of Saguenay appealed the decision to the Quebec Court of Appeal, who agreed to review the case on the basis that it was a “matter of importance to the legal system over which the Tribunal did not have exclusive jurisdiction.”²⁵⁸ The three-panel Court of Appeal unanimously overturned the Tribunal’s decision and found that Simoneau’s rights were not infringed. It concluded that state neutrality “does not require the state to abstain from involvement in religious matters.” Further, cultural and “religious heritage” could be reconciled. And finally, that the updated prayer under the bylaw was not overtly religious but rather “expressed universal values.”²⁵⁹

The appellate court reached this verdict on the basis of a legal review that is called the ‘standard of correctness.’ The matter of the choice in the standard of review arose at multiple times during the journey of this case from the Human Rights Tribunal to the Supreme Court of Canada. While this is not the place for a detailed exploration of standards of review in Canadian jurisprudence, it is informative to outline the distinction between the two major standards in Canadian law.

In reviewing administrative decisions, Canadian courts rely on a framework called a standard of review to judge whether that decision should be upheld or overturned. The decision of “which standard applies depends on what kind of decision it is.”²⁶⁰ The standard of reasonableness is a deferential standard, which means the reviewing court should defer to the expertise of the decision maker. It is the typical standard of review for most administrative decisions. It posits that a ruling is reasonable so long as it falls within a “range of possible, acceptable outcomes”

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 12.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 18; and see Quebec Court of Appeal, (2013), QCCA 936, 363 D.L.R. (4th) 62, para. 37.

²⁵⁹ *Saguenay*, paras. 20 and 21.

²⁶⁰ Supreme Court of Canada. (2019). “Case law in brief: The standard of review (taken from Vavilov in the ‘Administrative law trilogy’).” 2019, SCC 65 and 2019 SCC 66. Available at <https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/cb/2019/37748-37896-37897-eng.pdf> (retrieved August 29, 2021).

and can be supported by evidence and the law.²⁶¹ A decision that is ‘reasonable, is “based on a logical chain of reasoning. It must make sense in light of the law and the facts.”²⁶² As a result, there can be more than one outcome, so long as that outcome was arrived at reasonably.

The standard of correctness, on the other hand, is much stricter. This standard posits that “a ‘correct’ decision is the only right answer in light of the law and the facts.”²⁶³ As a result, only one ruling could be made on the case, and the reviewing court essentially asks whether the law was applied correctly in making the decision. Thus, “when applying the correctness standard, a reviewing court will not show deference to the decision maker’s reasoning process; it will rather undertake its own analysis of the question.”²⁶⁴ In other words, the reviewing court essentially ignores the decision made by the administrative tribunal and re-analyzes the case. This “standard is meant for cases where a decision was made that has important and wide-ranging legal consequences.”²⁶⁵

The Supreme Court of Canada codified the test for which standard applies in its 2008 ruling in *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*.²⁶⁶ In this decision, the Court delineated the following factors that would lead decision makers to be given deference, and for a reasonableness test to be applied:

- A privative clause: this is a statutory direction from Parliament or a legislature indicating the need for deference.
- A discrete and special administrative regime in which the decision maker has special expertise (labour relations for instance).
- The nature of the question of law. A question of law that is of “central importance to the legal system . . . and outside the . . . specialized area of expertise” of the administrative decision maker will always attract a correctness standard (*Toronto (City) v. C.U.P.E.*, at para. 62). On the other hand, a question of law that does not rise to this level may be compatible with a reasonableness standard where the two above factors so indicate.²⁶⁷

The choice of standard of review in the case was explored in both the decision and concurrence, which are detailed below.

The Supreme Court of Canada

In October of 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal of the decision of the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court ruled that the Tribunal was correct to order the Saguenay Council

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*. 2008, SCC 9, [2008] 1 SCR 190, Para. 55.

²⁶⁵ Indi. (2016 April 29). “Indi’s MLQ v Saguenay review: What went wrong in the appeal?” *Canadian Atheist*. Available at <https://www.canadianatheist.com/2016/04/indis-mlq-v-saguenay-review-3-the-appeal/> (retrieved August 29, 2021).

²⁶⁶ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*; and see *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 55.

to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber,” declared the bylaw inoperative, and awarded Simoneau \$30,000 in damages.²⁶⁸ In reaching its decision, Justice Gascon concluded that the opening of council meetings with the recitation of a prayer “constituted discriminatory interference with Simoneau’s freedom of conscience and religion.”²⁶⁹ While the Canadian and Quebec *Charters* do not explicitly impose a duty for the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and belief, Justice Gascon found that in order to protect the “variety of beliefs” under the Canadian *Charter*, there is a need for “true neutrality.”²⁷⁰ Justice Gascon elaborated that

True neutrality is concerned not with a strict separation of church and state on questions related to religious thought. The purpose of neutrality is instead to ensure that the state is, and appears to be, open to all points of view regardless of their spiritual basis. Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject. Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is ‘inclusive,’ it may nevertheless exclude non-believers.²⁷¹

Justice Gascon ruled that there was no way for the state to remain neutral while also engaging in a religious practice, because doing so creates a ‘hierarchy’ where those who share the expressed beliefs are ranked above those who do not share them. Justice Gascon also explained that true neutrality is a “democratic imperative” as it ensures that institutions, like municipal council meetings, are a “neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally.”²⁷²

In *Saguenay*, Justice Gascon concluded that the prayer was in violation of the state’s duty of true religious neutrality and an infringement upon “Mr. Simoneau’s right to exercise his freedom of conscience and religion.”²⁷³ The prayer itself was expressly religious as denoted by the context (the content, the sign of the cross and the religious symbols) and by the admission of the Mayor of Saguenay himself, who declared:

I’m in this battle because I worship Christ. When I get to the hereafter, I’m going to be able to be a little proud. I’ll be able to say to Him: “I fought for You; I even went to trial for You”. There’s no better argument. It’s extraordinary. I’m in this fight because I worship Christ. I want to go to heaven and it is the most noble fight of my entire life.²⁷⁴

This supported the conclusion that the Mayor and Council used public powers to engage in a practice where they “adopted or favoured one belief to the exclusion of others” while acting on

²⁶⁸ *Saguenay*, paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 23.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 68 and 71.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, para. 137.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, paras. 73-75.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, para. 120.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 92 and 116, emphasis removed.

behalf of the state, and thus turning council meetings into a “preferential space for people with theistic beliefs.”²⁷⁵

Although the Saguenay Council had also allegedly tried to accommodate those who chose to abstain from prayer through the introduction of a bylaw that amended the wording of the prayer and allowed for a two-minute recess, this had the opposite effect. It exacerbated Simoneau’s sense of “isolation, exclusion and stigmatization” by requiring that he either conform or reveal his non-belief by physically separating himself from others.²⁷⁶

In addition to determining whether the state’s duty of religious neutrality was breached, Justice Gascon ruled that the Court of Appeal had erred by applying standards of appeal to the Tribunal’s decision, instead of standards of judicial review. Furthermore, the Court of Appeal erred in using the standard of correctness instead of the standard of reasonableness. Justice Gascon argued that as a specialized administrative decision-maker, the Court of Appeal should have deferred to the Tribunal. The Court should have limited the standard of correctness to the question of the scope of the state’s duty of neutrality and applied a reasonableness standard to other questions, such as “whether the prayer was religious in nature, the extent to which the prayer interfered with the complainant’s freedom and the determination of whether it was discriminatory fall squarely within the Tribunal’s area of expertise.”²⁷⁷

The Court unanimously allowed the appeal and restored much of the Tribunal’s conclusions: the bylaw was declared invalid, the City and Mayor were ordered to cease the recitation of prayers in council chambers, and the municipality had to pay \$30,000 in damages to Mr. Simoneau.

Justice Abella’s Concurrence

In her concurrence, Justice Abella objected to the use of different standards within a single review and noted that approach to selecting a standard strayed from the directives established in *Dunsmuir*.²⁷⁸ Justice Abella wrote that “using different standards of review for each different aspect of a decision is a departure from our jurisprudence that risks undermining the framework for how decisions of specialized tribunals are generally reviewed.”²⁷⁹ Justice Abella insisted that *Dunsmuir* established “that questions of general importance to the legal system attract the correctness standard only if they are outside the tribunal’s expertise,” and that the question of determining whether discrimination occurred is well within the mandate of the Human Rights Tribunal, and is in fact its ‘daily fare.’²⁸⁰ The concurrence questions why the ruling subjects “one aspect of freedom of religion to more rigorous scrutiny than the main issue of whether the right itself has been violated and there has been discrimination.”²⁸¹ Justice Abella elaborated that

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, paras. 113 and 120.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 120 and 121.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 50.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 166.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 165.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 167.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, para. 169.

“we have never dissected the right in order to subject its components to different levels of scrutiny.”²⁸² Justice Abella elaborated, noting,

My final concern is a practical one. What do we tell reviewing courts to do when they segment a tribunal decision and subject each segment to different standards of review only to find that those reviews yield incompatible conclusions? How many components found to be reasonable or correct will it take to trump those found to be unreasonable or incorrect? Can an overall finding of reasonableness or correctness ever be justified if one of the components has been found to be unreasonable or incorrect? If we keep pulling on the various strands, we may eventually find that a principled and sustainable foundation for reviewing tribunal decisions has disappeared. And then we will have thrown out Dunsmuir’s baby with the bathwater.²⁸³

In Justice Abella’s view, the decision was within the expertise of the tribunal and should be reviewed entirely within a reasonableness framework.

Justice Abella warned that “To extricate [the duty of neutrality] from the discrimination analysis as being of singular significance ‘to the legal system as a whole’, elevates it from its contextual status into a defining one.”²⁸⁴ This suggests a unique role for the duty of religious neutrality in Canadian law. Unlike the US Constitution, Canada’s *Charter* does not have an establishment clause, but Justice Abella’s view of the majority’s decision suggests the duty of neutrality is “a transcendent legal question.”²⁸⁵

Consequences of *Saguenay*

The *Saguenay* decision has led to further development of the scope of the state’s duty of neutrality by requiring the state to practice ‘true neutrality.’ In practice, the decision outlined that state officials, *acting in an official capacity*, must not profess or practice any religious belief. This includes the abstention of prayers at municipal council meetings. As summarized by Justice Gascon

By expressing no preference, the state ensures that it preserves a neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally, given that everyone is valued equally.²⁸⁶

As such, beginning a municipal council meeting with prayer is strictly proscribed by law, and this prohibition is part of the democratic imperative of the state’s duty of religious neutrality.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, para. 170.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, para. 173.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 168.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 74.

Since the *Saguenay* decision, many municipal councils across the country have amended their procedures to abolish prayers from meetings to comply with the ruling, but apparently not all. In her recent book, Lori Beaman documented several municipal officials who, commenting after the ruling, expressed an intention to violate *Saguenay*. For example, then Caledon, Ontario Mayor Allan Thompson declared that “personally I am disappointed, and I don’t support it... Canada was built on a Christian law. We’ve shown tolerance to all faiths... and I am not about to erode our principles.”²⁸⁷ Along a similar vein, the Mayor of Oshawa, Ontario announced that “I’m proud to be a Canadian, [and] I intend to continue doing the Lord’s Prayer prior to the commencement of the council meetings.”²⁸⁸ This reticence to comply with the law underscores the importance of our research into prayer at municipal council meetings across Canada.

²⁸⁷ Beaman 2020.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX B: PRAYER TRANSCRIPTIONS

This appendix consists of 87 transcripts from 54 municipalities. Several municipalities included multiple prayers, invocations, blessings and/or Bible readings in their inaugural meetings. We have grouped these together as prayers and included 60 transcripts from 2018 inaugural meetings. We have also included 27 transcripts of regular council prayers from nine municipalities. These have been transcribed by BCHA volunteers from video recordings of municipal meetings. Each transcript includes the name and population of the municipality, the date, and the name and affiliation of the person conducting the prayer.

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B.1 Barrie

Population: 141,434

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Doctor Susan Eagle, Grace United Church

“Mayor and members of council, and guests, and friends, and family who are here tonight, we gather for a special and honourable ceremony, the taking of oaths and the making of covenants, with regard to civic obligations and responsibilities. You are here tonight, Council members, because you have been willing to put yourselves forward, and offer yourselves for public leadership. To get here took work, and time, finances, and people willing to support you in this endeavour. It also took public confidence in you, and an affirmation that you can and will represent your community to the best of your ability. And so, it is an honourable vocation.

And now it is time to look forward, taking with you all that you have heard from the voters, and all the commitments made as you have visioned the needs, and possibilities of this community. We gather tonight to acknowledge the fresh start that you make, as a municipal council. Before you lie the opportunities, as well as the responsibilities, of public office. We wish you well as you embark on that journey, and we honour and uphold you as our democratically elected representatives working on our behalf. It is serious business, but may you also have a lot of fun and an enjoyable time over the next four years. I think with the Mayor that you’ve got, you will.

When you gather at City Council and get caught up sometimes in the minutia of debates about garbage, or streetlights, or budgets, or feel overwhelmed sometimes by trying to balance the challenges of competing constituent demands, or find yourselves at odds over proposed resolutions, may you remember the vision, and passion for public office that brought you here. For municipal leadership is really about people, making their lives better, and doing things that make our community more vibrant, welcoming, and fair.

Let us pray.

God of many names, Holy One, who in all faiths calls us to care for our neighbour and act with justice, we acknowledge the work of municipal government and ask your blessing on the Mayor and councillors of the City of Barrie.

Bless them, we pray, with diligence, sensitivity, and integrity. Give them patience, perspective, and perseverance. Bless them in their deliberations, as they commit time and energy to serving this city. May they carry out their duties with enthusiasm, compassion, and mutual respect. Bring out in them their best abilities and wisdom. May they represent the needs of all citizens as they look to the wellbeing of the whole community. And may they be sensitive to the larger good of caring for all creation, that they may help to build a sustainable future for the benefit of all.

Holy God, we ask your blessing on Mayor Jeff Lehman. May he be diligent in his leadership, and open to insights and experience of both councillors and staff. May he be supported in his efforts to set priorities and guide the work of Council.

We ask your blessing on the council members. May they find ways to work together with open minds and hearts, representing the diverse needs of our community, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

Holy One, we acknowledge the municipal staff, who carry forward the work of council. Give them wisdom, skill, professionalism, and patience in the carrying out of their responsibilities. And finally, we ask your blessing on this city, and all its citizens. May we work together to build a city of safety and harmony with respect for diversity. Amen.”

B.2 Belleville

Population 50,716

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Father John Hibbard – Invocation

“Let us bow our heads before the Lord Almighty and eternal God. Creator and sustainer of all life who have revealed your love for all people, we commend to you all the citizens of the City of Belleville, the Indigenous peoples who first inhabited this land and preserved its resources, the immigrants of various nations, cultures and religious backgrounds who have come to populate and cultivate this area along the Moira river and the Bay of Quinte and the people from across this country who have chosen to live in this community. Pour out your spirit of unity and peace among us that we may live and work in harmony with each other, respecting the diverse gifts you have planted among us and seeking the common good for all citizens. Bless us with the gifts of knowledge, gentleness and service, that we may build up your kingdom here on Earth for blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are those who are merciful, blessed are those who are peacemakers, humble and meek. Grant us a spirit finally of thanksgiving that we may acknowledge your gifts of love and life and that our work may give you glory. you who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.”

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 –Pastor Shawn Stickler – Benediction

“Can we all stand. May God bless Mayor Panciuk. May God bless this city council. May God bless the staff of the City of Belleville. May God bless the Belleville Senators.

To this council and each family member and friend gathered here today into this great City of Belleville that we all love, we declare blessing, we declare growth, we declare equity and fair treatment of all.

We proclaim ourselves a city that cares for those who are hurting and those that are in need. We pronounce ourselves a city whose citizens are safe and whose children are protected. Where every person has the opportunity for prosperity and well-being.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen.”

B.3 Brant County

Population: 36,707

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Dr. David Ralph, Brant Community Church

“Well it is my privilege to be able to give the invocation this evening, especially since I'm a fairly new resident to the county into St. George. However, I've known the Mayor for almost 40 years, and we worked the first ten years of our working life together. We have secrets that we will never share with any of you, except for a fee. But I believe that David will lead this county well. So, I just ask you to stand, bow your head whether you have any faith or you have a faith, and just listen to the words that I pray.

Dear God known by many names and beyond all names, we give you thanks for the many blessings we enjoy living in this country and in this county. We have many freedoms that we enjoy and one of those freedoms is to elect those who will govern over us. We thank you for these elected officials that are gathered here tonight who are fairly voted in and we pray for them tonight because you have instructed us to pray for those who govern over us so that it will go well with the residents. We thank you for this county and all who call it home. We thank you for those who planned and those who make things happen We thank you for those who have been elected to govern this county.

We ask for your blessing on our new Mayor and the men and women who will sit around the council table who felt the sense of calling to lead Brant County the place we live work and play. Grant them wisdom to make the wisest and best choices for our county even if it doesn't align with their personal agenda or desires. Help them to be good listeners to the variety of voices around the table and in this county give them listening ears and thoughtful responses to everyone. Remind them that they are leaders but that they are also servants and help them serve with diligence and integrity for the common good of all. Remind them that everyone matters and all are equal no matter if they are black, or brown, or white, gay, straight, or transgender, whether they're on a spiritual path or not, whether they're rich or poor, old or young, they all matter to you and they should matter to this council. May they all be treated equally. Grant them the courage to make the right decisions even if they might not be even if they might not be the popular ones. May they work together in harmony with a single purpose to serve this county. May they respect each other when they disagree. Grant them clarity of mind, creativity of spirit, compassion of heart, and integrity in action. And Lord, give them a sense of humor, they're going to need that from time to time.

May we use the residents of this county encourage our elected officials share our feedback in gentle and gracious ways, not be toxic or destructive in our comments but understand the difficult role that they have chosen.

In closing, we give thanks for those who those elected citizens who will govern us for the next four years may they lead and serve well. Amen.”

B.4 Burlington

Population: 183,314

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Emma Duncan, Knox Presbyterian Church

“Thank you very much for the privilege of being here tonight. Let us pray.

God of many names. God of all creation, we thank you on this day for the many blessings we have received. We are so grateful for this great land that you have given us and entrusted to us. We thank you for our nation, our province, our region and our city. May we be good stewards of these resources.

As we gather here to celebrate new beginnings for our city, we thank you for all who work, live and play in our community. And we remember all those who teach and those who learn, those who protect and serve, those who clean and those who repair and those who plan and those who implement plans, those who heal and those who counsel and those who serve. We celebrate all who live into the best example of what it means to be a good citizen.

