



AMEN, AGAIN!

Revisiting Unconstitutional Prayer in Ontario Municipalities



**BC HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION**

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The following research was conducted and written by people, not AI.

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FOREWORD: THE SAGUENAY PROJECT

The Saguenay Project is an ongoing research and advocacy campaign by the BC Humanist Association to audit and promote compliance with the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *MLQ v Saguenay*.¹

Report	Province	Date	Regular prayers	Inaugural prayers
Duty of Neutrality Beyond Saguenay	BC	Nov 2020	0/162 (0.0%)	23*/162 (14.2%)
In Open Defiance	MB	Mar 2022	4/101 (4.0%)	6/101 (5.9%)
Open for Unconstitutional Business	ON	Dec 2022	9/360 (2.5%)	156/328 (47.6%)
We Yelled at Them Until They Stopped	BC	Nov 2023	0/161 (0.0%)	7/148 (4.7%)
The Last Municipality Standing	AB	May 2024	6/177 (3.4%)	6/172 (3.5%)
An Impossible Task	SK	Oct 2024	2/95 (2.1%)	3/90 (3.3%)
Prayer Free BC	BC	Apr 2025	0/160 (0.0%)	8/155 (5.2%)
The Island Anomaly	PEI	Sep 2025	0/14 (0.0%)	1/6 (16.7%)
Godless Serenity	NB	May 2026	4/68 (5.9%)	6/54 (11.1%)

*We identified three more prayers at BC's 2018 inaugural meetings in *We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped*, bringing the total to 26 (16.0%).

This report, the tenth in our series, builds on and borrows from these previous reports. Our study of municipalities across the country is ongoing, and we have identified several trends: (1) The number of municipalities including prayer in their meetings (regular or inaugural) has steadily 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 across the country. (3) These prayers are disproportionately delivered by Christian men. (4) Advocacy works, and more advocacy is needed.

The *Saguenay Project* seeks to highlight violations of *Saguenay* to increase compliance with the ruling, thereby strengthening the separation of religion and government in Canada and ensuring that all feel welcome in municipal council chambers across the country.

¹ Learn more and find links to all our reports at <https://www.bchumanist.ca/saguenay>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Canada left little room for ambiguity when it ruled on *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay* (Saguenay) in 2015: Opening a municipal council meeting with a prayer, whether at regular or inaugural sessions, is unconstitutional.² This report is the latest addition to our ongoing Saguenay Project, which examines the practices of municipalities across Canada to assess their compliance with principles of secularism and promote inclusivity for people of all beliefs and none. “Amen, Again!” is the second report on the province of Ontario. Our team reviewed both 2022 inaugural meetings and regular council meetings in 2023 and 2024 across Ontario to measure those municipalities' compliance with Saguenay and to determine how the BCHA's advocacy has impacted secularism in the province.

Since the publication of “Open for Unconstitutional Business,” the BCHA has written, either directly or through an Ontario-based constitutional lawyer, to many of those municipalities we had identified as including unconstitutional prayers. We called on them to end the practice and commit to keeping future meetings secular. While few municipalities responded directly to us, we have nevertheless observed a significant drop in the prevalence of prayers in Ontario municipal council meetings.

Our research team revisited the 360 municipal websites in Ontario with a population over 1,000 according to the 2016 census. Of the 359 for which data were available for inaugural meetings, 62 (17.3%) included prayer in their 2022 inaugural meetings. While this is a sharp decline since 2018, it still remains the highest percentage across all provinces. We additionally identified two (0.6% of 356 municipalities for which data was available) municipalities (Laurentian Valley and Pembroke) that routinely include prayer in their regular council meetings. We also identified 24 (6.7%) municipalities that included a moment of silence in their 2022 inaugural meetings and 65 (18.3%) that included one in their regular meetings.