We pray for those in our community that are poor and marginalized. Be with all those who are sick, be it physically, emotionally or mentally. Grant them your healing.

Today we pray especially for our elected officials and those that work with them. Give them wisdom and understanding. Give them compassion and integrity. Give them humility and a passion to work for the greater good. Give them listening ears and thoughtful words. Give them presence of mind and an open heart. Give them strength to do this important work. All these things we pray in the name of all we hold sacred and holy. Amen.”

B.5 Cambridge

Population: 129,920

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council April 12, 2018 – Reverend Frank Squires, Trinity Anglican Church

“Good evening, Mayor-elect Katherine, honoured guests, and fellow citizens of Cambridge. I would like to thank the mayor, the councillors, and the organizing committee for the privilege of being able to speak here tonight.

My name is Frank Squires, Reverend Frank Squires, and I'm a deacon at Trinity Anglican Church, and I bring greetings from the congregation at Trinity, which will be celebrating 175 years of ministry in 2019. Trinity is the oldest stone church building in the region of Waterloo. It was built in 1844. Trinity is also the home of the Trinity Community Table, where we have been serving

nourishing meals three days a week for twenty-five years plus, without judgement or cost our less fortunate friends, with food to be taken away and eaten for in the days when we don't serve lunch. Last year we served over 20,000 sit-down meals and provided over 13,000 sandwich lunches. This year we are expecting to exceed these numbers.

And I also bring greetings from Galt Branch 121 of the Royal Canadian Legion, where I have the privilege to serve as chaplain. This year, Branch 121 is celebrating its 90th anniversary.

Now, let us take a moment to center ourselves and clear our minds as we ask for God's blessings on our new Mayor, our new Council, and our great City of Cambridge. Let us pray.

Almighty God, you are our creator and our sustainer. You are our light and our fortress. You are our wit, wisdom, and our strength. We ask for you guiding hand to lead us through this ceremony of inauguration.

May our new Mayor and Councillors approach their task with wisdom and may they treat all their constituents with respect. And may they conduct the business of our city in an environment of cooperation and kindness.

Almighty God, we thank you for helping us to accomplish our work this day, and we ask that you be with our new Mayor and the Council Members in all their meetings as they take their decisions to make Cambridge an even greater city for all our citizens, for years to come. We ask all these things in your powerful name. Amen.”

B.6 Collingwood

Population: 21,793

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Donna Wilson, Erie Street Community Church

“Let’s pray. Our Father and our God, we thank you today for the privilege of inviting your presence to the inauguration of the Collingwood council today. And we ask for your gracious hand to be upon this ceremony. And it’s with our heartfelt thanksgiving we remember our rich history, including the dedication of those who have served our community to this day. And we offer support to those who will serve the people of Collingwood with great humility, courage, and discernment in all decisions. In God we trust. Grant us your peace, Amen.”

B.7 Fort Erie

Population: 30,710

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Julio Romero, Trinity Lutheran Church - Invocation

“Let us pray. Holy Father, blessed God, you have brought us here this evening to witness and celebrate the beginning of a new term in office for our Mayor Wayne Reddekop and the newly

elected City Council. We gather today as a united community even though we come from different backgrounds, some of us from different cultures, and a diverse world and political views but with one common goal, to the love and do what is best for this city and its people.

We thank you God for the privilege to reside, work and served in Fort Erie. We ask you to bless and guide the leaders of this community, provide them with the wisdom to see their elected positions not as a job but it's a calling to serve your people in your creation. Pour your Holy Spirit upon them so that they can act according to your word and will. In your holy name we pray, Amen."

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Dan Bennett, St Paul's Anglican Church – Prayer of dedication

"Let us pray. Creator who is known by many names, we give you thanks that you have put into the hearts of our fellow community members to enter public service. Leadership can feel lonely.

Companion, keep them ever mindful of your steadfast presence that they never feel abandoned in the tasks they undertake. Watch over them and guard that they fall neither into complacency nor despair. Sometimes it is hard knowing what is best.

Counselor, gift these servants great gift these servants with wisdom that they may lead with humility, deliberate with integrity, listen with compassion, and make manifest the qualities of vision, kindness, confidence, and consideration. We live in hope and our hope is in you.

Comforter, help them to work your will in this place. Lighten their hearts in the face of challenge, give them courage in adversity, and grace in prosperity. Strengthen their resolve loving God that they may live out the knowledge that our diverse backgrounds are an asset and a gift that finds its origins in you. And guide their efforts in sustaining the bonds of mutual respect that hold our common civic life together. All this we pray in your holy name, Amen."

3. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Martha J Lockwood, Central United Church – Closing prayers

"Let's pray together. Gracious and eternal God, as we conclude the inauguration of Mayor Reddekop and this new Council, we ask for your blessings as we recall and heed the words of the former NDP leader Jack Layton: 'My friends love is better than anger, hope is better than fear, optimism is better than despair; So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic and we'll change the world.'

We pray that you would bless us with your continued presence because without it, hatred and arrogance will infect our hearts, but with your blessing we know that we can break down the walls that separate us. We pray for your blessing because without it suspicion and mistrust will be our rule of life, but with your blessing we can see each other created in your image an instrument of God's grace. We pray for your blessing because without it we will only see scarcity

in the midst of abundance, but with your blessing we will recognize the abundance of the gifts with which you have endowed this town.

Give this council vision and courage to lead our town into its next chapter of greatness. Bless all of us privileged to be citizens of Canada and residents of the Town of Fort Erie with a spirit of gratitude and humility that we may become a blessing to our neighbors. Fill our Mayor and Council with the love of truth and righteousness that they may serve those whom they have been elected to represent. We pray that they will remember the words of the prophet Micah: 'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice to love kindness and to always walk humbly with God.'

Mayor Redekop, Regional Councillor Insinna, Town Councillors McDermott, Dubanow, Zanko, Butler, Lubberts, and Noyes, may God bless you all your days. All this we pray in your most holy name, Amen"

4. Regular Meeting of Council February 18, 2020 – Clerk Carol Schofield

"We meet to serve our community and endeavour to be worthy custodians of all that has been entrusted to us. Let us be concerned only for what will promote good government. May we bring to our council chamber minds that think and hearts that feel so that in our deliberations we may display imagination, wisdom, and courage, and the will to do our work for the good of all. Thank you."

5. Meeting of Council November 16, 2020 – Clerk Carol Schofield

"We meet to serve our community and endeavour to be worthy custodians of all that has been entrusted to us. Let us be concerned only for what will promote good government. May we bring to our council chamber minds that think and hearts that feel so that in our deliberations we may display imagination, wisdom, and courage, and the will to do our work for the good of all. Thank you."

6. Inaugural Meeting of Council June 18, 2018 – Clerk Carol Schofield

"We meet to serve our community and endeavour to be worthy custodians of all that has been entrusted to us. Let us be concerned only for what will promote good government. May we bring to our council chamber minds that think and hearts that feel so that in our deliberations we may display imagination, wisdom, and courage, and the will to do our work for the good of all. Thank you."

B.8 Georgina

Population: 45,418

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 5, 2018 – Pastor Bryan Vaughan, Hope for Today Fellowship

“Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time together and we thank you so much for the Town of Georgina. We are so blessed to be in a town like this where, for the most part, people reach out to one another, they care about each other, they’re loving their neighbours. We’re so proud to be part of this town.

And Father, we thank you for the Council and for the Mayor. We pray your blessing upon them. We pray Father that you give them courage to do the right thing. We pray Lord that you give them wisdom to know how to do the right thing. And we thank you so much for everybody that represents this town in so many ways. We pray for safety for the town, for all the workers. We pray God blessing upon the families of all of the people who work here. We thank you. We give you all the glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

B.9 Goderich

Population: 7,628

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Kate Ballagh-Steeper, Lakeshore United Church – Opening prayer

“Firstly, let me say thank you for the opportunity to be here. I bring greetings from the Goderich ministerial, which represents the Christian clergy and churches here in the Town of Goderich. Know our prayers will be with you in the work that lies ahead as you begin as a new council. I invite you all into a time of prayer or meditation or to pause.

Spirit of Generations who has given us many faiths through which your infinite nature is discerned, we thank you for the blessings of liberty and free conscience celebrated in this land. We remember today that we live, work and serve on land that was cared for by Indigenous peoples before us. We remember that we are in relationship through the treaties that preceded us with the Indigenous communities of this area.

As we here today offer ourselves to the discussion and consideration of public issues, guide our work together that we may always be mindful of the community that is served. Those with many resources and those with few. Those with much to say, and the quiet majority. May we always be mindful of the diversity of our community so that we may value that diversity as a strength rather than something to be feared.

May those among us who have been elected embrace the mantle of service offered to them, grant them patience to listen to all voices. Grant them wisdom in the decisions they will be called upon to make, ever mindful that they make these decisions on behalf of all of us and not as individuals. Grant them a sense of humour to lighten the weight of the decisions before them and grant them courage to make decisions that are just and right, even when they may be unpopular.

Creator, in the spirit of unity, may this council work together, and together may they work diligently and with openness with the staff of town offices. And may those among us who are

citizens grant respect to those that have chosen to serve. May the citizens of this community uphold our responsibility to be engaged, to work together with our town councillors and staff, to strengthen our whole community. We offer these desires, hopes and dreams to the awe of the holy, and the sense of community, and the impulse of service. So may it be.”

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Kate Ballagh-Steeper, Lakeshore United Church – Closing prayer

“[Inaudible]...that those who are councillors will serve with honour; that those who are town staff may continue to serve with integrity; that those who are community members may serve with diligence and energy. And may we all be united in our desire to build a just and fair town where all are honoured and where we may be known not just as Canada’s prettiest town, but also a town that honours the gifts of all of her citizens. Amen.”

B.10 Haldimand County

Population: 45,608

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Former Councillor Tom Patterson

“I would like to quote from Romans 13 verse 1: ‘Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.’

Would you please bow your heads. Lord, as we come together on this historic and solemn occasion to inaugurate once again mayor and council, teach us afresh that power, wisdom and salvation come only from your hand.

We pray Lord for Mayor-elect Ken Hewitt, elected councillors Stewart Patterson, Dan Lawrence, Bernie Corbett, Tony Dalimonte, John Metcalf and Rob Shirton to whom you have entrusted leadership of Haldimand County. Use them to bring reconciliation and healing to political wounds, give them calmness in the face of storms, encouragement in the face of frustration, and teach them to be humble in the face of success. Give them the wisdom to know and to do what is right and courage to say no in the face of conflict. Lord, we pray also for their families. Today we entrust Mayor Hewlett and elected council members, lead them as they journey through new doors of opportunity to serve others.

Now Lord we dedicate this inaugural ceremony to you. May this be the beginning of a new dawn for Haldimand County. In your name, Amen.”

B.11 Hamilton

Population: 1,109,909

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2020 – Father Tony O'Dell, St. Patrick's Parish

"It is my privilege and pleasure to lead the prayer of the inaugural meeting of the Mayor and Council of the wonderful City of Hamilton. Leadership requires two virtues that seem very simple until they become very inconvenient, honesty and courage. All of you have earned the right to be here today by winning the trust and support of the people of Hamilton. Along with that honour comes a duty of humility, integrity and public service.

Let us pray.

Holy one, known by many names and beyond all names, spirit of life, spirit of love, and spirit of community, spirit of justice, we ask your blessings on the mayor and the councillors who have been elected to lead the City of Hamilton in which we live and work.

Remind them because we all forget from time to time, especially in the noisiness of passes for political debate today that they are not only leaders but also servants and that it is their responsibility to serve the common good.

Remind them that no matter where we live, everyone is our neighbour, our sibling, that throughout the ages prophets have called leaders of people to respect and protect the least among us, our children, the elderly, the poor, those who are hungry, those who have no homes, those who are ill in body, mind or spirit, strangers and immigrants who live in our midst, those on the margins, those who are alone, those who are forgotten.

Grant them the wisdom and courage to know and to do what is right and good and true. May they speak out when it is time to speak out and listen patiently and receptively when it is time to listen. May they always be guided by the spirit of community, by the spirit of justice and by the spirit of love. This we pray in the name of all we hold sacred and holy, all that we hold good and right and true."

2. Regular Meeting of Council February 26, 2020 – Jamie Wood, Living Hope Church

"Let's pray. Lord. I just thank you for your blessings. Lord. I thank you for the safety of Canada, Lord, of which we don't take for granted. Lord, I ask for your safety and your protection on the country. Lord. I ask for your wisdom on this meeting tonight and on each person, and just give them guidance and clarity of thought and wisdom. In Jesus' name, Amen."

3. Regular Meeting of Council January 23, 2019 – Pastor Richard Palmer, Access Community Church

"Thank you Mr. Mayor, members of Council, thank you so much for having me today...well, having me back. If you will, just bow your heads with me as I ask God to bless this council meeting.

Father in Heaven we are so thankful for your mercy upon us. As we begin this meeting oh Lord, we ask your presence here. We ask you oh God that you will guide this meeting, and that you will guide the thoughts of those who are participating.

Father, we thank you oh Lord for the sacrifice and for the service of the men and women who are members of council here today. We thank you oh God for their commitment, we thank you oh God for their sacrifice and for standing up for those of us who need representation.

We ask oh God that you will bless them, protect them, strengthen them. Bless their families as they perform this service, may you guide and protect their families.

And Lord I pray for the city, the great City of Hamilton and that you will bless it, that it will continue to grow and become a model city within this region of Ontario. Father bless all the proceedings here and may you guide our wisdom and our thoughts. In Jesus' name, Amen. Thank you."

4. Regular Meeting of Council September 25, 2020 – Resident Teacher Gen Kelsang Rabgye, Samudra Kadampa Buddhist Centre

"First of all, I'd like to thank everyone for inviting me, and also for being open to the few words that I have to say. That's very kind of you, thank you.

So, the prayer that I'd like to lead you in is called the Four Immeasurables, and what they refer to is developing immeasurable good qualities in our heart so that we experience immeasurable good fortune.

So, the basis of this prayer is that we wish all living beings without exception to experience happiness, freedom from suffering, never be separated from or have degenerate these good qualities and be free from extreme minds. So, this prayer is, visibly benefits us and that if we engage in big cause we will experience big effect. So, I'd like you, because this is painless and virtuous, is to maybe to suspend any disbelief you have and just try to generate for a few moments an authentic wish which I'll describe. Just hold that at your heart for a moment. Okay? Thank you.

The first is 'may everyone be happy' so this means may everyone experience pure happiness. So, we may wonder why would we want to wish someone that's bad or evil to be happy? Because if they're happy they don't do bad or evil things. So, if you could just take a moment and just wish all living beings to experience pure happiness. Just generate that at your heart and hold it for a moment.

And then secondly, wish all living beings without exception to be free from suffering, all mental and physical suffering, including aging, sickness, death and so forth. Just hold that sincerely at your heart again, may everyone be free from misery.

And then thirdly is to wish everyone these qualities of freedom from suffering and happiness and never degenerate and that when people attain happiness, or when living beings attain happiness and freedom from suffering and never degenerate, is never lost, and hold that in your heart for a moment.

And then finally is to wish everyone free from the extremes of anger and attachment. These are extreme minds of hatred and avarice and greed. So, we want everyone to be free from such extremes and happiness, very equitable and harmonious minds and just hold that wish for all beings.

So, thank you very much, you've created very powerful and special causes by holding those wishes because the power of inaction is multiplied by the number of beings of which it is concerned. So have a wonderful meeting and may it be very fruitful."

B.12 Huntsville

Population: 19,816

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Major Darren Wiseman, Salvation Army Community Church

"Well, first let me say that it is an honour to be (I'm a little taller than she is!), it's an honour to be here today mayor, councillors, and all of our friends, former mayors and it's so nice see you here and to be able to be here for this beautiful occasion. And as a Newfoundlander, I hope you can understand what I say. I came here in 2013 and I just want to say that I love Huntsville. Don't tell anyone else but it's a favourite place that I've ever lived except for Newfoundland, but I love it here. And even this morning as I came in and I looked around and I see so many people that I know and it feels like, it feels like home here. And I think that that says a lot about our community that we live in.

Well, today is a special day and we get to, to support the mayor and the councillors and we're going to pray for them in just a few moments but I, I have just a few words of encouragement for the mayor and the councillors. 1 Timothy Chapter 1 and Chapter 3:1 says: 'It is a trustworthy statement if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.'

The people selected by this community are very special people who have been elected for special service and it is a fine work that they desire to do. The work of a leader can be difficult at times, and it is in those times that we need to support them. Hopefully you will pray for each other and as well as we will pray for you. It is to our advantage that we hold up our leaders and that we fully support them.

Hebrews 13:17 says: 'Obey your leaders and submit to them.' It is important that we have people in leadership who know what they are called to do and how they are to carry out their job. And these people are here to serve the public by taking care of their needs.

I want to talk just for a moment about the motives of a leader. Scripture talks about leading others as a shepherd cares for the sheep, but their motives must be pure. A leader's motives are important and will determine what kind of a job they will do, and here's an example. One Sunday morning one of the leaders of a church stood at the pulpit and he explained that the preacher had the flu and had called him on Saturday to ask him to conduct the worship service. Agreeing

to do it, the man said I began to panic at the thought of preparing a talk on such short notice. The panic subsided when I remembered those comforting words 'ask and ye shall receive'. He paused for a moment before adding, 'but as you see, I didn't catch the flu and I still had to come here this morning.'

Well, being a leader can be tiring work, but this town wants people in a position of leadership who care enough that they will do their job, and I think that we have those leaders here this morning. These people do not take their position for their own personal gain as we heard just a few moments ago, although there are some benefits to being a part of this town because they love this town, they love the people. And not every person is able to be a leader like the people that we have here this morning, but those who are called, their calling is great.

The character qualifications for leader are important because as leaders we become examples to those we lead. An effective leader is one who is an example of what they want other people to do and other people to be. Leadership in this town is important and we want leaders who will do their job, and as I look at you this morning, I see people who have the opportunity to step up to the plate and lead this town in the future. It's one of my dreams to see this town flourish and I've seen that happen over the past six years that I've been here.

I've been asked to pray for this council, for the mayor, and for the councillors, and so I ask you to pray with me as I ask God to guide and direct these wonderful servants. And I ask you today to continue to pray and support your leadership for it is a fine work that they desire to do. Shall we pray?