In addition to our research on municipal prayers, our team also collected data on Indigenous content in each meeting examined for prayer. In 2022 Inaugural meetings, 179 (49.9%) municipalities included indigenous content.³ Further, 222 (62.4%) municipalities included indigenous content, typically land acknowledgements, in their regular meetings.⁴

This report identifies several themes, the first of which is that the number of municipalities including prayer in their meetings (regular or inaugural) has declined since Saguenay. This decline was particularly steep in Ontario between our previous report and the current one, with the number of inaugural prayers falling by 63.7%, from 156 of 328 in 2018 to 62 of 359 in 2022. Second, despite this reduction, many municipalities continue to include prayers, particularly in inaugural meetings, and are frequently reluctant to commit to substantial or meaningful change.

² See Appendix A.

³ See Appendix C.6.

⁴ See Appendix C.7.

Third, of the 74 individuals who delivered inaugural prayers, a disproportionate number, 50 (67.6%), were men, whereas all regular meeting prayers examined were delivered by men. Fourth, Christianity overwhelmingly dominated the religious content of municipal prayers in all (100.0%) studied regular meetings with prayer and in 62 out of 74 (84.9%) inaugural meeting prayers. Finally, a growing number of municipalities include Indigenous content in their inaugural (19.5% in 2018, 49.9% in 2022) and regular (17.8% in 2021, 62.4% in 2024) meetings since our last report.

The BCHA urges municipalities to adhere to the ruling in *Saguenay* and eliminate religious practices from their future council meetings. Specifically:

- Municipalities must remove ‘prayers’ and/or ‘invocations’ from inaugural and regular council meetings.
- Municipalities should avoid using religious language, such as ‘invocation(s)’, to describe secular practices.
- Invited guests at inaugural and regular meetings must be selected in a religiously neutral way that does not result in perceived favouritism of a particular religious group or of religion over non-religion.
- 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. Moments 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.
- When including the National Anthem in council meetings, municipalities should ensure the version they select is the most recently approved version by Parliament.
- Municipalities should not be prescriptive when inviting Indigenous communities to participate in council meetings.
- Municipalities are encouraged to review their practices around all formal meetings and events to ensure the content of those meetings are secular and train staff and council in the duty of religious neutrality.

Overall, this report provides a comprehensive review of the impact of the *Saguenay* decision on municipal prayer practices in Ontario, offering valuable insights for policymakers, legal scholars, and community stakeholders concerned with religious neutrality and inclusivity in public governance.

As the 2026 Ontario local elections approach, the BCHA urges candidates to reaffirm their commitment to secular governance and the legal duty of religious neutrality. Municipal governments serve residents of all religions and the non-religious. Elected officials must ensure that public meetings are conducted in a manner that respects and welcomes all members of the community.



THE SAGUENAY DECISION

In December 2006, Alain Simoneau challenged the prayer that opened the municipal council meetings of Saguenay, Quebec. As an atheist, Simoneau was uncomfortable with the religious displays and had asked the Mayor to stop the practice.⁵ After the Mayor refused his request, Simoneau pursued a human rights complaint to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In October 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered Saguenay Council to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber.”⁶ Although the Canadian and Quebec *Charters of Rights and Freedoms* do not explicitly impose a duty for the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and belief, the Court ruled that to protect the “variety of beliefs,” the state must maintain true neutrality.⁷ 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 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.”⁸

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.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ We provide a detailed exploration of the *Saguenay* decision in **Appendix A**. Ultimately, the *Saguenay* ruling was clear: municipal councils have a constitutional duty of neutrality.

“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 Gascon¹¹

⁵ *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015, SCC 16 [2015] 2 S.C.R. 3, paras. 6 and 8.

⁶ *Ibid.* paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

⁷ *Ibid.* paras. 68 and 71.

⁸ *Ibid.* para. 137.

⁹ *Ibid.* paras. 113 and 120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* paras. 73–75.

¹¹ *Ibid.* para. 137.



METHODOLOGY

This report followed a similar methodology to our previous work in the Saguenay Project. Our team reviewed publicly available documents, typically meeting agendas, minutes, and videos, hereby referred to as “records,” to identify religious content in council meetings. We distinguish between two types of meetings: regular and inaugural.