Dear wise and loving heavenly Father, first let me say thank you on behalf of all who gathered here today, thank you for your many and abundant blessings, thank you for life itself, for the measure of health we need to fulfil our callings, for our daily bread, and for our friendship. Thank you for the ability to be involved in useful work and for the honour of working for those you have called us to serve. Thank you for loving us with your grace and mercy.

In the Scriptures you have said that citizens ought to obey the governing authorities since you have established those very authorities to promote peace, order and justice. Loving and gracious father, you are indeed the giver of all good gifts, and we thank you today for your blessings, for the successful outcome of the election.

And therefore, I pray for our mayor, for the various levels of leaders and the workers within our town. We ask that you bless them abundantly and we continue to seek your wisdom, guidance, courage and strength. Be with them in their deliberations and help them to be wise in the decisions they make for the good of those who come, for those who have placed their trust and confidence in their leadership. Give them insight to lead with integrity that their decisions may reflect what is right and good. Help them to make decisions that are for the good of all and guard them against those things which will blind the interests.

Please be gracious unto them and grant them wisdom; a keen sense of justice and righteous; confidence in what is good and fitting; the ability to work together in harmony even when there

is an honest disagreement and personal peace in their lives and joy in their tasks, especially as we enter this Christmas season. Please give an assurance of what would please you and what would benefit those who live and work in and around our beloved town of Huntsville Ontario, and I pray in the name of your son Jesus Christ through your Holy Spirit, giving you thanks amen and amen.”

B.13 Ingersoll

Population: 12,757

1. Regular Meeting of Council July 13, 2020 – Mayor Ted Comiskey

“At this point in time I usually have some sort of formal blessing to make over the procedures that will take place. All I can say is that we have so much in this County to be thankful for and certainly this week especially in the town of Ingersoll we have so much to be thankful for and I just want to reflect on that to say everyone recognize who you are, recognize your neighbours, take care of them and let's look after the life we have and carry on as if I guess it were tightened down with the COVID-19, but carry on with our connection with people whether it is only by phone or whatnot when we shop or we take care of things, make sure we keep that six feet distance that is the key, well we've been told many, many times over and over the six foot distance is the key.”

2. Regular Meeting of Council January 13, 2020 – Mayor Ted Comiskey

“Those who would like to stand are more than welcome to join me in making this statement that we are truly fortunate to grow in a country as free as Canada, to work in a province as great as Ontario, to prosper in a County as productive as Oxford, to live in a community as beautiful as Ingersoll, let's take this moment to reflect, reflect on what we have and what we have to give. Thank you.”

3. Regular Meeting of Council November 12, 2019 Mayor Ted Comiskey, Town of Ingersoll

“Those who would like to stand ...We are truly fortunate to grow in a country as free as Canada, to work in a province as great as Ontario and prosper in a county as productive as Oxford, and to live in a community as beautiful as Ingersoll, let's take this moment to reflect, reflect on what we have and what we had to give. We had Remembrance Day yesterday and certainly the reflection that we should have is that we are able to stand here politically able to run for office. People are free to vote, people are free to have their choice of religion, people are free to have a voice. It's not always that way in many countries, we are truly blessed and because of certainly Remembrance Day and those that gave their life and those that came back. It was once said that every man and woman who goes to war is injured whether it was mentally or physically, but they came back. Some didn't, but we should recognize that as an opportunity to give us once a year to stand up and remember what we have and certainly what we have to offer.”

B.14 Kincardine

Population: 11,389

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 5, 2018 Reverend Gordon Dunbar, Dunbar Parish Church

“First of all, I’d like to acknowledge the land. For thousands of years, First Nations Peoples have walked this land, weaving their identity and spirituality intimately with the land. European colonization came about in part because of the Doctrine of Discovery, a flawed understanding that ignores Indigenous presence on the land. Affirming the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and therefore repudiating the wrong of such a doctrine. We begin our time together this afternoon by acknowledging the unceded territory of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, the Saugeen Ojibway, and more recently the Saugeen Métis. We are all treaty people, parties to the Upper Canada, Haldimand, Huron, and Niagara treaties. Keep us mindful of the covenants that have been made and broken with First Nations Peoples. May we grow into living with respect on this land, walking into reconciliation through peace and friendship for all who live and work on it.

Let’s join together as one in prayer. God of love and of new beginnings, we gather to honour those among us who have been elected to serve. May you continue to nourish our heritage roots of two townships and one town, previously, woven together into what we now call the Municipality of Kincardine. Blessing with great energy, not just the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, and the Counsellors, but the skilled and talented staff who support them. May you give them a passion for initiative and for innovation, while blessing them with a balance of wisdom. May you weave them together as one to work collaboratively for the people of our community, while blessing them with the restorative healing of sun, wind, and water of your good creation. Equip us all, we pray, to serve with integrity and with grace. Amen.”

B.15 Lambton County

Population: 126,638

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 12, 2018 – Executive Director Myles Vani, Inn Of The Good Shepherd

“Thank you for this opportunity and this distinct honour to be able to share some of my thoughts on public service.

First, I must say thanks to each of you as councillors, and as administrators, for committing to serve this county and your local communities. As politicians, you have put yourself forward for a tremendous task of serving and governing a diverse population, in a very complex political environment. You will face long hours, difficult challenges, and an unfortunately growing trend in our society where a differing view or opinion can leave you open to uncivil personal attacks. And yet, you will serve and do what you do with decorum, dignity, and respect because that is what you do, that is what you are. In you is a desire to provide leadership, to make live in your communities better for all, to foster growth, development, a sense of fairness and community. I can't say what genetic makeup it is that is in each of us driving that sense of duty but I can say that there is a quiet sense of peace and fulfillment that comes from it.

Through my 35 years in scouting leadership, 16 years in Rotary, and 13 years at the Inn of The Good Shepherd, I've had the privilege and humble opportunity to serve, and to be able to reflect on just what public service is. Now I know that there are some of you thinking that I'm way too young to have done all that, and that many years of service, so I can say precisely that doing all of that helps keep me young.

More than a few years ago, at summer camp, I was taking a group of 20 scouts and 6 junior leaders on a three-day hike through the Halliburton area. Hiking through the forest, crossing rivers, camping under the stars, in the heat of August. With the junior leaders we were having a bit of a difficult time with this group of scouts. They would be, as I would say, maybe a little spirited and one in particular was being very challenging. It was wearing down the junior leaders and I could sense their frustration, and they're starting to pull back as the scouts weren't listening very well or undertaking their camp tasks.

We got to our second night's campsite along the river, and I decided I needed to give the junior leaders a bit of a break. So, I asked the patrol leaders to work with their patrols to get the site set up, their tarps laid out for sleeping and to begin the meal prep, while I took the junior leaders down to the river to check out the swimming areas, set out the safety lines on the river, and to give them a chance to cool off with a dip. With this particular group of kids, I wasn't expecting much to be done when we returned to the site 20 minutes later, so I was somewhat surprised to see the scouts all sitting in their patrol areas, tarps are laid out. But upon closer inspection I noticed that two of the patrol leaders and that one particularly challenging scout were off to the side. The remaining patrol leaders came running up to explain that the scout had decided that he was better off up a tree rather than helping out the rest of the kids, right up at the top of a tree. It took quite a bit of coaxing to get him down and to be back a part of the group again. They did it though, and they got the site cleaned up.

After the swim, as we sat eating supper, the four patrol leaders talked about how they pulled that group together, how they set boundaries, and how they got the work done. Two of them commented on how tough being a leader was, and how good they felt being able to accomplish what they were able to do, to get the scouts all working together again. That, too, was exactly the feeling that myself and the junior leaders had after talking to those boys. Those junior leaders started that third day of the hike with energy and a renewed sense of purpose.

At the Inn of The Good Shepherd, I have found that our success and accomplishments and serving those in need has been most successful by having a firm belief in our mission, building a talented and compassionate team of staff and volunteers, and being able to rally a deep community commitment to that mission of fighting poverty throughout the county. It has shown that strength and unity can accomplish so much.

Yes, you too will find that leadership is tough. You will have to make decisions that may not be popular to some, small urgencies will divert energies from long-term goals, and resources will never be enough. And so I challenge you that if you stay true to your mission and your values, if you follow that Rotary commitment of service before self, if you treat people with dignity and

respect - especially those with differing views, if you approach every decision with compassion and empathy, and if you seek that difficult balance between fiscal and social responsibility, that you will truly be a council and an administration that exemplifies the best there is in public service.

Again, thank you for your commitment to this County and to your communities and your passion to serve.”

B.16 Laurentian Valley

Population: 9,387

1. Regular Meeting of Council July 21, 2020 – Mayor Steve Bennett

“Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.”

2. Regular Meeting of Council November 17, 2020 – Mayor Steve Bennett

“Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.”

3. Regular Meeting of Council April 21, 2020 – Mayor Steve Bennett

“Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.”

B.17 Leamington

Population: 27,595

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Ruth Boehm, Faith Mennonite Church

“At Point Pelee, I found three things: a feather from a herring gull, a smooth stone from the shoreline with pink and brown veins, and this acorn which fell onto my windshield of my car. Gifts from the sky, the earth and the waters. Gifts from our Creator. Leamington and area is rich in resources, resources from the land, the sky, and the waters. Resources we are given to use and to protect.

Leamington is also incredibly rich in people resources and tonight we are especially grateful for the resources of our town Council, our Mayor and Deputy Mayor, people who've been chosen by our community to represent us and to give leadership in our municipality.

And so to you are chosen leaders, may you be given the gift of enough. Enough that you are not easily swayed by bribes or promises, enough financial resources, enough support, enough help, and enough joy. May you be given the gift of clear boundaries. Boundaries to set limits for yourself, for your families, your work, and our municipality. Boundaries to respect yourselves and all with whom you interact. May you also be given the gift of deep centres to draw from the wells of spirituality to know who you are and who you been created to be in order that you might know where to return to find your best self when you get off track.

And to you as a council as you work together, may you be given the gift of openness to listen to all sides of an issue or opportunity before you decide what to do. May you be given the gift of teamwork to trust one another in working together, maybe even having some fun while you're doing it, and to be able to admit when you're wrong or change course. Leadership these days is not easy. So may you be given the gift of great boldness. To try things you've never tried before, to learn from mistakes, and to not give up easily.

The last three gifts for you as Town Council are to help us as a Leamington municipality in the building of our community. May you be given the gift of memory so that you keep in mind all of the peoples who have lived here before us. Our aboriginal peoples, voyagers, settlers, people have come and made their home in this place. May we learn from our mistakes and treasure the very best of our history. May you be given the gift of hope for generations to come. Hope to plant acorn seeds making wise decisions for the health and well being of our children and grandchildren and our great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandchildren. May your decisions also express hope and care for our land, water, and the skies.

Each day new peoples arrive in our community, and everyone adds to the evolving fabric of our neighborhoods some stay a long time and some a few months and all are welcome. And as you know there are many challenges facing our community from housing and nightlights, to racism and addictions, the need for infrastructure, and the list goes on and on. And perhaps the gift that is most greatly needed is that you hold before all of us a vision of what it means to be a healthy that strong community. A vision for a community that can name and address issues, a community that knows the name of our neighbours, a community of compassion, a community that treasures the rich resources of [inaudible].”

B.18 Leeds and the Thousand Islands

Population: 9,465

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Dan Massey, Pine Grove Community Church

"We bow our heads. We thank you Lord for the municipality of Leeds and the Thousands Islands, for its beauty, and for its residence. We pray your blessing upon every council member who holds office or has special responsibility within it. For leadership and for the new initiatives that will be brought forward.

We pray for your guidance and blessing on all these endeavours for the benefit of our Township. Loving Lord, in the scripture should have said that citizens ought to obey the governing authorities since you have established those very authorities to promote peace and order and justice. Therefore, we ask that you would graciously grant the council wisdom to govern amid the conflicting interests and the issues of our times, a sense of the welfare and true needs of the people, a commitment to social justice and righteousness, confidence in what is honourable and fitting, the ability to work together in harmony even when there is honest disagreement, peace in their personal lives, and joy and their civic duties. Grant to them an assurance of what would please you and what would benefit those who live and work in and around our beloved communities Lord. In all these things may your name be honoured and praised in the power of the Holy Spirit and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

B.19 Midland

Population: 16,864

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Father Michael Knox, Martyr Shrine

"I invite all present to bow their head in a moment of private reflection or to join me in prayer as we offer a blessing for these new servants of the Town Of Midland. Creator God, Gemendado, Lord, Giver of Life, we give thanks for the many blessings in this county that we share in, and here in particular in this city of Midland.

We ask for your spirit to pour forth on these duly elected servants of the people, with the people, for the people, at the service of the crown. We ask that this spirit enliven their hearts with love and care for the people they serve, especially the poor and those in most need. We ask that your spirit of wisdom come upon them in the planning and vision that they shall bring in the forming of this community. We ask that your spirit of perseverance enliven their minds and bodies as they strive to build the structures that hold us firm. The streets, the roads, the buildings, the services and all things that help us live good and healthy lives.

We ask for your spirit of patience, of kindness, of mercy, of compassion, of love, be with them as they journey with the many other servants here in this municipality that bring their gifts to the people. Father in heaven, each of them have been chosen for the gifts that they bring. May they always offer them freely in a true spirit of kindness and justice and may they have the inner strength and fortitude, moral conscience and grace to live out their vocations and their call in peace and tranquillity. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."

B.20 Minto

Population: 8,671

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Pastor Phil Des Jardine, Evangelical Missionary Church

“As I was contemplating how to begin this evening, I was reminded of what the scriptures tells us in Mark, Chapter 10 about leadership. In that scripture Jesus lays up two models of leadership: one that is based on lording it over those that we lead and one that is based on servanthood and the desire to look for the best of those that you lead. And as we gather in prayer together tonight in this invocation it is my sincere hope that this council will find themselves chasing after the latter. Would you please stand with me for prayer?

Gracious god we are humbled to be in this place this evening. We are humbled to stand as a community recognizing the gift of leadership that you have placed on the men and women who stand here tonight to take their oaths of office. God, we are privileged to be in a country where we have the right and the privilege to have a say in that process. God, that we can stand her this evening confident that these men and women have earned the respect, God, have earned the right to govern. And God, we simply come to you in this moment and ask that you would put your blessing on that right.

Father, they would recognize that their wisdom is not all ending, that their knowledge will have holes. God, that their ability to see the best in themselves and their community may sometimes be hampered by their circumstances, by the things they are called to deal with day in and day out. And God, I pray that in those moments when they find themselves at their weakest, but they would remember that you stand beside them.

And so God, I just ask that you would rest your hand on these men and women. I pray that they would turn to you in their moments of need, but they would turn to members of their friends and family who support them and encourage them. That they would turn to the best of what of what our community has to offer and recognize that we are blessed and that they would be encouraged to keep on the road, the road that inaudible has so eloquently conveyed for us tonight. The road that is straight and level, that is consistent, that is right regardless of whatever criticism comes their way.

So, rest on them tonight, be with them as they take these oaths of office, God, and I pray that the weight of that responsibility would rest brightly on their shoulders and that they would find themselves to be servants, go find themselves to be pillars, and they would find themselves to be first among equals in this place that we call home. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord in prayer, Amen.”

B.21 Mississauga

Population: 721,599

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Monsignor Owen Keenan, Merciful Redeemer Parish

"Thank you, Janice and for your kind introduction. I wish to express my gratitude to our returning Mayor, her worship Bonnie Crombie, for a mighty inviting me to bless her, her office, and all city council as you begin this term. In the invitation to me as a Catholic Priest, you recognize and honour faith in your life. No less importantly, asking for the blessing of God expresses your understanding of the importance of religion in the private lives of the citizens whom you and your council have been elected to represent. As well as the irreplaceable role that the public expression of faith and religion have in the building up and the betterment of the public square and the common good and common life of all.

The last census indicates that over 85% of Mississaugans adhere to a religious tradition. The majority of those of course would be Christian with a sizeable and important percentage belonging to members of the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and other religious traditions.

We are better. We grow in tolerance. We learn and we improve. Not when we hide our differences, but when celebrate them. And when we are confident that we are welcomed and supported by our elected officials in bringing the wisdom of faith and religion to bear upon the issues that effect us all.

I won't speak for members of other religious traditions, but I will take the liberty to point out in the Muslim tradition, the 40th Hadith of an-Nawawi teaches that not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself. Hindus believe in Dharma, that set of ethical laws that promote peace, growth, and harmony between beings in order to be reflected in the actions of man. Sikhism asks its adherents to perform selfless service for the community which is good for the moral uplifting of all persons.

From the Christian tradition, St Thomas Aquinas, speaking about the common good, offers five fundamental axioms that define the constitutive elements of a due order that can reasonably be expected to be the hallmark of that common good, which it is the duty of any government to uphold.

These are: First, the orientation of the human person toward the transcendent. Two, the orientation of the human person towards other human persons. Three, the fundamental equality of every human person. Four, the end of the community as the perfection of its individual members. And five, that the human person is a steward of the goods of the earth.

These five axioms (the orientation- the openness towards the transcendent, openness to one another, the fundamental equality of all person, the perfection of all persons in the community, and each person being responsible as a steward of the goods of the earth) are the hallmarks of the good government as well.

As a believer in God, in the name of people of all religious traditions in Mississauga, and with a view to the good of every resident and visitor, I enjoin you Mayor Crombie and your council to regard both as your privilege and your duty to respect the ethical and moral foundations of your very important work. May these be your guide and your strength.

With these reflections, one short story:

There was a story told about an old Irish priest who was sitting in the confessional one day and he was raging hellfire and brimstone and he said: 'Stand up in the church,' he said, 'all ye people in the church who want to go to heaven.' And everybody of course dutifully stood up and casting an eye across his pews he said, 'Very good, now sit down.'

Now I want you to stand up all ye people in the church who want to go to hell. And of course, nobody stood up except for O'Shaugnessy in the back pew and the priest raged: 'O'Shaugnessy you fool,' he says, 'do you want to go to hell?' And O'Shaugnessy said: 'No father I don't,' he says, 'but I couldn't bear to see you standing up there all by yourself.'

So, whether you would like to join me in blessing our Mayor and City Council or whether you just can't bear to see me standing up here all by myself, I ask you to stand.

In the name of the Father and of the sun and of the Holy Spirit. Oh God from whom all power comes, by who's divine will all must abide, we thank you for our Mayor and City Council. We thank you for placing in them the desire to serve your people to build up this city to make us better. We beg of you to bless, assist, and enlighten them. May they prove worthy of the confidence placed in them by their fellow citizens. May they be just and upright in their thinking; honest in all their actions; and be ever guided by a right conscience in the legislation they propose and vote upon. Forgive all of us our mistakes and our selfish tendencies and help prepare us by our good deeds for an eternal union with you. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

God bless you Mayor Crombie, your City Council, and all the residents of good residents of our wonderful city."