Under Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001*, regular meetings must occur at set, recurring intervals (biweekly or monthly, depending on the municipality) and must be open to the public by default, absent a specific statutory exception.¹² An inaugural council meeting is the first meeting of a municipal council following a regular election, as defined under section 230 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.¹³ It typically includes the swearing-in of newly elected members.¹⁴

Given the large number of municipalities in Ontario, our study is limited to those with populations equal to or greater than 1,000 according to the 2016 Census (n=360).¹⁵ While the 2021 Census was used for specific population size and religious distributions in this report, the full municipal list was based on the 2016 Census to maintain consistency with the 2022 Ontario report, “Open for Unconstitutional Business.”¹⁶

As in our past reports, we reviewed each municipality's available records to determine whether council meetings opened with a prayer, moment of silence, National Anthem, Indigenous content, or other notable practices. Where prayer was present and relevant information was available, we also recorded the name, affiliation, and gender of the person who delivered the prayer.¹⁷ Our research team and volunteers consulted each municipality's website to locate the records for all 2022 inaugural meetings and for the two selected dates of regular council meetings (the first meetings after October 15, 2023, and after February 6, 2024).

Where relevant records could not be located, we contacted the municipality directly by email and phone. When this information remained unavailable, we searched for additional documentation, such as news coverage, to supplement our data. If discrepancies were found

¹² *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c. 25. Available at <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25>; and see Wideman, Alex. (2023 June 13). “Municipal Council Meetings in Ontario.” *OpenCouncil*. Available at <https://opencouncil.ca/municipal-council-meetings-ontario/>.

¹³ *Ibid.* c. 230.

¹⁴ Government of Ontario. (n.d.). *Ontario Municipal Councillors' Guide*, 5. *Municipal Organization*. Available at <https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-municipal-councillors-guide/5-municipal-organization>.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2017). Population and Dwelling Count Highlight Tables, 2016 Census: Population and dwelling counts, for Canada, provinces and territories, and census subdivisions (municipalities), 2016 and 2011 censuses. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/pd-pl/Table.cfm?Lang=Eng&T=302&SR=1&S=86&O=A&RPP=9999&PR=35>

¹⁶ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., O. Jensen, P. Chowdhury, & I. Bushfield. (2022). *Open For Unconstitutional Business: Prayers at municipal councils in Ontario*. BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/open_for_unconstitutional_business.

¹⁷ We made efforts to identify the individual's gender via publicly available information, i.e. pronoun use in church websites, media reports, blogs, etc. where possible.

between the two dates of regular council meetings selected for our study, our research team verified the municipality's typical practice with supplementary meeting records to confirm the presence of these procedures over several meeting dates.

For regular meetings, we also aimed to identify when and why municipalities changed their prayer practices.¹⁸ To do this, we searched municipal records, by-law documents, and any relevant news to extract the date of the last prayer delivered. We consulted these sources to determine what sparked that change. This data was not included for inaugural meetings due to scale and minimal record availability.

Our research team transcribed inaugural prayers wherever a recording was publicly available. Notably, documenting these proceedings with a recording is not a required practice across Ontario; therefore, several could not be transcribed. Transcriptions are included in **Appendix B**, which consists of prayers from 43 of the 62 (69.4%) municipalities with prayer. We also transcribed prayers from two municipalities that featured prayers at regular council meetings. Transcriptions were gathered both by volunteers and our research team. All transcriptions were verified by our research team to the best of our ability; however, the combination of long prayers, inconsistent audio quality, and limited staff capacity can lead to minor errors.¹⁹

Using the resulting transcripts, we coded each prayer for the presence of the various terms/language. We recorded only the presence or absence of each category within a given prayer, not the number of times it recurred, for our analysis. Using the resulting transcripts, we coded each prayer for the presence of the following:

- **Jesus Christ/Christ:** The prayer explicitly mentioned any variations of the name Jesus Christ, including 'In Jesus' name.'
- **Deity, any variation:** The prayer explicitly mentioned the name of the deity or deities of any religion.
- **Religious text:** The prayer made reference to the text, book, or associated documents of any religion.
- **The Lord's Prayer:** A clearly identifiable version of 'The Lord's Prayer' was recited.²⁰
- **Bible quote:** The prayer included direct quotes from the Bible (any version).
- **Lord guiding council:** The speaker implies, or explicitly states, that religion or a deity/deities played a role in elections and government proceedings. And/or that religion will influence future municipal practice. Statements that blurred between a blessing and being guided by an outside force were categorized as ambiguous (A). In our previous Ontario report, we observed the prevalence of "prayers for theocracy", essentially the speaker suggesting that god was responsible for the election, or was guiding the

¹⁸ See Table 5.

¹⁹ See our further discussion in the Limitations and Future Research chapter.

²⁰ For versions of this Christian prayer, see <https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/what-we-believe/lords-prayer>.

community. We included this category in our transcript analysis to explore whether or not this was an ongoing trend.²¹

- **Amen:** The prayer ended with, or included, the term “amen.”

Based on the findings from our past studies, we hypothesized that inaugural meetings were more likely to include prayer(s) as compared to regular council meetings. Inaugural meetings tend to include more ceremonial elements. 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.²²

Over time, the Saguenay Project has also expanded to collect basic data on the presence of Indigenous content in meetings examined for prayer. The diversity and context of these practices has required us to adapt our methodology for categorizing, assessing, and analyzing Indigenous content while studying municipal prayer. We provide a more detailed discussion of the reasoning for our approach to Indigenous content in the chapter on Analyzing Indigenous Content.²³

²¹Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp.28-29.

²² *Ibid.* p.43.

²³See Note on Methodology for Indigenous Content.

QUANTIFYING PRAYER PRACTICES

Inaugural Meetings

Prayer

Of the 360 municipalities included in our study, data for 2022 inaugural council meetings were available for 359. Of these, 62 (17.3%) included prayer in their 2022 inaugural council meetings, in violation of *Saugenay*. The prayers were categorized into eight faith traditions based on the affiliation of the individual delivering the prayer and/or the content of the prayer itself. Of the 62 inaugural prayers, 62 (84.9%) were Christian; of those we identified 12 (16.4%) as Catholic and 50 (68.5%) as being from other Christian denominations (marked as 'Christian (O)' in **Table 1**).²⁴ There were two (2.7%) Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish prayers each, and one (1.4%) Sikh and one (1.4%) Baha'i prayer. The remaining three (4.1%) prayers were categorized as 'unknown'.²⁵

The number of prayers delivered by or on behalf of a religious faith other than Christianity was higher than in any other province to date. Notwithstanding this, all eight (10.8%) non-Christian prayers were accompanied by a Christian prayer, typically as part of a failed attempt at ecumenism or interfaith representation.²⁶ As explored in "We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped," *Saugenay* is very clear that prayer cannot be included in a municipal council meeting, and the state's duty of religious neutrality is not obviated by attempts at being "non-denominational".²⁷ Instead, including the prayers of multiple faith traditions further excludes those from faith traditions not represented, and privileges religion over non-religion by excluding the non-religious.²⁸

In addition to religion, we collected data on the gender of the individual delivering the prayer. Some municipalities, such as Newmarket and Brampton, included more than one individual in the prayer portion of their inaugural meetings. Though these municipalities are only counted once for our overall data, the total number of individuals who delivered prayer was 74. Of these individuals, 50 (67.6%) were men, 22 (29.7%) were women, and two (2.7%) were 'unknown' (listed as N/A).²⁹ Two cases were categorized as unknown (N/A) due to a lack of available records.

²⁴ We identified a significant number of the Christian prayers as explicitly Catholic in Ontario. Other denominations were not represented or identifiable at such a large scale. We therefore provided two categories: 'Catholic' and 'other Christian.'