B.22 Newmarket

Population: pop. 84,224

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Father Efren Alvarez-Pelayo, St. John Chrysostom

"God and ruler of the universe, we ask you to bless your servants as they take on the sacred trust of serving the town of Newmarket. Help them to serve with integrity, embolden them with courage and strength. Guard them against the temptations brought on by fear, anger and power.

Give them a heart of openness and compassion, especially for the most vulnerable in our community, that each decision that they make be for the goodness not only of this generation of residents, but for generations to come. Surround them with wise counsel and knowledgeable guides and help them be humble and open to this wisdom and knowledge. Guide them to use it with care so that they may discern what is best for the good of all your people. Give them joy in service. Bless them with strength to carry on when the task of service overwhelms. Provide them with peace in times of respite so that they may serve long and well. We ask these blessings for the sake of your people. Amen."

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Imam Mohammed Bemat, Newmarket Islamic Centre

“[Prayer sung in Arabic] In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful, oh mankind, we have created you from a single man and a single woman and thereafter we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may recognize one another. Really the most honourable in the sight of God are those who are the most mindful and really the god is the most knowing and all seeing.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the opportunities and abilities you have granted each and every single one of us. Dear God, we ask you to allow us to demonstrate the power of unity, and make us successful in each of our endeavours. Amen.”

3. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Rabbi Mendy Grossbaum, Chabad of the Crescenta Valley

“We are gathered here this evening to inaugurate the governing body of our town, the municipality of Newmarket. Almighty God, king of the universe, he who nourishes, sustains and supports all forms of life, grant us the vision to see good in others, while we remain forever conscious of our faults. Replace every morsel of envy and selfishness with the desire to share and give. Remove from our hearts every trace of cynicism only to be replaced with sincerity and humility. Give us the courage to battle injustice, hate and divisiveness. Fill our hearts with tolerance, respect and forgiveness.

Bestow upon us wisdom and understanding so that we appreciate our sacred mission entrusted to us. Awaken us to hear the call from on high so that we can dedicate our time, talents and resources to improve the quality of life and foster universal understanding. Infuse our hearts with the conviction that we can bring the world closer to perfection.

Almighty God in heaven, send your grace to the newly elected mayor, the regional councillor and the custodians of the seven wards. Bless them with vision and vitality, with intelligence and perception, with tolerance, patience and compassion, with generosity of spirit and abundance of support.

May they be found favourable in the eyes of God and in the eyes of man so that all decisions, regulations and legislation be enacted with fairness and fortitude so that so that they be graciously accepted and embraced. [Prayer in Hebrew] He who makes peace in the heavens above shall make peace below amongst man here in Newmarket and in the entire world and let us say Amen.”

4. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Garry James, Valley View Alliance Church

"Mr. Mayor, may I say thank you for including the faith community leaders in our time together tonight. We value that, and we say thanks. Friends, if these prayers sound repetitive, let it remind us that we have far more in common than in difference as a community. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, creator and sustainer of all that has breath, you are the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. You know our thoughts before we do, and we bow humbly in your presence this evening, and we ask that you will bless these, our civil servants in this official prayer of invocation.

In many parts we ask for and invite your presence by your spirit here in this place and here in this town. The scriptures teach us that you, Lord, guide the hearts and minds of kings and rulers and all who lead. And as such, we pray oh God for these who have been elected by the people to serve our community by giving leadership to our town.

Lord, as their work is complex, we ask that you would give them wisdom beyond their years and their experience. Enable them to think broadly and deeply as they make strategic decisions which will be best for our whole town.

And Lord, as they are each independent strong thinkers, we ask that you would give them an unusual capacity to both represent their individual wards and also to work together as a unified team of servants with mutual respect, courtesy and understanding for one another, for their residents, the business owners and visitors to our town.

And Lord as their work on behalf of our citizens will often infringe upon their own personal time, we pray for their families also, who will sacrifice time with them so that they can serve our community well. Would you bless and protect their families, returning to them your favour and your blessing for their sacrifice on behalf of we the people.

And Lord the scriptures declare that you instruct us to administer true justice and to show mercy and compassion to one another. Lord, let our town, under the leadership of these your servants, increasingly be known as a place where justice and mercy and compassion for one another define our culture. And so, in all of these things oh God, make us well beyond the ordinary. And we pray these things in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit. Amen."

B.23 New Tecumseth

Population: 34,242

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 Pastor Darryl Price, Alliston Pentecostal Church

"Good evening guests, distinguished officials. I do want to thank Mayor Rick Milne, the Deputy Mayor, and the Council, for the invitation to come tonight to address the New Tecumseth officials with a few words of inspiration on this very special occasion. I do bring official greetings from Alliston Pentecostal Church, its pastoral staff, Board of Elders, members, and

adherents. I believe that leadership is a gift that we are given in order to serve those whom we have been entrusted to serve. One of the things that I have noticed about great leaders is their willingness to lead, but also their willingness to follow, their willingness to listen, their willingness to make decisions based on others best interests.

The Bible, in Romans 13:1, says 'Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. These authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authorities is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement upon themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended, for the one in authority is God's servant for your good.'

The well-ordered governmental structure came from God, He instituted it, He ordained it, He sanctioned it. Whether we are elected, acclaimed, or appointed, I do believe that whatever the case we have been selected by God Himself to actually fulfill a duty, a role, a calling, in a place where we are to bloom. Never take your responsibility lightly, or thoughtlessly. You have been chosen, and you have been placed in a specific role by God Himself.

One of the challenges in being in such a role is the fact that we all come to the table with different political views, we come with different perspective. And it can certainly be a challenge to agree to disagree on some issues, situations, and items of discussion. But as our elected, God – appointed leaders today, we are to show respect for those who hold public office, even if we do not accept their political position or party affiliation doesn't mean that we take that respect and somehow turn it to create self importance, it simply means that we humbly accept that which God brings our way. And I am personally thankful to God this evening for living in an open democracy, with all of the freedoms and the benefits that it brings. I respect all of you as our leaders today. At the same time, I know I can be your friend. That's called freedom of democracy. Never let what you do distort who you are. Never let your title become your identity. Never let your time serving this constituency take away from the home you live in or the family you are a part of.

Titus 3:1 says 'Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good. To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone.' If you live the words of Titus, you will be successful in whatever you put your hand to do. Whether that be the New Tecumseth council, or speaking to your child, or your grand child, or your spouse, or someone living in our great city. Titus gives us six keys to being successful in whatever we do, but I do believe it applies specifically to the leaders of our land today, particularly here tonight. Be obedient, do whatever is good, slander no one, be peaceable, be considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone. If we allow these six principles to be our guide, our goal to strive toward, then I believe that New Tecumseth will be greatly blessed and will be in great hands. In conclusion this evening, after this invocation is over you will be faced with many challenges and many decisions over the next four years as you

work together as a team, and I trust, and I pray that God will lead you to make the correct decisions on every single matter that comes your way.

Theodore Roosevelt said these words: 'In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The next best thing is the wrong thing. And the worst thing you can do is nothing.' Great words to instill into the depths of our hearts tonight as a New Season begins in New Tecumseth. Be diligent in all you do and remember that it is God that has allowed any and all of us to do what we do every single day.

Let me pray for you tonight. Heavenly Father we thank you today that we can come. And we lift up these who have been newly elected. We pray for our new Mayor Rick Milne, we pray for our Deputy Mayor Richard Norcross, We lift up Wayne Noye, Michael Beatttie, Paul Foster, Fran Sainsbury, Donna Jebb, Stephanie MacLellan, Shira Harrison McIntyre and Alan Lacey. And we commit their lives to this next season of leadership.

We pray the blessing, and the favour of God may be upon them. I ask you for discernment and wisdom and insight. That as they will make decisions they can do so easily in the good times. But when the times are not so easy I pray that they make the right decisions regardless of what the popularity declares to them, that they'll do what's right.

And so, God I pray that you will instill in them tonight a favour, a blessing, a power from you, as you have appointed them, as you have allowed them this privilege to serve and lead New Tecumseth. I pray all of this tonight in Jesus' name. Amen."

B.24 Niagara on the Lake

Population: 17,262

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Rudy Dirks, Niagara United Mennonite Church - Invocation

"Lord God, creator of all things, as we gather to open this new session of the Niagara-on-the-Lake town council we express our gratitude, and we express our gratitude and ask for your blessing. We are grateful for this place in which we live, bounded by the waters of the Niagara River, the Welland canal and the heights of the Niagara escarpment.

We are grateful for the generations of people who have lived in this place, from those who first lived here, for those who have since found a home here and those who have made this a choice of destination from countries around the world. We are grateful for the rich earth which produces such a paradise of animal and plant life and the beauty it creates all around us in the produce of gardens, forest, fields, orchards and vineyards. We are grateful for the seasons which bring each in turn the promise of new life in spring, the pleasures of the warmth of summer, the satisfying harvests of fall and the restful hibernation of winter. We are grateful for the many businesses and industries which provide employment, and which generate a thriving economy. We are grateful for every person in this community, whether guest, worker or resident

and the part they play in shaping our community into a life-giving gathering of diversity. Finally, we are grateful for the opportunity, privilege and freedom we have to elect people from among us who, together commit themselves to the task of using their abilities and wisdom to lead this community.

So, we ask for your favour and blessing on this newly elected council and Lord Mayor. May they be given the gifts of clarity of vision and wisdom and a partnership of goodwill and cooperation. May they be given the insights to know what is needed at this time and in this place for the benefit of everyone who lives and passes through here. May we as a community exercise the grace to live and work with each other in peace, harmony and enjoyment, and make this place, which we call home, become an even greater blessing for us, our families and all who visit. Amen.”

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Dorothy Hewlett, Christ Anglican Church – Benediction

“Please bow your heads. For every ending there is a beginning. For every beginning there is a dream ahead. As we conclude this inaugural ceremony, may we forever be in awe of all that had to happen in our lives to be here right now.

May we walk the walk of compassion and bring compassion to the centre of our lives. May we cultivate the ability to see the wisdom and dignity of those who seem to disagree with us, treat all people no matter how different with the reverence they deserve. May we live a purpose bigger than ourselves, understanding that when we do you and I will begin to transcend our limitations and discover ourselves to be far greater than we have ever imagined. May we recognize our lives will be measured not by how many titles we carry but by the hearts we heal and lives we transform. May we be vigilant such that in our lives of service our hearts don’t become hardened, our eyes don’t become blind, that we don’t forget where we came from nor neglect those we are meant to serve. May we realize that change doesn’t magically happen, that everything worthy requires effort and sacrifice, that in order to accomplish things we’ve never accomplished and to become people we’ve never been, we make sacrifices we’ve never made and do things we’ve never done. May we work together to produce unity in this large geography that makes up Niagara-on-the-Lake.

God gives each of us gifts to use to share with each other. May we seek to share ourselves generously and with respect listen to each other. May we walk away from this gathering determined to find ways to live an inspired life, absorb the inspiration of others and become an inspiration. May we all walk away with the will and courage to move beyond ourselves and leave our noble mark upon our beloved community of the town Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada, and all of earth. And God’s blessing upon Lord Mayor Betty Disero and all our councillors. Go in peace. Amen.”

B.25 Norfolk County

Population: 64,044

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Pastor Bill Wiebe, Port Rowan Community Church

“Mayor Chopp, to the councillors of the seven wards, staff members, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens of Norfolk County, I thank you for the privilege and opportunity of sharing this day of new beginnings.

Leadership is a responsibility avoided by the many. Leadership is a position that is sought after by some, and leadership is a privilege that is given only to a few. Your talents, your abilities, what some may indeed call your God given gifts, bring you good folks to this day in history.

As constituents, we commit ourselves to supporting you in the confidence that in the authority that you do hold, it will be well exercised, and that the essential attribute that resides in the heart of every truly great leader will be evident in your words and actions. That attribute is a measure of humility, for it is humility that harkens us back to our roots and it is that same humility that will teach us, each one of us, that ultimately in one form or another each one of us will be required to sacrifice of ourselves for the greater good. Such is the substance and the very fibre of Norfolk and its citizens. May God’s hand, may his blessing be upon each of you in the days ahead.

I will pray a prayer of blessing now upon our newly elected council, upon all, and friends that does include each one of us, whether we are staff members, whether we are support as a general citizenry, each one of us has a role to play. I will pray in the style of a fellow pastor now gone to glory who dearly loved to pray with his eyes open. His explanation was that he did not want to ever miss something that God was going to accomplish, and that sometimes God does indeed answer prayer even in the midst of the prayer itself. And so, I invite you good folks, let us join our hearts together in prayer.

Father God, creator of all, we invoke your name as it was the foundation upon which the dominion of this great land was built. We pray for those who will lead and direct and govern. May you provide all that is necessary in the accomplishing of this noble work. May we be found as a people adhering to laws and ordinances while employing mercy and grace as it is appropriate. Give our leaders wisdom, we pray that it is tempered with compassion. May you provide them with strength that glows of respect.

We pray that the same pioneer spirit that forged the pathways and the communities of Norfolk in the past would guide them as agents of beneficial change in the future. Lord, grant these men and women courage in the seasons that they are called to build. And bless them with patience in the seasons that they are called to simply wait and prepare. And in all these things, in all these things may each one of them be galvanized with a fortitude that will withstand the rigours, the pressures and the stressors of their chosen calling. Supply for them we pray sufficient hours to adopt a balanced life of required work and necessary rest.

Lord, hear our prayers, hear our prayers that the county and the people of Norfolk would, as according to your good and perfect will, achieve the peace and the prosperity that fits our words and actions. These things we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen."

B.26 North Bay

Population: 51,553

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 1, 2018 – Reverend Doctor Ted Harrison, Trinity United Church

"Your worship Mayor Macdonald, members of city council new and recycled, ladies and gentlemen. It was but four years ago that I was asked to provide the invocation at the premiere meeting of our last city council. I gave what could be safely described as an inoffensive benevolent blessing, and yet I think we can agree that the term of office that followed was sometimes disharmonious and could occasionally be characterized as lacking in civility. And so, as Jesus Christ demonstrated in his sermon on the plain as outlined in the Gospel of Luke, today I will remind us that via the present invocation that it is the purview of the faith communities not only to bless but also to curse.

And to my point the 16th century Archbishop of Glasgow Gavin Dunbar wrote down the single longest most masterful and comprehensive curse of all time. The context was this: Archbishop Dunbar was fed up with the reavers, that is the robbers and highwaymen who were raiding farms and stealing livestock all along the Anglo-Scottish border. Parenthetically, Mr. Mayor, it is entirely possible that among those cursed vagabonds were men that carried the surname Macdonald. So here is but a small selection of Archbishop Dunbar's words that were read in every church and public square in Scotland in the year 1525.

The proclamation goes thusly:

'Good folks, my Lord Archbishop of Glasgow has thought it expedient to strike all the outlaws with the terrible sword of the holy church with that may not long endure and resist, and has charged me to denounce, declare and proclaim them openly and generally cursed at this market cross and all other public places.

'Herefore, through the authority of almighty God, the father of heaven, his son our saviour Jesus Christ and of the holy ghost, through the authority of the blessed virgin Saint Mary, Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel and all his angels, Saint John the Baptist and all the holy patriarchs and prophets Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Andrew and all the holy apostles, Saint Stephen, Saint Lawrence and all the holy martyrs, Saint Giles, Saint Martin and all holy confessors, Saint Anne, Saint Catherine and all the holy virgins and matrons, and all the saints and holy company of heaven, by the authority of our holy father the Pope and his cardinals, and of my said Lord Archbishop of Glasgow, with the advice and the assistance of my lords, archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors and other prelates, and ministers of the holy church, I curse them, I curse them all.

'I curse their head and all the hairs of their head, I curse their face, their eyes, their mouth, their nose, their tongue, their teeth, their forehead, their shoulders, their breast, their heart, their stomach, their back, their womb, and their arms, their legs, their hands, their feet and every part of their body from the top of their head to the soles of their feet before and behind, within and without.

'I curse them going and I curse them riding, I curse them standing and I curse them sitting, I curse them eating and I curse them drinking, I curse them rising and I curse them lying down, I curse them at home, I curse them away from home, I curse them within the house, I curse them outside of the house, I curse their spouses, their children, and all the servants who participate in their unjust deeds, I curse their crops, their cattle, their wool, their sheep, their horses, their swine, their geese, their hens and all their livestock.

'I curse their halls, I curse their chambers, their kitchens, their barns, their cowsheds, their yards, their cabbage patches, their ploughs, their harrows, and I curse the goods in the houses that are necessary for their sustenance and welfare.

'May all...may all the malevolent wishes and curses ever known since the beginning of the world to this very hour descend on them. May the malediction of God which fell upon Lucifer and all of his fellows that cast them down from the highest heaven to the deepest pit, curse them mightily.'

Your worship Mayor Macdonald, members of city council new and recycled, ladies and gentlemen, I share with you that small selection of the curse of Archbishop Gavin Dunbar. I share it with you on behalf of the many faith communities of this fair city of North Bay as a means to implore you that you must lead this city from the very best angels of your nature.

I share it on behalf of the Anishinaabe and Nipissing peoples of whose traditional territories we are blessed to share stewardship.

And my message is this: What you just heard is but a small fraction of the sublime and extensive damnable curse of the Archbishop Dunbar, the greatest curse of all time, and it is in fact much longer in words and also in scope. But should this council, this council, prove to be cantankerous, uncivil or unmindful of the task to care for this land and especially its most vulnerable inhabitants, I shall be only too pleased to return to these chambers and share with you the full and unabridged text of Archbishop Dunbar's curse. Heed my words my friends, and may holy wisdom guide you in all your decision making. And to this I say so be it, Amen."

B.27 North Huron

Population: 4,932

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Dale Hussey

"I'm just so blessed to be here tonight and to experience the peace and the willingness of the Reeve and all you Councillors and the people that support you to maintain that safety, and

there's a scripture that says: 'of the increase of his government and peace will be no end.' And I think of the responsibilities each of you have, but first of all your willingness to give your time, the wisdom over many years you've received and learned. As it says it is more blessed to give than to receive.

My wife and I have had the privilege to live in this area for nearly 45 years and raise our nine children. We've enjoyed the prosperity and the blessing. As the scripture says: 'the blessing of the Lord maketh rich and addeth with it no sorrow.' Some parts of the Earth tonight are very troubled, very disturbed because of lack of government and lack of order. And the responsibility you've taken on to make decisions in the future that's going to affect so many families and so many lives.