²⁵ Where there was no secondary confirmation of the religion of the prayer or the person delivering the prayer, we categorized the prayer as having an 'unknown' religion. In some cases, religion is also 'unknown' due to a lack of available records, video and/or audio.

²⁶ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., I. Bushfield, & O. Jensen. (2023a). *We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped: Revisiting Prayers in BC Municipal Council Meetings and the Power of Secular Advocacy*. BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/we_yelled_at_them_until_they_stopped.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See Patriarchy and Prayer; and see Appendix C.1.

In order to identify the religion of each prayer, our research team searched for the affiliated religious organization of the speaker. To achieve this, we looked for the associated religious organization in municipal records, scanned local news media stories, examined church websites for current and former staff, reviewed social media sites like LinkedIn, and through the content of the prayers themselves when possible. We erred on the side of uncertainty, marking affiliation as 'Unknown,' in cases where information was limited to one source.

Table 1 – Religions represented in 2022 inaugural council meeting prayers.

Religion	Number of Prayers	Percentage of Total Prayers
Christian (total)	62	84.9%
Christian (Other)	50	68.5%
Christian (Catholic)	12	16.4%
Unknown	4	4.1%
Muslim	2	2.7%
Jewish	2	2.7%
Hindu	2	2.7%
Sikh	1	1.4%
Baha'i	1	1.4%

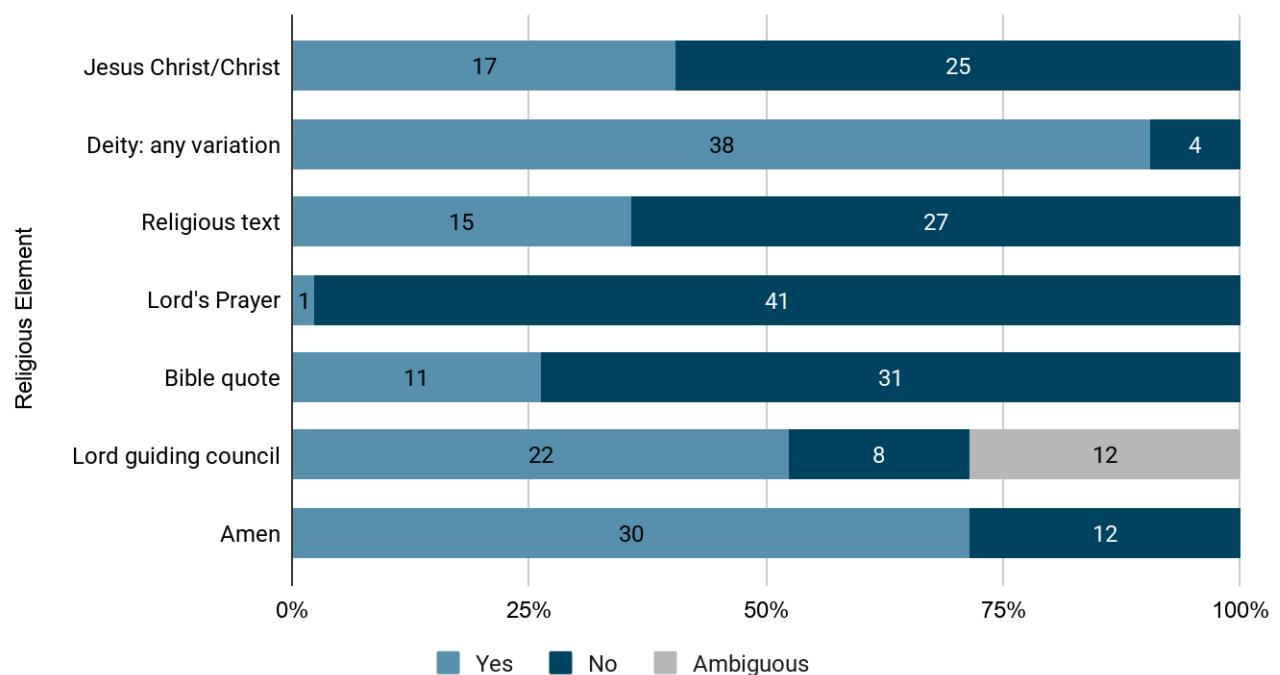


Figure 1— Inaugural meeting prayer content by religious element (%) (n=42)

Through analysis of transcripts of inaugural council meeting prayers, our research team documented the prevalence of seven salient elements across a sample of 42 prayer transcripts (n=42). "Amen" was present in 30 prayers (71.4%). Reference to a higher power guiding the council ("Lord guiding council") was included in 22 prayers (52.4%), and indirectly in 12 prayers (28.6%), for a combined total of 34 prayers (81.0%). By direct reference, we mean that the prayer mentioned explicitly that a higher power influenced the council and/or influenced the election. For example, in North Huron, Pastor Jason Gilbert included the following in his prayer:

*"The Bible declares that all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. And although you were freely elected by the citizens of this great community, you have been granted this great honour of governing by God."*³⁰

An example of a more ambiguous version of "lord guiding council" would be Innisfil, where Reverend Howard Courtney stated, "Protect them, oh God. Keep them from fraud, from bribery, and from corruption of every kind. Impart wisdom and understanding as they wrestle with the issues that they will face."³¹ Here, Rev. Courtney is asking a higher power to watch over council and grant them strength. The majority of prayers, 38 (90.5%), invoked a deity in some manner. References to a religious text were present in 15 prayers (35.7%), and biblical quotation occurred in 11 prayers (26.2%). The Lord's Prayer was recited once (2.4%) in Penetanguishene. A detailed description of this data is included in **Appendix C**, and transcripts of those municipalities included are available in **Appendix B**.

Secular Practices

From our sample of Ontario municipal inaugural meetings, we found that 24 (6.7%) included some variation of a moment of silence (see **Table 2**). As the terminology varied quite significantly, we grouped together those practices where the words "moment" or "minute" and "silence" or "silent" were included in the minutes or when there was an intentional silence in the recording of the meeting. We also included any variation of "moments of reflection," as long as these were intended to be a time of silent reflection.

How these practices are listed in agendas is significant. In our previous research, we have found that moments of silence or reflection can also be executed in a prescriptive or religious manner that either suggests or directs how individuals should reflect.³² This is often done to recreate religious rituals, what we later discuss as "stealth prayer."³³ Previously recorded data showed instances where these moments of silence were seemingly used as a way of introducing prayer into meetings in a more subtle way.

³⁰ See Appendix B.20.

³¹ See Appendix B.9.

³² Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp. 31-32.

³³ See Not Entirely Secular.

Table 2– Ontario municipalities (n=24) with a moment of silence (of any variation) in their 2022 inaugural council meeting, including name and the exact title listed in the agenda. Municipalities that also prayed in their inaugural meetings are indicated in *italics*.

Municipality	Description in Agenda/Minutes
<i>Adelaide-Metcalfe*</i>	<i>Silent Reflection</i>
<i>Admaston/Bromley*</i>	<i>Moment of Silence</i>
Asphodel-Norwood	Moment of Silence
Clarington	Moment of Reflection
Emo*	Moment of Reflection
Faraday	Moment of Silence
Georgina	Moment of Meditation
<i>Kingston</i>	<i>Time of Reflection</i>
Lakeshore*	Moment of Reflection
Loyalist	Moment of Reflection
Milton	Moment of Silent Reflection/Traditional Land Acknowledgment
Montague	Moment of Silence
North Dumfries*	Words of Reflection
Ottawa	Call to Order and Moment of Reflection
Perth (County)	Moment of Reflection
Perth East	Moment of Reflection
Port Hope	Moment of Silent Reflection
Rainy River*	Opening Ceremonies, Moment of Silence, and Salute to the King
Scugog*	National Anthem, Land Acknowledgment & Moment of Silence
Shuniah*	Moment of Silence
St. Joseph*	Moment of Silent Reflection
Tiny*	Moment of Silent Reflection
Toronto	Moment of Silence
Wellesley	Moment of Reflection

*Indicates which municipalities did not have accompanying audio-visual recordings for the chosen sample date.