I just wanna, I guess pray a blessing on you. I want to pray. I believe as a servant of the Lord and how Jesus said the words that I speak their spirit of their life he said you know it is so important that that you know we declare and decree the purpose that we're here for.

And it's not just what's in it for me but how can I serve the interests of my neighbor and how can I love my neighbors myself. I sense that love here tonight and I sense that concern and that desire to be a gift to your community to your Township to wherever you were voted in. I see a man here that I remember and the buck stops here. So I played hockey with him and to see him in a place of responsibility and I know that again the decisions that are going to be made are, I'm just believing there will be such a unity and a togetherness as you carry out the business that's needed for this region.

So, I just wanted to read something, a short scripture because God's a blesser. God's not a taker he's a giver and God has given you gifts to share and give freely 'cause he gave them to you. And I guess I do cry sometimes I weep I get emotional when I see love in our operation when I see it being manifested when I see it not just talk but that there's actually sacrifice. And there's times that many things you will do no one will notice and they'll never see but you're not living 'what's in it for me' you're doing it because of a calling really, of a responsibility to bring protection and safety. I know you're going to be making decisions on how money is to be spent and how things, the material things but to me the important thing is the safety of this of our communities and of our families. And I feel we're in wonderful hands and for the future and I feel there's going to be such a greater blessing and prosperity come in the weeks and months that this area has never seen because of your willingness.

There's a scripture that says: 'if we be willing and obedient, we'll eat the good of the land.' So thank you for being willing, thank you for giving your time, thank you for saying I'm available because there is such a need for good leadership and responsible leadership. In my ministry I traveled a lot and I pastored for 43 years. I just gave up my pastorate but I'm still working. I started my work. Instead of having freedom 55, I went to work in a real job I guess they call it, helping to build that arena that's sitting down there. Decisions had to be made for that to be a reality and this brought great blessing and great enjoyment to so many people.

And that's what your decisions are going to do. It's going to bring peace on earth and goodwill among all men. I decree that. It's going to bring unity in our community and there's big schisms and divisions and things that shouldn't be happening is going to cease because one day you know we're coming to that time of season when the angels declare peace on earth and good will among all men. And that's what my wife and I have lived with our family, to be repairers of the breeches to heal the hurts. And I'm sure you're inheriting some problems and situations.

And I believe one in five are all new councillors and one has been re-elected and so it's quite a new job for you, a new chapter in your life but you're going to do it well. You're going to do it right and we're going to feel the effects of it out there in the communities and thank you again for being available. And this is what, just something in numbers came to me I'm just going to leave with you because again with our lives we bless or we curse. But I just feel a lot of blessing here and you know how we treat people, how we forgive people, how we honour people, and prefer people and 'the Lord spake unto Moses saying , 'speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying on this wise you shall rest the children of Israel saying unto them, the Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.'

Heavenly Father, I thank you for letting me be here to experience the peace that's in these men and women's hearts. And Lord, I thank you that you're going give them the wisdom to make the right decisions in the future for our communities and for our lives. And father we thank you that for their availability that you've enabled them and given them a joy to serve and to give. And Lord when we give you give back to us heaped up pressed down and running over. And there's going to be joy even in their togetherness and there's going to be peace, it's going to go now in their decisions, it's going to heal our community, and it's going to cause it to prosper and people are going to take notice of what's happening in Huron County in this area and North Huron, and the different townships Lord. We just thank you for favour in our land and blessing hallelujah. I just say thank you Jesus for your mercy and love that has brought this day about. Amen."

B.28 Oakville

Population: 193,832

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Jeff Ward, Oakville Interfaith Council, St. Cuthbert Anglican Church

"Good evening and thank you for having me this evening on behalf of the Interfaith Council. Halton as we know it today is rich in history and modern tradition of many First Nations and Métis from the Anishinaabe and the Attawandaron to the Haudenosaunee and the Métis. The lands surrounding the Great Lakes are steeped in indigenous history. As we gather today on these treaty lands we have the honour and responsibility to respect the four directions, land, waters, plants, animals, ancestors that walk before us and all the wonderful elements of creation that exist. We would like to acknowledge and thank the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation for sharing their traditional territory with us.

My name is Jeff Ward and I am the Priest and Rector of St. Cuthbert's Anglican Church in south east Oakville, ward three. I am pleased and privileged to be here also as a representative with my friends and fellow faith leader of the Interfaith Council. I am new to St. Cuthbert's but I have lived and served in Oakville for more than thirty years.

As we gather this evening to discuss the issues and opportunities that present to our town at this time, let us remember that Oakville is like a family. The people of Oakville live together in relationship and share resources. We know from our experiences that if any member of a family is self serving, then every member suffers. If, however, every member of the family supports and cares for other family members supports and cares for other family members and cooperates for the good of the whole, everyone benefits. It is like that with our town family. If the various constituencies that make up our town family, wards, neighbourhoods, sectors, cultural groups, faith groups, businesses, residents associations and our representatives seek only their own self interests but if all groups work together to share resources and to uplift each other all Oakvillians benefit.

We are grateful to the citizens here who have sacrificed so much to represent Oakville on this council and regional council, and we wish them, as members of the interfaith council and this community to know that we are here to support them and work with them as they serve the people in our town to the best of their abilities with transparency, goodwill and integrity.

So let's give thanks this night that many who once were not working together have discovered strength and benefit in partnership with each other, that we are growing to know about more effectively using assets that exist in our community by ensuring that every voice is heard and respected, that we have incredible people working in our town, paid and volunteer who contribute their time, talents and wisdom to our community to benefit everyone, and that we enjoy beautiful surroundings in this wonderful time and an abundance of natural resources for all to share and care for.

Thank you."

B.29 Orillia

Population: 31,166

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Gerry Mcmillan, Ontario Provincial Police Chaplain

"Good evening. The late president Lyndon Johnson was quoted as saying: 'When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy, I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a Mayor.' Well Mayor Clark, I don't know what the next term will bring. No doubt as Mayor in Council this next term will bring joy in serving. Yet, as you already know there will be challenges.

Tonight's ceremony, I treat as a sacred one. Each of you Mayor and Council, have gained the trust of citizens of Orillia. And tonight, unselfishly with utmost care, you dedicate yourself to the concerns and the welfare of our city and the citizens. God bless you.

Nelson Mandela said: 'What counts in life is not the mere fact that we lived. It is what difference we make to the lives of others that will determine the significance of a life we led.' Each of you have already made a positive difference in the life of others and I know that you'll continue to do so.

And during this upcoming term of office, may we as citizens lift and encourage our Mayor Clark and Council. For we know at times the issues will be difficult. May we as citizens assist Mayor Clark and Council wherever we can in the service of our community and may we as citizens continue to pray for our Mayor and Council, as I do now.

Almighty God, Father, Creator, We thank you for our glorious country with its freedoms and privileges that came at the cost and lives of men and women who paid the ultimate price both on battlefields and peacekeeping. Thank you for our City of Orillia and the many who serve to make this place peaceful and safe. Thank you for outgoing councillors and their hard work and dedication. Bless them and their families as they continue their life's journey.

And we thank you tonight for our newly elected Council, Mayor Steve Clark, David Campbell, Ted Emond, Ralph Cipolla, Rob Kloostra, Mason Ainsworth, Jeff Fallis, Pat Hehn, and Tim Lauer

As they commence their leadership, we ask you to grant them your guidance, wisdom, direction, and protection as they serve our community. I ask you to bless them and their families. I also ask you to bless our Queen, Elizabeth, our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, our Premier, Doug Ford, and our guests and those in attendance here tonight. Respecting all faiths and beliefs, I pray these things in the name of the one I serve, Jesus Christ. Amen."

B.30 Parry Sound

Population: 6,408

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Nelson Small, Trinity Anglican Church

"Thank you, Jackie for your kind invitation to share in the inaugural ceremony. I also want to offer my sincere congratulations to the newly elected members of council. The residents of our fair town have entrusted to you the responsibility of attending to their collective and sometimes individual needs and concerns. And certainly, their hopes for a strong, safe and vibrant community.

Since we don't all speak with a common voice on most matters it will surely not be an easy task, but one that I believe will be achievable when undertaken in the spirit of cooperation and goodwill, but I'm sure you're already familiar with that. And so, I wish you well in all your

deliberations and encourage you to be responsive to all voices so that all residents will feel a sense of ownership and pride in the place we call home.

We now take time to ask God's blessing on our gathering and our purposes. Creator Spirit, source of wisdom and compassion, we acknowledge your presence and the good will and honourable intentions of all that have gathered here this evening for the good governance of Parry Sound. We give thanks for the gifts of those that were elected to serve on town council and pray that you will guide them in their deliberations and decision-making, enabling them to meet the needs of those they serve, in the spirit of fairness and compassion.

Encourage all residents of our town, Holy One, to participate more fully in the work of governance, helping us to think and act as community, for the wellbeing of all that call Parry Sound home. Amen."

B.31 Pelham

Population: 17,110

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – The Venerable Dr John Course, Holy Trinity Anglican Church

"Let us pray. Loving and compassionate god, we are gathered together this night for the inaugural meeting of our new town council for Pelham whose representatives have been duly elected to office. May you bless these, our representatives, with your grace and wisdom that they may use their gifts to work together in a dignified manner and with a cooperative spirit for the common good of all our citizens. We ask your blessings also on all staff and employees of our town who work to ensure that all our citizens receive the benefits of living here in Pelham. We give thanks for the services of the outgoing representatives and ask you blessings on them as they carry on with their lives. Amen."

B.32 Penetanguishene

Population: 8,962

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 5, 2018 – Father Silvio Eljuga, St. Anne's Parish

"Good evening everyone. So, I'm honoured to be here, to be invited for this great event, and Mr (inaudible) asked me did you do that before and I said never, so I looked in my big book of blessing and I found some words for sure of prayers that we will say now, and they will be for sure a big help for all of us. So, we will start with a sign of our faith in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Almighty and eternal God you have revealed your glory to all nations. God of power and might, wisdom and justice, we pray for members of this council and all others who are entrusted to guard our political welfare. May they be enabled by your powerful protection to discharge their duties with honesty and ability. We ask this of you Lord Jesus who live and reign forever and ever, Amen. And may Almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen."

B.33 Pickering

Population: 91,771

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Mel Finlay, Nation at Prayer

“O God, Creator and sustainer, we pray for your blessing on these proceedings this evening, and on Mayor Dave Ryan, Regional Councillor Kevin Ash, Regional Councillor Bill McLean, Regional Councillor David Pickles, Councillor Morris Brenner, Councillor Ian Cumming, Councillor Shaheen Butt, as they assume their responsibilities for the growth, health, wellbeing, and protection of our city and the region of Durham. We thank them for the willingness to serve on our behalf.

They have worked effectively in the past to serve our city and its residents, and we ask that you now give them the wisdom, knowledge, discernment, courage, patience, endurance, and grace beyond human capabilities that they will need during their term of office.

In their deliberations, may they give due consideration to many points of view, seek wise council as appropriate, and keep in mind the needs of the whole city and the region. In their decisions, may they act with integrity without fear or favour. In their disagreements may they not be disagreeable but strive to reach a position they all can live with. And may they, and we, always remember that we all are stewards of this city and region, and all that they offer, with obligations to generations not yet born, as well as to ourselves and to our children.

Watch with care over our mayor and councillors and their families, in their travels, their work, their family and personal relationships, so that when their service to this city is done, they and their families will still be healthy and strong.

We pray for the staff who serve council and all of us, may they be faithful in their service, wise in their advice, knowledgeable and skilled in what they do.

May we not be citizens who elect and then neglect our politicians. May we expect as much from ourselves as we do from them. May we be willing to work with them, to walk with them, to pull our weight as citizens of our city, and may those of us who know the power of prayer pray for them frequently. O God, may your blessing be on all of us, in your name we pray. Amen.”

2. Regular Meeting of Council September 28, 2020 – Mayor Dave Ryan

“Creator of all, we give thanks that we live in a place where all have freedom to pray. Help us to remember we are in a special place consecrated to the principles of democracy and service. Give us wisdom to perceive the right, courage to lead in times of confusion, patience to wait and listen for the hopes and aspirations of our citizens, and wit to devise creative ways of being a community. May we be as concerned for others as for ourselves, and compassionate for the needs of the less fortunate among us. At best may this city of ours be a special place. Amen.”

3. Regular Meeting of Council July 27, 2020 – Councillor Kevin Ashe, Regional Councillor Ward 1

“Creator of all, we give thanks that we live in a place where all have freedom to pray. Help us to remember we are in a special place consecrated to the principles of democracy and service. Give us wisdom to perceive the right, courage to lead in times of confusion, patience to wait and listen for the hopes and aspirations of our citizens, and wit to devise creative ways of being a community. May we be as concerned for others as for ourselves, and compassionate for the needs of the less fortunate among us. At best may this city of ours be a special place. Amen.”

4. Regular Meeting of Council May 25, 2020 – Councillor Kevin Ashe, Regional Councillor Ward 1

“Creator of all, we give thanks that we live in a place where all have freedom to pray. Help us to remember that we are in a special place consecrated to the principles of democracy and service. Give us the wisdom to perceive the right, courage to lead in times of confusion, patience to wait and listen for the hopes and aspirations of our citizens, and wit to devise creative ways of being a community. May we be as concerned for others as for ourselves, and compassionate for the needs of the less fortunate among us. Thus may this city of ours be a special place. Amen.”

B.34 Red Lake

Population: 4,107

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Pastor Keith Graber, Grace Community Church

“You can’t possibly know how tempting it is for me to talk a long time here, but I promise I won’t do that. I’m going to share two thoughts and then I’d like to pray for each of the councillors and the mayor.

Proverbs says that ‘By me kings reign,’ in Proverbs 8:15. By wisdom Kings reign, and it takes wisdom to do what you’re going to do and it takes creative thought and it’s important to know all you can know and so I’m going to be praying for you for wisdom. And secondly, Proverbs 29:14 says, ‘If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever.’ If you have a conscious desire to serve people who don’t have economic advantages, God looks after your administration. That’s important, I just wanted to say that.

Let’s pray. Thank you, Father, for this morning and for this occasion. Thank you that you see our lives and you care about them, and so I ask for your blessing on this community, on our economy, on our environment, on our families, our schools, our businesses and organizations.

I ask particularly that you give this mayor and council your wisdom. Bless Mayor Mota with vision and passion and wisdom as he leaves this council. Bless Mayor Hager with wisdom and confidence that she speaks truth and kindness to the council and in everyone else she meets in

this role. I pray for your blessing on Councillor Kristoff helping to juggle and balance the demands of work, family and council. Thank you for Councillor Butterfield, give him wisdom, give him forward thinking, give him your ideas. Thank you for Councillor Badiuk, give him relief in light of his recent loss. Thank you that you heal hearts, I pray that your wisdom rests on him. So bless this mayor and council with your wisdom, your presence, your vision, thank you that your kingdom is present in Jesus' name Amen."

B.35 Rideau Lakes

Population: 10,326

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Mayor Arie Hoogenboom

"Dearly beloved, on this historical day I invite you to open up your hearts and minds to all the blessings that awaits us.

Let us pray. Holy Creator, who is mother and father to all of us, we come to you this day not only as residents of the Rideau Lakes Township, but also as honest, humble stewards of this world, where you have placed us.

We are grateful for accountable individuals who have come forward to serve the wider community. We give you thanks for all who had the courage to put their names forward for the election of this Township. Whatever the outcome, may they all know that they are wrapped in your grace and love from eternity to eternity. Today we stand before you with all who were elected, and we pray that they are guarded by your wisdom, peace, and patients.

And us, the people of Rideau Lakes Township, may we work with our Mayor, Councillors, and all of the employees of this beloved area with dignity and respect. Holy one, as the season of Advent has begun, we pray that this ceremony serves all of us as an advent of hope, peace, joy, and love. Not just for ourselves, but for this Township and beyond. Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, as we journey on, help us to reflect your eternal life to others by our actions of truth, integrity, and service to all people equally. We pray humbly and sincerely in the name of Jesus who showed the world how to live in and through a community of love, integrity, and truth. Amen."

B.36 Russell

Population: 16,520

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council March 12, 2018 – Mayor Pierre Leroux

"Attendu que le Canada est fondé sur les principes qui reconnaissent la suprématie de Dieu et la primauté du droit, prenons un moment de réflexion personnelle. Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection."

2. Regular Meeting of Council February 21, 2017 – Mayor Pierre Leroux

“Attendu que le Canada est fondé sur les principes qui reconnaissent la suprématie de Dieu et la primauté du droit, prenons un moment de réflexion personnelle. Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection.”

3. Regular Meeting of Council March 2, 2020 – Mayor Pierre Leroux

“Attendu que le Canada est fondé sur les principes qui reconnaissent la suprématie de Dieu et la primauté du droit, prenons un moment de réflexion personnelle. Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection.”

4. Regular Meeting of Council April 1, 2019 – Mayor Pierre Leroux

“Attendu que le Canada est fondé sur les principes qui reconnaissent la suprématie de Dieu et la primauté du droit, prenons un moment de réflexion personnelle. Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection.”

B.37 Saugeen Shores

Population: 13,715

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor David Baker, South Port Pentecostal Church

“Father, Almighty God, Creator, known by many names and beyond all names, spirit of life, spirit of love, spirit of community, spirit of justice. We are gathered here this evening with our hearts fixed upon your goodness as we are thankful for which you have accomplished in our midst already leading up to this special day. We are thankful for the country in which we love and call home. We are thankful for the Town of Saugeen Shores. Our hearts are filled with thanksgiving tonight for the beautiful people and nature you have provided for us in this town.

Holy one, we ask your blessings on the people called to lead this precious community in which we live, work and play. We ask your blessing on Mayor Luke Charbonneau, his wife Allison and their family. We ask you blessing on Don, Cheryl, Mike, Dave, John, Jami, Matt, Kristen and each one of their families. Help each of them as leaders not to ask first how can we fix this but rather how do we need to learn, how might we change or need to change or to whom we need to listen.

Remind each of them, because we all forget from time to time, that they are not only leaders but also servants. That it is their responsibility, and ours, to serve the common good of all. Remind each of them that no matter where we live everyone is our neighbour and our posture should be who can we serve, each other and the least of these. How can we make another person’s life better and more enriched by our service. Grant them the wisdom and courage to know and do what is right, good and true.

May they and we speak out when it is time to speak out and listen patiently and receptively when it is time to listen. May they and we always be guided by the spirit of community, by the spirit of justice and by the spirit of love. May We, as citizens of Saugeen Shores also commit this day to always keep our Mayor Luke Charbonneau, the town council and its staff and all public workers in our thoughts and prayers and do our parts to keep our community safe and prosperous for all to enjoy for generations to come. And teach us to pray as you Jesus have taught us to pray through your word, the Bible.

Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Respecting all faiths, beliefs and traditions in attendance tonight, I pray this in the name of the one I serve, in Jesus' name, Amen."

B.38 Sault Ste Marie

Population: 73,368

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Sister Mary Sammon, Sisters of St Joseph of Sault Ste Marie

"Dear God, you are the giver of all good gifts. Give our Mayor and Council clear vision, integrity, and wisdom. Grant them the resilience necessary to face difficulties with determination, open heartedness and courage. Help them in all ways to serve our city with humility, kindness and unity of purpose. Amen.

In the past couple of weeks, I have come across a beautiful quotation, which I have memorized, but because I'll be nervous, I'll read it, and I think it's something we could all take to heart: 'Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break, and all things can be mended, not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go, love intentionally, extravagantly and unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.'"

B.39 Selwyn

Population: 17,060

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Reverend Doctor Anne Gowan-Blinns, Bridgenorth United Church

"The blessing I am going to offer today is from a book called *To Bless the Space Between Us*. It was written by an Irishman, who was a priest, and his name was John O'Donohue. His prayer is 'For A Leader', and it goes like this:

'May you have the grace and wisdom to act kindly, learning to distinguish between what is personal and what is not.

May you be hospitable to criticism.

May you never put yourself at the center of things.

May you act not from arrogance but out of service.

May you work on yourself, building up and refining the ways of your mind.

May those who work for you know you see and respect them.

May you learn to cultivate the art of presence in order to engage with those who meet you.

When someone fails or disappoints you, may the graciousness with which you engage be their stairway to renewal and refinement.

May you treasure the gifts of the mind through reading and creative thinking so that you continue as a servant of the frontier where the new will draw its enrichment from the old, and may you never become a functionary.

May you know the wisdom of deep listening, the healing of wholesome words, the encouragement of the appreciative gaze, the decorum of held dignity, the springtime edge of the bleak question.

May you have a mind that loves frontiers so that you can evoke the bright fields that lie beyond the view of the regular eye.

May you have good friends to mirror your blind spots.

May leadership be for you a true adventure of growth." [inaudible]

Thank you for inviting me. This is my 18th year at [inaudible] church, and I will [inaudible] and I'll be retiring soon. So, I appreciated getting invited to come and give the blessing and prayer [inaudible] council, and I am wishing you all very, very well. [inaudible] Thank you."

B.40 Shelburne

Population: 8,126

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Gord Horsley, Abiding Place Ministries

"I want to thank you all for coming out and as we celebrate these wonderful servants who are about to lay their lives down, to the service of a very special (inaudible), I don't mean like literally, but you understand. Today, as we celebrate this, I just also want to acknowledge and thank our past council from the last four years, so if we could give them a clap. They have served us very well and we thank them all for their service. But now we're celebrating the people that will replace them, that we voted for, that we believe in, that we trust will take us into our new journey

in the next four years as our wonderful community is changing and growing, and so we look forward to that.

So, as we acknowledge Wade Mills, our new Mayor, Steve Anderson as our Deputy Mayor, Councillors Walter Benotto, Lynda Buffett, Kyle Fegan, Lindsay Wegener, and Shane Hall, I named Lindsay Wegener before Shane Hall because she always seems to be last (inaudible). These people who have chosen to serve our community and this very high calling knew what they were getting into, at least I hope they did, and know that they are in it for a good four years to serve us in the best of their abilities. But our responsibility is to pray for that, to encourage them, to lift them up, but not just them but their families as well.

We need to acknowledge that it's not just them who are coming to lead us and to sacrifice for us but it's their families as well. I know with some of them that they have young families and it's a big sacrifice they're doing for our community, and we need to remember that. As these wonderful people get together and lead us so let's not forget to pray for them as well. The responsibilities that they have in the coming days are great, they'll need lots of divine help, much wisdom, understanding, long-suffering, and great perseverance.

As one of the spiritual leaders in our community it's my honour to be here tonight. I, and other faith leaders, have a responsibility in our community to pray for our Council and our leaders and our Mayor. The most important is to pray for their families as well. I'm asking God for his protection, his mercy, his grace, to be poured on these wonderful folks that are leading us. And that they would have the wisdom, and that we ask on a daily basis that wisdom be poured out to them, so they know how to make the right decisions for our community.

I humbly have a little bit of advice, not that it might be very much, but being a leader for twenty-seven years in the church, I've learned that our lives are not measured by our titles or the positions that we carry, but by our character, our integrity, our honesty, our morals and ethics, and the ability to serve others above ourselves. I believe that is what makes a good leader. In all my years I don't know what a good leader is, many people say I know what a good leader is, but I don't know what a good leader is really. But I believe that a good leader is people like yourselves who are stepping into that position tonight. Who have a willingness of heart to serve others beyond their selves, and who, with the resources that your given, and the time that you have, and the energy that God has given you, will do all that you can to serve our community to the best of your ability and that's all that matters. So tonight, as we celebrate this time of swearing you in to a heavy responsibility, I pray that God makes it light for you all and your families, and that He will be with you always.

So, at this time I'd just like us to bow so we can pray for them. Father, we lift up the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the Councillors, we especially lift up their families. I pray that you will always give them times of rest, times of encouragement, times of peace. I pray that as they lead us that You will give them wisdom beyond their years. That Father, that you would help them in those times where they're not sure which way to turn. Father, you would speak to them in the depth of their heart. And that Father as you lead them and guide them more, we as a community would lift

them up, pray for them, encourage them. And Father, believe in them and know that they are trying to do the best they can for us as a community.

So Father, as we continue to grow, as we continue to change here in Shelburne, I pray Lord that you will just be in this place and especially then. Let our community be an example to many other communities. And I pray for the unity of our Council as they work with the CAO and her staff, Father. I pray for the works department, the police department, and ambulances, and the fire department. I pray for the businesses, I pray for the residents of our community, that we would work with one heart and one mind to better our community for the sake of Your glory. Father, I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."

B.41 St Catharines

Population: 133,113

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Craig Danielson, Calvary Church, Chaplain of Niagara Regional Police Services

"All I can say is that my granddaughter would love one of those drums. Man, that's awesome.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mayor Walter, Councillors, it's a privilege and honour to be with you tonight. We have come face to face with two things as we gather as citizens, Council Members, family, friends, and City Staff tonight and those two things are compassion and leadership. And if I may, I would like to address both of these powerful characteristics before I give the benediction, especially as I wear few different, a few different hats tonight.

One as a police chaplain for the Niagara Regional Police, which has been a privilege to do. Where I better know a few things about leadership and compassion as you deal with citizens of St Catharines. As a Pastor in this city for 30 years or as most people say a "man with the cloth". I better know a whole lot about compassion in this area and a whole lot more about leadership. But I also wear a hat as a parent, a grandparent, and a citizen of St Catharines. For the last 30 years, I've so enjoyed seeing our city move towards a compassionate city.

You see, to me when we talk about living in a compassionate community it means the needs of all people of our community are recognized and met at certain levels. That the well being of the entire community is a priority and all people and living things are treated with respect. But simply put, in a compassionate community people are motivated by compassion to take responsibility for and care for each other. See, a community where compassion is fully alive is a thriving resilient community whose citizens are moved by empathy to take compassionate action and able to confront crisis with innovative solution, they are confident in navigating changes in the economy and the environment and are resilient enough to bounce back from any kind of disaster. You see, compassion is that God given gift to humanity that needs to be displayed on an everyday basis.

Yes, compassion is about kindness and sympathy but there is something deeper, something even more profoundly powerful in its meaning. The origin of the word helps us grasp the true significance of compassion. In Latin *compati* means to suffer with, to suffer with. See, compassion means someone else's heartbreak becomes your own heartbreak. Another person's suffering becomes your suffering. See, true compassion changes the way we live and the way we see and interact with the people around us and I have seen this in our city even in the last few months.

And I love what Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, 'we must learn to regard people less in light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.' So, as we already in the last few minutes, or a few years, set out on this quest to be a compassionate city, let's keep expanding on this powerful ingredient of compassion because it will make a difference in the lives of our citizens today but also it will affect the lives of our kids, our grandkids, and generations to come. That's compassion.

When it comes to the characteristic of leadership, I heard a wise man say once, 'leadership is influence, nothing more nothing less.' Tonight, we have installed our Councillors and our Mayor as leader influencers for the City of St. Catharines. And I would just say, wow what an exciting time for them and for all their family members involved and yet at the same time it brings this sense of intense responsibility, and it should.

If I can, can I ask a question, what sets great leaders apart from others? There's lots of different answers, but the ones that have hit me personally: It's the ability to cast vision and to see the future, they are clear in their mind which direction they have to head and what they want for life, they are experts at preparing strategies and changing those strategies from time to time according to what time, the time requires. See, these kind of influencers become transformational leaders and these kind of transformational leaders also take into account the emotions and the needs of the people they serve and they act accordingly.

In my 30 years of ministry, there's all kinds of essential qualities that have come as I've sat in conferences and sat in rooms with smarter people than I am. But there are three qualities that I would actually like to embark on tonight, just for a few minutes, and the first one is courage.

One of the really significant qualities of a good leader is courage. See, being courageous means he or she has the guts to take risks, risks in life without having the assurance of positive outcomes and because life itself is precarious every action that we perform or ever commit or commitment to we make can, cannot be without a risk factor. Therefore, courage is the most identifiable trait in a leader because not everyone has the courage to follow his or her dreams or vision. That's courage.

The second one is focus. Those who are true leaders always have their penetrating gaze on the possible outcome and are able to anticipate all situations. This attribute is very much needed because if he or she isn't focused, any foundation governed by him or her can come crashing

down in no time. They have to focus even on their goals in their individual lives and also their organizational goals. That's focus.

And the third one is strategic planning. Great leaders are also great masterminds together as a team. They can do strategic planning and look ahead to upcoming trends and make adjustments according to changing industry tastes and preferences.

See, it's been my experience that the qualities of a leader go far beyond just these three. However, it is these three that make him or her stand out from the crowd and become a source of inspiration for people. The kind of inspiration for our Mayor and for our City Councillors to lead the City of St. Catharine's with leadership, fortitude, and with a heart of compassion for generations to come.

Henry Ford once said, 'coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.' See, we have come together tonight as a community to celebrate and honour the installation of our Mayor and City Councillors. See, tonight we celebrate the beginning of new opportunities working together as leaders to serve with compassion this great City of St. Catharines.

See, for all of us we have our own source of strength and wisdom, and we pull that from different areas of our life. So, before I lead us in a benediction, I invite you to stand with me and I want to just take a few moments of silence in meditation and reflection on this very special occasion tonight. So would you stand with me and just meditate and reflect on what you have agreed with tonight in the City of St. Catharines and then I will lead us in a benediction.

Creator God, we celebrate tonight a new beginning. Thank you for the new opportunities presented to those who now serve and will serve in City Hall.

Creator God, thank you for our Mayor and the City Councillors and grant them good judgement and wisdom as they execute their leadership roles. Protect each of them and their families from harmful words and disinterested people. Fill their hearts with courage, focus, and strategy. Give them personal strength to do what is necessary and right. God of compassion, give our leaders a compassionate heart that suffers with others in understanding and gives voice to those on the margins of life.

Creator God, where there is ignorance and superstition let there be enlightenment and knowledge. Where there is prejudice and hatred, let there be acceptance and love. Where there is fear and suspicion, let there be confidence and trust. Where there is tyranny and oppression, let there be freedom and justice. Where there is poverty and disease, let there be prosperity and health. Where there is strife and discord, let there be harmony and peace.

Almighty God, because you are compassionate, will you flood our Mayor and Councillors, our individual hearts as citizens, and this city with compassion so that for generations to come the City of St Catharines will be a light in the Niagara Region. May Grace, mercy, and peace be with all of us. Amen."

B.42 Thorold

Population: 18,801

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Bishop Emeritus John O'Mara, Diocese of St Catharines – Invocation

"Oh God, our heavenly Father, we invoke your blessing on this inaugural meeting of the council of the City of Thorold. In a special way we ask you to bless His Worship Mayor Terry Ugolini and all the members of the council who've been elected to give leadership and direction to our city. Endow them with the wisdom to discern the needs of our community and the courage to implement them. Moreover, give them the spirit of humility to always speak the truth and to witness to it in their lives. Bless the women and men who have been called to implement the decisions of the Council and to care for our city and its people. We ask this in all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our lord. Amen."

2. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Bishop Emeritus John O'Mara, Diocese of St. Catharines – Inspirational reading

"My reading this evening is from the Gospel of Luke, and Luke writes:

'Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And he said to him, what is written in the law, what you read there. And he answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself. And he said to him, you have given the right answer to this, and you will live.

'But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, and who is my neighbour? And Jesus replied, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road and when he saw him passed by on the other side. So also a Levite, and when he came to that place, he saw him pass by on the other side.

'But a Samaritan while travelling came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them and then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said take care of him, and whenever I come back, I will pay you whatever more you spend. Which of these three do you think was the neighbour to the robber, or to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? And he said, the one who showed him mercy, and Jesus said to him, go and do likewise.' The gospel of the Lord."

3. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Bishop Emeritus John O'Mara, Diocese of St. Catharines – Blessing

"We had a very important meeting, a very interesting meeting, a very joyful meeting. So, we thank God for that, for calling us together, for having been able to participate in this inaugural

meeting, and we thank God for all his gifts and all his graces, and we ask his blessing in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Go in the peace of Christ.”

B.43 Thunder Bay

Population: 107,909

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Nancy Ringham, Thunder Bay Council of Clergy

“Greetings to all you present in this chamber and viewing from your homes. It's my privilege to fulfill this request made of the Council of Clergy. I've personally lived and served in this community for 19 years now. I've lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else, and you can tell that I've lived for a while. I've prepared a prayer using words, but I'm also including a time of silence, and these prayers are offered humbly, with a yearning to bring us all together for the love of Thunder Bay and the surrounding areas.

Let us pray. Creator, source of life for these people gathered, as we breathe and live and move in this city, we give thanks for the life you give and the opportunity to share this part of the beautiful creation. We give thanks for the leaders, for the mayor and the council members who have come forward and been elected and chosen to make decisions which care for all the people who live here and who visit here for short and longer periods of time. Be with us as we support their discussions and research and decision-making in little and large matters that affect the lives and the life of this city. Support the work of the leaders through the staff and volunteers that are involved at so many levels of administration and coordination of what makes up the City of Thunder Bay.

Redeemer, in these times we have opportunity to hear from social media, news, word of mouth, and personal experience of the matters that affect each one of us. Guide our mayor and council and city leaders to make wise decisions following fruitful exploration of issues and ideas that come into the spectrum of responsibility, as has been determined in corporate values, process, and position descriptions. Guide the citizens of this city to work together for the good of all, in the ongoing work of the elected and chosen leaders.

Sanctifier, heal and restore our leaders in the midst of decisions made with the best information and intentions possible at every given time. Help all of us - leaders and citizens - to practice the arts of listening, silence, personal reflection, and community building, as we seek new understanding in all things. Let us take this moment to be in silence for our own thoughts and prayers.

[20-second pause]

Lord, you have heard our prayers and we commend all of them to you. Open us all to the possibilities before us, for the long-time citizens, for the newborns, for those who attend school

here from northern communities and from around the world, for those who are employed in education, business, community services, sport and leisure, for those who care for our children and our elderly, for the volunteers in every sector of our community, and for those who have no home or shelter.

May the gifts you have given to each of these elected leaders be used in such a way that the City of Thunder Bay prospers and benefits in every way to be the city you have created us to be. In peace and with great humility, we offer this prayer. In your holy name, Amen.”

B.44 Timmins

Population: 41,788

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Pastor Sean Lee, Grace Bible Chapel

“Let’s take a moment to bow our hearts together. God our Father, we thank you for rule of law, democracy, the freedoms we enjoy. Thank you for a community and this incoming council, the men and women who have expressed their desire to serve the citizens of Timmins and have been entrusted to do so.

It’s a large and challenging task, and so this evening we pause for a moment to uphold them in prayer and commend them to your care. We pray that you would fill each with wisdom to discern between that which is good, not which is best, for integrity, compassion, courage, perseverance and humility. We also pray for their families that you would sustain them and guard their hearts through the scrutiny and rigours of having a loved one in public office.

Finally, we would ask for clarity of vision, that a spirit of unity and mutual encouragement would surround this table, in the name of our Lord for your glory and for our good. Amen.”

B.45 Tiny

Population: 11,787

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Elise Robitaille, Brethren in Christ Church

*Note: Parts of this prayer were delivered in French but our volunteers did not transcribe those portions.*²⁸⁹

“Well, its an honour to be invited here today to be part of this dedication of our new town council. [French] In my tradition a dedication is a ceremony where people are formally set apart for a particular role, a particular service. The dedication affirms the privilege of serving in that role and the people involved publicly commit themselves to fulfilling their responsibilities. But

²⁸⁹ For the full prayer, watch the inaugural meeting at Township of Tiny. (2018, December 3). “Tiny Township Inaugural Meeting of Council – December 3, 2018.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2ciJIYCcMo&t=2316s> (retrieved November 23, 2022).

then what truly qualifies a ceremony as a dedication is the pronouncement of a blessing over these people who have been set apart for this service.

Blessing can be understood as asking God to bring good, to give protection, to bestow his favour. The blessing is also something that people offer to one another as a means of expressing support, encouragement, hope, goodwill and appreciation. We have already witnessed the declarations and promises and heard the intentions of our new town council. They have stepped up, they have been set apart for this office. What remains to do then, is to give them our blessing. [French] So please join your wishes with mine as I pronounce this blessing over our new town council.

Mayor Cornell, Deputy Mayor Walma, Councillors Hastings, Mintooff and Wishart. We are grateful for your willingness to give up your skills, talents, energy and time for the betterment of our community and for your commitment to public service. [French] As our elected officials you are stewards of the hopes and dreams that we have for a just, prosperous, wholesome and inclusive community. And so we pronounce these blessings and all you do in the name of those whose trust you now hold. [French] May you be guided and inspired with wisdom, discernment and integrity in your deliberations and decisions, always striving to bring life and wholeness to this community and beyond. [French] May you be concerned with restoration and mending brokenness wherever you find it. [French] May you be mindful of the richness that we have in this Township and be discerning and generous in its use. [French] And may you find personal peace and joy in your task. Amen.”

B.46 Uxbridge

Population: 21,176

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Pastor Andrew Alton, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church

“Would you pray with me. Living God, the bible says that you who brought the universe in this world to life. It's you who breathe design and meaning into our lives and into everything around us, all that we see and all that we can't see. It's you who brought order into the chaos, it's you who brings leaders to power for your glory and for the good of those they serve.

So, first of all we give thanks for those who now stand among us as elected officials, for Dave, for Gord, for Pam and Gary, for Bruce, and Willie, and Todd. Before they were elected they had and have commitments as husband or wife, as mother or father or neighbour and friend and now this on top of those sacred assignments to give them wisdom and humility to lead well, together, do pray that they learn to work as a team, honouring differences, valuing other viewpoints but in the end pulling at the orders in the same direction.

We pray against division or disunity. We also pray for the senior staff who serve this town, for Ingrid and Debbie, for Donna and Ben, for Amanda, and Phil, and Brian, we know it takes a community to raise a child, it also takes a healthy team to cause a community to flourish. There

is no one here who can do it on their own. I do ask that you let your peace rest here in the township of Uxbridge.

Jesus, you said something about your joy being in us and our joy being complete. So, it seems like there's at least a possibility that all the good work that lies ahead of these leaders could actually be fun and bring joy. May it be so in this place. We pray by your name, Amen."

B.47 Wainfleet

Population: 6,372

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Pastor Brian Lofthouse, Port Colburne Brethren in Christ Church and Firefighter Chaplain for the Wainfleet Fire Department

"Heavenly father, thank you for this fine group of leaders and community support that have gathered this evening for this transitional moment. We simply invite you to be a part of this time as we do the business of the people in the Township of Wainfleet. Grant your guidance and inspiration in all that is done and said tonight."

B.48 Wasaga Beach

Population: 20,675

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 5, 2018 – Reverend John Hamilton, Wasaga Community Church

"Let us pray together. Father, this is an interesting evening. Every four years we have the opportunity to see and to hear from visionary people like we have in front of us tonight.

We pray, Lord, that in these upcoming four years that you will not only give them great wisdom but remind them that they work under your authority ultimately. We all enjoy living in this community, and we ask that your blessing, and your grace, and your power be displayed not only in our council meetings, but in all the work that this council does in the years to come. And so, we thank you for allowing us the privilege of witnessing this ceremony tonight.

But most of all we pray that in these four years that they will sense your direction, and your guidance, and your wisdom, and your knowledge, and that this town will continue to grow and be the place that is so welcoming to so many. And so, Father, again, thank you for the privilege of having this night together, and the freedom of democracy that we have in this country. In your name we pray. Amen."

B.49 Waterloo

Population: 104,986

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Brooke Ashfield, Knox Presbyterian Church

"It is my honour to be here today. Your Worship, councillors, honoured guests, citizens, residents, former councillors of whom I count four, one of whom is serving as a regional councillor-elect and Karen Redman regional chair-elect, all of you I want to acknowledge as well.

I'm grateful to be here. It is a perilous time to reflect upon democratic institutions. It sometimes seems as if democracy and the environment are under attack, where people are assassinated while in the safety of their own country's embassy while seeking a permit to get married. When Statistics Canada, last week, reported an alarming increase in hate crimes in Canada in 2018 over 2017, with a particular mention of southwestern Ontario. Where journalists are being increasingly murdered and portrayed as enemies of the people. Where those that step forward as candidates for public office are often, often subject to rudeness, disrespect, denigration of their heritage, ethnicity or sexual orientation, or point of view, and a reasoned and careful diplomacy respecting others seems in short supply.

My reflection today is that we need you. You have put yourselves forward as candidates to serve, you have knocked on the doors. You have not always been welcome, I can pretty well guarantee that, but you have persisted. You have stepped forward and you are here today in this room where children who are remembering this in future years, will, we are planting that seed that public service is a noble offering. That putting their names forward and risking being denigrated is worth it to offer service and to make this world a better place, and so I say thank you to you who have served in the past, to you who have been elected and re-elected and are moving forward.

The declaration of democracy is that all issues are local, you know this. There is no pothole too small or sidewalk too cleared of snow that you might not hear about it, yet these are important concerns of real people. You are the frontline of democracy and it is our responsibility to support you while keeping you accountable. We live here, we care, we need wise leaders and we've chosen you. May you find joy, peace, and hope in this noble service.

It was my pleasure today to be with Piper Nigel Moore once again. Nigel served with one of the original police services for many years including the time I was a police chaplain between 1992 and 2002. And, as today as with the police service, all people are equal under the law and in civic rights. The days of exclusive privilege for any religion or ethnic group are long gone as we live in a world, a beautiful world, a rainbow world of many colours, many varieties of rich diversity.

I am grateful for this opportunity to offer this reflection and wish you well as you serve with distinction. Thank you."

B.50 Wellesley

Population: 11,260

1. Regular Meeting of Council September 1, 2020 – Municipal Clerk Grace Kosch

"Let us be mindful of the needs off all our citizens and advance only those causes that will ensure peace and harmony in our community now and always."

2. Regular Meeting of Council October 27, 2020 – Municipal Clerk Grace Kosch

"Let us be mindful of the needs off all our citizens and advance only those causes that will ensure peace and harmony in our community now and always."

3. Regular Meeting of Council January 5, 2021 – Municipal Clerk Grace Kosch

"Let us be mindful of the needs off all our citizens and advance only those causes that will ensure peace and harmony in our community now and always."

B.51 West Lincoln

Population: 14,500

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Clarence Bouwman,
Canadian Reformed Church

"Madam Clerk, Mayor-elect, incoming Councillors, members of the public. Seems to me the residents of the community West Lincoln feel a measure of excitement at the induction of a new council tonight with a new mayor. We're grateful that we enjoy the freedom to select from our community people we are confident can serve the public in local governments. Equally, we are grateful to the incoming officials, that you've made yourselves available to serve in this capacity. We're all aware that the task you receive involves serious responsibility as you make decisions pertaining to the well being of our community, perhaps for years to come.

My brief purposes this evening then is to give you a word of encouragements. As you sit yourselves to fulfilling the task that's been given to you. I wish too to seek God's blessing upon you work. For the word of encouragements, I like to read a portion of holy scripture particularly tonight psalm 8.

Psalm 8 those who wish to follow along there are bibles in the pews with you or underneath the seat for the front bench. We're on Page 450. The psalm:

'To the choirmaster: according to the *gittith*. A Psalm of David.

'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

'Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the

fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

At the one level, you received your mandate from the people of West Lincoln. And so, to them you'll have to answer as to the decisions you make in the years to come. But on a deeper level, you do receive your mandate from God himself and it is to him then that you'll need to answer. This God who gives you a mandate's so beyond our comprehension.

We read psalm 8, David standing there we can imagine looking up (as we've all done in its time) and he's seeing the stars and all their array and over yonder the full moon. And it strikes him: 'I'm so small just six feet tall under this dazzling sky little, where as God's signature is rich so large in the works he's made, and yet,' he says: 'You were mindful of man. This God so big can make a universe that big yet mindful of man. You care for him.' He says: 'supplies for everyone's daily needs and more, but' David continues, 'what you've done God, you've made this man, six feet tall here today gone tomorrow, you've made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, those who inhabit the heavenly place the world of the angels if you will,' God himself.

'In a scale of one to ten, if that is ten,' says David, 'you made us a nine. What an awesome position that you've given us in this world. Dominion over all the works of your hands, fish of the sea, birds of the air, the sheep the oxen, all under man's speech. It's also wonderful, a privilege.' To care for God's world as ought, experience it to be a challenge. This world is broken. Our lives messed up. We try to fix it, you can't.

We elect governments, expect them to fix it. They can make some improvement of conditions. But God's told us why it's broken. He didn't make it this way. We misused our elevated position as a nine in God's world, used-misused the position, rebelled against the maker, thought to follow our own way, and so through the world entrusted to us into disarray. The results: tensions between peoples, weeds and thistles in the gardens, the fields, relationships, tears, injustice, poverty, sickness, death, and we can't fix it.

The Creator loves the world he made, the stars, and the animals, and the plants, people. And so came himself into this world in his son. God so loved the world—it's Christmas season note—God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whoever believes in him should not perish. Eternal life. God with us, Emmanuel in the flesh, we share the struggles communities experience in their efforts to live in peace, experience the tensions of broken families, the heartaches of losing loved ones, the challenges of making ends meet. To clean up our mess, he went to the cross to take on himself the worst of hatred, the worst of heartache, the worst of poverty, the worst of injustice, of cruelty, of oppression.

And there's the wonderful, gospel he was not crushed by the brokenness of life. Ah yes, he died and sovereignly rose again, as the annals of history so clearly record. And then, ascended to heaven where God made him king of kings, Lord of Lords in the words of Psalm 8, crowned him with glory and honor, gave him dominion over all the works of his hands, put all

things under Jesus' feet, sheep, and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds, fish, the people of this planet.

And the marvel continues, from his throne in heaven above, Christ Jesus appoints particular persons to be his ambassadors on earth through whom he today governs peoples and communities. Through people of the community West Lincoln, he's appointed you to govern this little part of his world. Privilege with grace. Your mandate then as officers under Christ: you're to love truths as God loves truth, to show mercy as God is merciful, to pursue justice as God pursues justice, to encourage kindness as God is kind, care for people, for nature, for God's world even as God cares for people, for nature, his world. Through your careful governance the community is made to experience something of God's good care for his creation. And I can assure you, as you covered in that fashion, the community will gladly honor and respect you and together will flourish under God.

Can I lead you in prayer now? Lord God sovereign in heaven over earth, we praise you for who you are. Such a God your majesty written large in the world around us, you've given to finite little people such an honored place in your creation, dominion over what you have made. It is, we acknowledge, such a privilege. We acknowledge we see that position so dimly. Life is so broken, so many relationships skewed, so much damage to nature, so much injustice on the part of citizenry and the part of governments.

We tried to fix it. We acknowledge we can't. And so we thank you for Jesus Christ of how he suffered the worst judgments yet wasn't crushed, is now enthroned as king of kings and Lord of Canada, and pleased to appoints officers to govern under him. And together Lord we want to thank you for the work that could be done by the previous council of West Lincoln, your servants. And we pray that you grant to each who retire from their office a peaceful transition out of public life.

And now you give a new council, the new mayor too and we thank you for them all and pray for your blessing upon each of them that you Lord give much of wisdom, much of patience, much of kindness, and mercy, and a strong sense of justice as these leaders of our community set themselves the task you assigned to that. We pray that through their work we in the community receive a stronger sense of who you are and so prosper in kindness and sensitivity to one another.

We pray for Councillor Rehner, for Councillor Trombetta, Councillor Coady, Councillor Jonker, for Councillor Gannan, Councillor Reilly, and we pray for His Worship the Mayor Blysmá. They will, we know it, need so much of your grace, strength, it's why we ask that you grant it to that in rich measure you may prosper through their good governance. We know too the work will take them periodic from their families and loved ones and so we pray that these families these loved ones to receive grace to support and to encourage in the task assigned.

We're also aware Lord of other officials who are behind the scenes and we pray for your strength and your blessing on each of them whatever position it may be so they too can carry

out their functions to the benefit of the community. We recognize too that you're behind the officials we see in every level of government in the land and so we beseech you to be with authorities across the nation. Make the land Lord to prosper, the nation to enjoy the freedoms we have. Through Jesus Christ in his name we pray, Amen."

2. Regular Meeting of Council September 28, 2020 – Councillor Mike Rehner

"We gather to make decisions for our community. May we use our best skills and judgements, keeping ourselves impartial and neutral as we consider the merits and pitfalls of each matter that is placed before us, and always act in accordance with the best of our community and fellow citizens. Thank you, Mr. Mayor."

3. Regular Meeting of Council November 23, 2020 – Councillor Jason Trombetta

"We gather to make decisions for our community. May we use our best skills and judgements, keeping ourselves impartial and neutral as we consider the merits and pitfalls of each matter that is placed before us, and always act in accordance with the best of our community and fellow citizens. Thank you, Mr. Mayor."

4. Regular Meeting of Council August 22, 2016 – Councillor Terry Bell

"We gather to make decisions for our community. May we use only our best skills and judgement, keeping ourselves impartial and neutral as we consider the merits and the pitfalls of each matter that is placed before us, and always act in accordance with what is best for our community and our fellow citizens."

B.52 Whitewater Region

Population: 7,009

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 3, 2018 – Reverend Kevin Moratz, St. Andrew's United Church

"Yesterday was the first Sunday of Advent and we celebrated the spiritual truth of hope, and the Apostle Paul tells us about the relationship between perseverance and hope when he writes to the 2 Corinthians, 'For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction so that through perseverance we might have hope'. We have come here tonight with a great hope for the future and also knowing that there are many people whose hopes rest in us.

We can never fully understand or develop hope without trials, and I'm sure there will be more than a few trials and challenges that must be faced over the next four years. Trials bring about the need for perseverance, but we can rest assured that in our struggles and challenges perseverance will always allow us to experience the hope and the love of God in new ways, for as followers of Christ let us truly be people of genuine hope.

Let us pray. Loving God, source of true community, you call us together, be with us this evening and bless us in our meeting. Give us the willingness to listen and the courage to speak, a willingness to share our own needs and a willingness to respond to the needs of others. Give us a sense of the faith community that is ours and a vision of what this community might become.

Alert us to the opportunities for service this opportunity presents and enable us to serve this municipality to the best of our abilities. Bless all who have taken leadership roles in times past, and those now willing to take on new leadership responsibilities. As we focus on the issues before this court keep us mindful of how our decisions affect others. Make us aware of the needs of all who reside in this region of which our mission is to serve to the best of our capacity. Bless us in this our meeting and all future endeavours that our perseverance may lead to the fulfillment of your kingdom rooted in hope, peace, joy, and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

2. Regular Meeting of Council November 18, 2020 – Mayor Michael Moore

"Almighty God, we give thanks for the great blessings which have been bestowed on Canada and its citizens, including the gifts of freedom, opportunity, and the peace that we enjoy. Guide us in our deliberations as township councillors, strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities. Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country, for the benefit of all, to make laws and wise decisions. Amen."

3. Regular Meeting of Council February 19, 2020 – Mayor Michael Moore

"Almighty God, we give thanks for the great blessings which have been bestowed on Canada and its citizens, including the gifts of freedom, opportunity, and the peace that we enjoy. Guide us in our deliberations as township councillors, strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities. Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country, for the benefit of all, to make laws and wise decisions. Amen."

4. Regular Meeting of Council March 7, 2018 – Mayor Hal Johnson

"Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen."

B.53 Whitchurch-Stouffville

Population: 45,837

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 4, 2018 – Reverend Graham Clinton, in2one Community Church

"When I was originally asked to do this, there was the indication that it would be more than a prayer. I just want to look for consultation, is that...? Thank you, I just wanted to make sure that we don't do anything out of line.

My name is Graham Clinton, and I am the founding pastor of in2one Community Church in downtown Stouffville. I am currently the chair of the Stouffville Christian Ministerial Association and I have been elected to my role as have you. Granted my election process was much shorter, much less involved, there were no signs, there was no door-to-door campaigning. In that way our elections must seem drastically different, but for each of us, we were elected to represent others, and in that role that's why I'm here today. And it is in your role to represent others that you are here today also.

And may I just pause for a moment to speak from the ministerial as a whole that we are committed to pray for you as our legal representatives, we're committed to pray for you as individuals, fellow human beings and citizens of Whitchurch-Stouffville. We are also committed to pray for you and your families, we are committed to pray blessing for you and on you as you provide your citizens with righteous government.

We each hold professions that once were highly respected but now each of our professions lacks trust because those who have gone before, because those who have gone before lost focus on the ideals and values that earned respect in the first place. Let us each buy back and earn back that respect. This will not be a time of posturing and pointing but about listening and leading, so let me state for the record clearly, I am for Stouffville.

Now because of what I believe and practice, some people think of me as a wack-a-doo. Because of the job that you have and because of the beliefs and practices that you will live out, some will also think of you as a wack-a-doo. Professions of service have sadly come into wide public disrepute. Your motives for action will now be called into question. That's good. Make sure your motives are pure.

As is customary I delivered to you what I was requested to deliver, a charge to the mayor and councillors of the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, this is a formal charge to guide your service.

First, you would place the people, the residents, the families, the seniors, the children, the young adults whose town this is, at the heart of your service. Your leadership is to be to the benefit of all and not the few. Be admirable in this.

Second, you are to treat each of these people equally without showing favour to one over another. You are to serve and to govern all as one community so that all might benefit. I charge you to actively resist being shaped by society's polarization that tells us to identify each other as either foe or friend. We are one community. Behave in a way that is right.

Third, your charge is to infuse all of your dealings, meetings, events, deliberations both private and public with an ethic of community service and to fight the pervasive impulse to lower yourself to selfish indulgence. Your example and dependability in this arena will be a key to

success in the strenuous effort that good governance always will be. We need the constituents of Whitchurch-Stouffville need you to strive, they need to see you strive and reach your full potential. In doing that you may well lead us to our own. Be noble.

Fourth, you are to take full advantage of as much wise counsel as you may come upon. Humbly learn from those around who have gone before, who have already faced similar situations and challenges. Turn them into opportunities. You must take counsel and consult with others and study whatever facts you can gather. Plans fail for lack of counsel but with many advisors they succeed. Be about the truth.

Fifth, you are given the right to create laws and policies. Use this power to care for and protect the people of this town. You are to pursue what is morally right over that which is merely legally permissible. Be about the business of doing good, lead with wisdom, with grace, with kindness, lead in such a way that you would want someone to lead you. Demonstrate and teach the habit of gratitude. May you be well known for your focus on seeking to embody the best of humanity, be the exceptional and do not settle for merely the acceptable. Be pure in heart, motive and action. English novelist Henry James writes there are three things in human life that are important: the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind, the third is to be kind. Lead the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville into this future.

I leave you with this question, or it is now yours to answer. How will you use our resources and your talents to bring people together? As the conclusion to this charge, I urge you strongly, make it your habit to repeatedly take the risk to do what is right.

And now let me pray for you.

Kind Father, thank you for the freedom that we live in, thank you for the abundantly generous way that you have blessed our region and our country. We remember and acknowledge that all blessing is provided that we might become a blessing to those around both near and far.

Thank you for how you have organized an ordained government, the systems to care for your people. You have given us leaders to oversee, to manage, to protect and to care for people because of your deep love for them. You have granted us the delight of freedom in our choices. Continue by your Holy Spirit to send wisdom and conviction that we might choose well.

It is my prayer that each of these leaders gathered together today would be given the gift of wisdom as individuals and as a healthy functioning team. May it be so. Provide them with insight, intuition and intelligence, provide for them and bless them each with all that they require as individuals and in their families. Bless them as leaders and keep them accountable to their constituents to provide us with the righteous government that is your will. When they stray Lord God I pray that you would restore them gently, when they fail I pray that you would grant the forgiveness that they require. Give them the strength and courage to behave and govern with the nobility with which you have imbued them.

Lord Jesus you are the sovereign that all other leaders fall under. May you lead well here. Thank you for your presence and your power amongst us, even now. be honored in our choices, bless those that have chosen to serve and to lead this community. In Jesus' name, Amen."

B.54 Woodstock

Population: 40,902

1. Inaugural Meeting of Council December 6, 2018 – Pastor Robin Pifer, Oxford Baptist Church

"Well let's pray together. Lord of heaven and earth who created us all in your image, we pray for these men and women you've called to serve and govern the City of Woodstock.

I pray for our mayor Trevor Birch that you will give him wisdom and favour among the people of this city, and that his influence would be used for the prosperity, development and security for the citizens of this city, impacting Oxford County, our province and our country as he meets with different levels of government, business and community partners.

Lord, I pray for our city councillors Deb Tait, Sandra Talbot, Connie Lauder, Jerry Acchione, Ron Fraser, and Mark Schadenberg that as they meet together, have healthy debate, listen to the city citizens of our city that you oh God would give them wisdom and understanding to make decisions that will strengthen all aspects of this city for generations to come.

May they be difference makers for all ages, beliefs and backgrounds in the friendly city so that all people may serve, labour together and raise strong families in significant and secure ways so that this city becomes a greater light, an example of hope while being a city placed at the crossroads in our province to influence this great nation as well.

We pray this blessing on the servant leaders of Woodstock, oh God in your great and holy name we pray. Amen."

APPENDIX C: EMAIL SENT TO MUNICIPALITIES WITH COUNCIL PRAYERS

Subject: Unconstitutional prayer/invocation at inaugural council sessions

July 20, 2020

To whom it may concern

We are writing in regards to the practice of your municipal council of including prayer in its inaugural or regular council meetings. In 2015, in the Saguenay decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it was unconstitutional to begin a municipal council session with prayer, as doing so violated the state's duty of religious neutrality.

However, in reviewing the minutes of your municipality's meetings, we noted that a religious invocation or prayer was delivered.

We kindly ask that you confirm that your council will take steps to ensure future inaugural sessions are compliant with the Supreme Court's ruling.

Sincerely

Ian Bushfield
Executive Director

APPENDIX D: MUNICIPAL RESPONSES

This appendix consists of the responses to the letter to municipalities with prayers in inaugural council sessions featured in Appendix C. Each response includes the name of the municipality, the date received, and full contents of the email.

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Bradford West Gwillimbury

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Mr. Bushfield,

Thank you for your email but I believe that you are mistaken. We have removed any prayer from our Council meetings several years ago and instead have a private moment of contemplation. We often recognize citizens who have passed or victims of tragedy or world emergency events. A prayer is not recited. Perhaps you were looking at old minutes however the practice has since changed. We will continue with this new practice for the next inaugural council meeting.

Thank you,

Rebecca Murphy, M.B.A. LL.B
Director of Corporate Services/Town Solicitor/Clerk

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Dear Rebecca

Thank you for the reply.

Our team identified the blessing delivered by Reverend Diane Knowles at the December 2018 inaugural meeting. Are there plans to include a blessing in the upcoming inaugural meeting?

Sincerely

Ian

August 2, 2022 – Final response

No our processes have changed. There is no plan for any prayer at the next inaugural.

Caledon

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Good afternoon,

Thank you for your e-mail and comments. The Town of Caledon has moved away from including prayer at the beginning of its Council Meetings.

Should you have further questions, please contact me directly.

Jordyn Lavecchia
Deputy Clerk, Council & Committee Services

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Jordyn

Thanks for the reply.

Our team had flagged a prayer delivered by Pastor Bryan Fox at the 2018 inaugural council meeting. Is the plan to no longer include a prayer at the upcoming inaugural meeting?

Best

Ian

July 25, 2022 – Final response

Hi Ian,

Yes, the intention is to no longer include a prayer.

Collingwood

July 20, 2022 – Response

Good evening Ian,

Not sure where you received your information from but Collingwood has not included a prayer in any proceedings for the last 20 years. Any recognition provided at official events is non-denominational.

Kind regards,

Sara Almas, Clerk

July 21, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Sara

Thanks for the response and apologies if we have made any mistake.

Our volunteers identified the invocation delivered by Rev Donna Wilson at the December 2018 inaugural meeting. Was this a "non-denominational" recognition?

I would draw your attention to the language in Saguenay that "even if it were accepted that the prayer at issue is prima facie a non-denominational practice, it is nonetheless a religious practice." (at para 137)

"Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is 'inclusive', it may nevertheless exclude non-believers; whether it is consistent with the Quebec Charter depends not on the extent to which it is inclusive, but on its exclusive nature and its effect on the complainant's ability to act in accordance with his or her beliefs."

Regards

Ian

Georgian Bluffs

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Agree. I have already asked for this consideration. Thanks for sharing.

Regards,

Cathy Coburn, Councillor

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Cathy

Thanks for the reply.

Does this mean there will be a change to the upcoming inaugural meeting agenda or does it have to be debated by your council first?

Best

Ian

July 25, 2022 – Final response

Hi Ian,

I had spoken to our clerk and CAO previously and they were aware how I felt about the issue already. They have indeed assured me that the inaugural event will not include the religious elements this coming November.

Thank you for adding your perspective.

Best Regards,

Cathy

Huron East

July 25, 2022 – Initial response

Hello Ian,

I've received your previous email sent via the Municipality of Huron East website and I was wondering if you could provide me with some additional information such as the date of the minutes or a field of reference regarding "in reviewing the minutes of your municipality's meetings, we noted that a religious invocation or prayer was delivered."

I look forward to your reply.

Thanks

Councillor Justin Morrison

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Justin

Thanks for the reply.

Our team identified the "inspirational message" delivered by Pastor Steve Hildebrand at the 2018 inaugural meeting.

Regards

Ian

July 26, 2022 – Final response from Cllr Morrison

Thanks for the clarification.

Kenora

July 20, 2022 – Initial response

Thank you for your email.

We don't have a prayer that is used in our Council meetings. We use a land acknowledgement/blessing which reads:

As we gather, we recognize that we are on Treaty Three Lands which are steeped in rich Indigenous history and home to many First Nations and Metis people today. We continue to be thankful for the partnerships with Indigenous people.

We give thanks for the many blessings we enjoy in the City of Kenora.

We seek wisdom in our minds, clearness in our thinking, truth in our speaking, and always love in our hearts, so that we may try always to unite the Citizens of Kenora.

Let these principles guide us in our decision making.

Heather Pihulak
Director of Corporate Services/City Clerk

July 20, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Heather

Thanks for the quick response.

Our volunteers reviewed the passed meeting minutes and sometimes mistakes may have been made. I see on the [minutes of the Dec 1, 2018 inaugural meeting](#) that Cllr Rory McMillan delivered a "blessing," which is why we had it flagged as a prayer. Can you confirm a bit more about the contents of that blessing and we'll update our records accordingly?

Best

Ian

July 20, 2022 – Final response

Councillor McMillan conducted the same blessing that I provided to you – other than adding a small section about the new Council and guidance and wisdom of the new Council.

We abandoned 'prayers' several years ago.

I have no plans to use at our upcoming Inaugural meeting either. It will be the land acknowledgement/blessing I provided

Thanks!

Heather

Lake of Bays

July 25, 2022 – Response

Thank you for your letter of interest. Currently we have no prayer in our meetings.

Stay well

Terry Glover
Mayor

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Terry

Thanks for the reply.

Our team identified that Thomas Brown delivered the opening prayer at the December 4, 2018 inaugural council meeting.

Regards

Ian

Lambton County

July 21, 2022 – Response

Good morning Ian,

Thank you for your email received through the County's website.

Our Council does not include prayer or religious invocation at our meetings.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Melissa Donovan
Executive Assistant

July 21, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Melissa

Thanks for the quick response and please accept my apologies.

Our volunteers identified the invocation delivered at the December 2018 inaugural council meeting. Reviewing Mr Vanni's comments though, I see they were strictly secular. Can you confirm if any direction was given by the County on the invitation to provide that invocation?

Best

Ian

Lambton Shores

July 21, 2022 - Response

Thanks Ian for your email...I believe in God and that He has unlimited power at His disposal. As I drive to every council meeting I pray for God's wisdom and guidance upon it. I recognize the state's duty of religious neutrality. My concern is that with in our world today that too many institutions and leaders have shifted into neutrality and are not realizing their full potential. God is not the enemy but desires a loving and constructive relationship with us. John:3:16 says it all...Best Regards...Dave [Marsh, Councillor]

Lennox and Addington

October 6, 2022 – Response

Dear Mr. Bushfield,

Please be advised that the Council of the County of Lennox and Addington has removed the Invocation (or any other type of religious expression) from the Order of Business for the Inaugural Meeting each year. The Inaugural meeting was the only meeting of Lennox and Addington County Committees or Council meetings which included an Invocation.

Tracey McKenzie, CMO, CHRP
County Clerk

October 11, 2022 – BCHA reply

Dear Tracey

Thank you for your confirmation.

Best wishes

Ian

Meaford

July 21, 2022

Thx for the message [Harley Greenfield, Councillor]

North Dumfries

July 21, 2022 – Response

Thank you. Our Council and legal will look into this and seek clarification on the Canadian Supreme Court decision.

Sue Foxton
Mayor

Orillia

August 9, 2022 – Response

Good morning Mr. Bushfield,

Thank you for your email dated July 20, 2022, regarding invocation for City Council meetings.

The City of Orillia strives to be an equitable, inclusive and diverse community. Please be assured that a Council meeting, including an inaugural, is not intended to be religious in nature and we will certainly be mindful of this when planning the upcoming Council inaugural.

Thank you for contacting the City of Orillia.

Take Care

Steve Clark
Mayor

Ramara

July 21, 2022 – Response from Councillor David Snutch

You obviously have not done your homework and your facts are incorrect. I guess you just send out blanket non factual emails.

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply to Councillor Snutch

Dear David

Thank you for your reply.

Our volunteers noted from the minutes of the December 3, 2018 inaugural meeting that an opening prayer was "bestowed" by John Appleby.

We did also see that prayers at regular council meetings were suspended on January 14, 2019. Did that amendment apply to future inaugural meetings as well?

Regards

Ian

July 21, 2022 – Response from Mayor Basil Clarke

Hi Ian

You are greatly mistaken. I don't know where you're getting your information from. Ramara hasn't opened our meetings with a prayer in at least 6 or 7 years !

Mayor
Basil Clarke

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply to Mayor Clarke

Dear Basil

Thank you for your reply.

Our volunteers noted from the minutes of the December 3, 2018 inaugural meeting that an opening prayer was "bestowed" by John Appleby.

We did also see that prayers at regular council meetings were suspended on January 14, 2019. Did that amendment apply to future inaugural meetings as well?

Regards

Ian

Russell

July 20, 2022 – Response from Mayor Pierre Leroux

Dear Mr. Bushfield,

I confirm receipt of your email.

As our minutes do not include the wording of our prayer I have included it below.

"Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take moment of personal reflection"

There is no intention of changing this wording. If you would like more information on the origin of this statement, I invite to review the Canadian Constitution here, as it the same wording for its preamble.

<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html>

Regards,

Pierre Leroux
Mayor

July 27, 2022 – Response from the Clerk

Hello Mr. Bushfield,

Further to your request and the Mayor's response, please be advised that I am bringing amendments to Council's Procedural By-law for Council's consideration at the next Regular Council Meeting of August 15, 2022 and I will add that the title of "Prayer" be amended to "Moment of Reflection" on Council's Regular Council Agendas as this would be more accurate to what it is.

Hoping this is satisfactory to you.

Joanne Camiré Laflamme
Clerk

August 3, 2022 – BCHA reply

Dear Joanne

Thank you, and the mayor, for your updates and clarifications. If you'll indulge me one further clarification, will that procedural change maintain the reading of the preamble of the Charter before the moment of reflection?

Best

Ian

August 8, 2022 – Final response

Hello Mr. Bushfield,

I acknowledge receipt of your email of August 3 as I was on holidays last week.

Yes what will be considered by Council is to amend the title "Prayer" to read "Moment of Reflexion" instead, and the preamble to be read at that time will remain the same as before, being:

"Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, let us take a moment of personal reflection."

Joanne Camiré Laflamme
Clerk

Selwyn

July 22, 2022 –Response

Hello Ian –

Thank you for your email – the Township eliminated prayer from its agenda in 2015. It has been replaced with a moment of silent reflection.

Thanks

Selwyn

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Thanks for the reply

When we reviewed the minutes of your December 4, 2018 inaugural meeting, our team noted that a blessing was delivered by Rev Dr Anne Gowans-Blinn.

Regards

Ian

Shelburne

July 21, 2022 – Response

... this email takes me aback... I am at a loss at to when/what you are referring to in regards to any prayer being conducted in any of our meetings.... Could you be more specific and provide dates, times and what meetings you are referring to?.

Kyle Fegan, Town Councillor

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Kyle

Thanks for the response.

I looked at our records and our team flagged the religious blessing given by Reverend Gord Horsley at the December 3, 2018 oath of office ceremony.

Cheers

Ian

Simcoe

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Thank you for your interest in the County of Simcoe Council meetings.

Would you provide a reference or example of a minute at issue?

John Daly
County Clerk

July 21, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi John

Thanks for the quick response.

Our volunteers identified the "prayer of invocation" at the December 11, 2018 Inaugural council meeting.

Best

Ian

South Glengarry

July 25, 2022 – Response

Good afternoon,

Thank you for your email.

Historically we have only had a prayer at our inaugural meetings, however please note that we will remove that portion for all future inaugurations.

Thank you,

Crystal LeBrun
Deputy Clerk

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Crystal

Thanks for the reply.

Best wishes

Ian

Southwest Middlesex

July 20, 2022 – Initial response from Jill Bellchamber-Glazier, CAO

There are no prayers or religious invocations in our meetings. Nor noted in our meetings.
Your information is incorrect.

July 20, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Jill

Thanks for the quick response.

Our data were collected by volunteers based on the minutes of past meetings. I see in the December 5, 2018 inaugural meeting minutes that a Reverend Deb Dolbear Van Bilsen delivered opening remarks. I assume this was flagged as a prayer based on the title and affiliation of that individual. Could you help us understand a bit better what was delivered at that meeting?

Best

Ian

July 20, 2022 – Final response

As a community leader, she was asked to bring welcoming remarks to the incoming council. I advised her that prayers and religious overtones were not permissible at council meetings.

Tay Valley

July 22, 2022 – Response

Hi Ian,

Tay Valley Township does not begin their Council meetings with prayer. Curious as to the Minutes you reviewed indicating that they did?

Thanks,

Janie Laidlaw, Deputy Clerk

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Janie

Thanks for the reply.

Our team noted the "devotional service" delivered by Reverend Shelley Roberts at the December 4, 2018 inaugural meeting. Though we also saw that wasn't an item on the 2014 inaugural meeting minutes.

Regards

Ian

The Nation

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Good morning,

Thank you for your email. I would like to confirm that The Nation Municipality does not recite prayers at the start of their meetings. Please see our agendas and minutes here: <https://nationmun.ca/en/council-staff/council/agendas-minutes>

Alternatively, you can watch our Council meeting recordings on our YouTube channel: [The Nation Municipality / La municipalité de La Nation - YouTube](#)

Kind regards,

Aimée Roy
Deputy Clerk

July 21, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Aimée

Thanks for the quick response.

I apologize for the error. Looking at the records our volunteers collected it appears like the first agenda item used to read "call to order and prayer" as recently as September 2020 but more recent meetings simply say "call to order". Can you confirm if there was a change in procedure or was it simply just updating the agenda to reflect practice?

Best

Ian

July 21, 2022 – Final response

Good morning,

It was following the adoption of a new procedural by-law in 2021.

Kind regards,

Aimée

November 16, 2022 – BCHA followup

Dear Aimée

I'm just following up on some of our final research on this and I see the procedure by-law adopted in June 2021 but it looks in there like the agenda still begins with "Call to order and prayers." <https://nationmun.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/By-law-68-2021-to-regulate-Council-Proceedings.pdf>

I see the practice changed starting at the Aug 23, 2021 council meeting though.

Cheers

Ian

Thorold

July 27, 2022 – Response

Good afternoon Mr. Bushfield,

Thank you for your question. I am new to the role of City Clerk at the City of Thorold, however I am aware of the ruling you have referenced. Please note, there is no prayer, blessing or religious statements made during regular or special Council meetings now. Additionally, none will be included in the agenda for the inaugural meeting of the new term of Council.

If you have any further questions or concerns [sic], feel free to email me directly.

Matthew Trennum
City Clerk

August 3, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Matthew

Thank you for your reply. We had noted the invocation in the previous inaugural meeting but appreciate the clarification.

Best

Ian

Thunder Bay

July 21, 2022 – Initial response

Good morning Ian,

Thank you for clarifying. The current agenda for the 2022-2026 Inaugural Meeting does not include an invocation.

With thanks,

Dana
Deputy City Clerk

July 21, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Dana

Thanks for the clarification.

Looking at our records, I think what our volunteers identified was the invocation held at the December 2018 inaugural meeting, which was led by a local Anglican pastor. I guess I'm curious whether that will be part of the ceremonies following the upcoming elections.

Best

Ian

July 28, 2022 – Final response

Hi Ian,

Thank you for clarifying. The current agenda for the 2022-2026 Inaugural Meeting does not include an invocation.

With thanks,

Dana

Whitchurch-Stouffville

July 25, 2022 – Response

Hello,

Thank you for your email. I can confirm that the Town does not include prayer in the Regular Council Meetings, the Town will review your recommendation prior to the inaugural meeting.

Kind regards,

Kristina Lepik, Dipl MA
Council Coordinator

July 25, 2022 – BCHA reply

Hi Kristina

Thank you for the reply.

Best

Ian

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