Whether moments of silence and reflection are secular depends a lot on context. A neutral introduction, such as, “we will now observe a moment of silent reflection prior to the beginning of the meeting,” is unambiguously secular. This allows all present participants to prepare for the meeting in their own way and is not prescriptive. By contrast, an introduction that asks attendees to “please join in a moment of silent reflection and prayer,” provides a prescription, or at the very least, privileges a religious practice. This instructs participants on what should occur during their reflection (i.e. prayer), and in so doing violates the duty of religious neutrality.

Our data collected on secular practices suggests that, when moving away from prayer or invocation in inaugural meetings, some municipalities are still inclined to include a grounding moment or moral reflection as a significant and important section of the meeting. While not all moments of silence and reflection are inherently secular, they can be conducted in a way that respects the duty of neutrality, includes everyone, and sets a positive and constructive tone for the meeting or, in the case of inaugural meetings, for the council’s term.

Regular Meetings

Prayer

We located data for regular council meetings for 356 of 360 Ontario municipalities with a population over 1,000 (according to the 2016 census). Two (0.6%), Laurentian Valley and Pembroke, began their regular meetings with a prayer, while 65 (18.3%) opened with a secular reflection or moment of silence, and two (0.6%) municipalities opened with invocations (see **Table 3** and **Table 4**).

Table 3 – Ontario municipalities with prayer in their regular council meeting (first meeting after Oct 15, 2023, and first meeting after Feb 6, 2024), including name, description in agenda, religion, and gender of person delivering the prayer.

Municipality	Prayer delivered by	Description in Agenda	Religion	Gender
Laurentian Valley	Mayor Steve Bennett	Prayer	Christian ³⁴	M
Pembroke	Mayor Ron Gervais	Opening Prayer/Reflection	Unknown	M

³⁴ Laurentian Valley recited the Lord’s Prayer. Therefore the affiliation has been determined Christian. This does not necessarily indicate the Mayor Steve Bennett is affiliated with Christianity or a Christian church, but rather indicates the religious affiliation of the prayer itself.

Secular practices

Using the same criteria as the inaugural meetings, any variation of “moment of silence” or “moment of reflection” was recorded for municipalities regular meetings. Overall, 65 (18.3%) municipalities included these reflective moments in the official proceedings of their regular council meetings.³⁵ This number included 20 (5.6%) municipalities where we were unable to locate recordings or transcripts. For these, we cannot confirm the degree of secularity of the practices. It is possible that any number of these elements were introduced with religious directions, but generally we have observed that these are overwhelmingly secular.³⁶

We identified two (Brantford and Fort Ernie) invocations where a review of the transcript revealed the practices were entirely secular. That is, they were devoid of religious language and did not reference a deity or the supernatural. We have therefore not included those above as prayers but as 'secular invocations.' For further discussion, see the section “Language and Prayer” below. As we explored in past reports, statements that do not evoke the divine or use religious language are a secular way of solemnifying meetings.³⁷

Table 4 – Ontario municipalities with secular invocations in their regular council meeting (first meeting after October 15, 2023 and first meeting after February 6, 2024).

Municipality	Delivered by	Description in agenda/ records	Gender
Brantford	Mayor Davis	Invocation	M
Fort Ernie	Clerk	Invocation	M

As demonstrated by **Figure 2**, we observed across regular meetings that 287 (80.6%) municipalities had no opening practice, not including indigenous content), two(0.6%) had invocations paired with two(0.6%) held prayer. And lastly 65 (18.3%) had a moment of silence or reflection. These findings suggest that while religious opening practices continue, the norm across Ontario is the absence of any ceremonial opening practices.

³⁵ See Appendix C.2.

³⁶ See Inaugural Meetings: Secular Practices.

³⁷ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., & I. Bushfield. (2025). *Prayer Free BC*. BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/prayer_free_bc

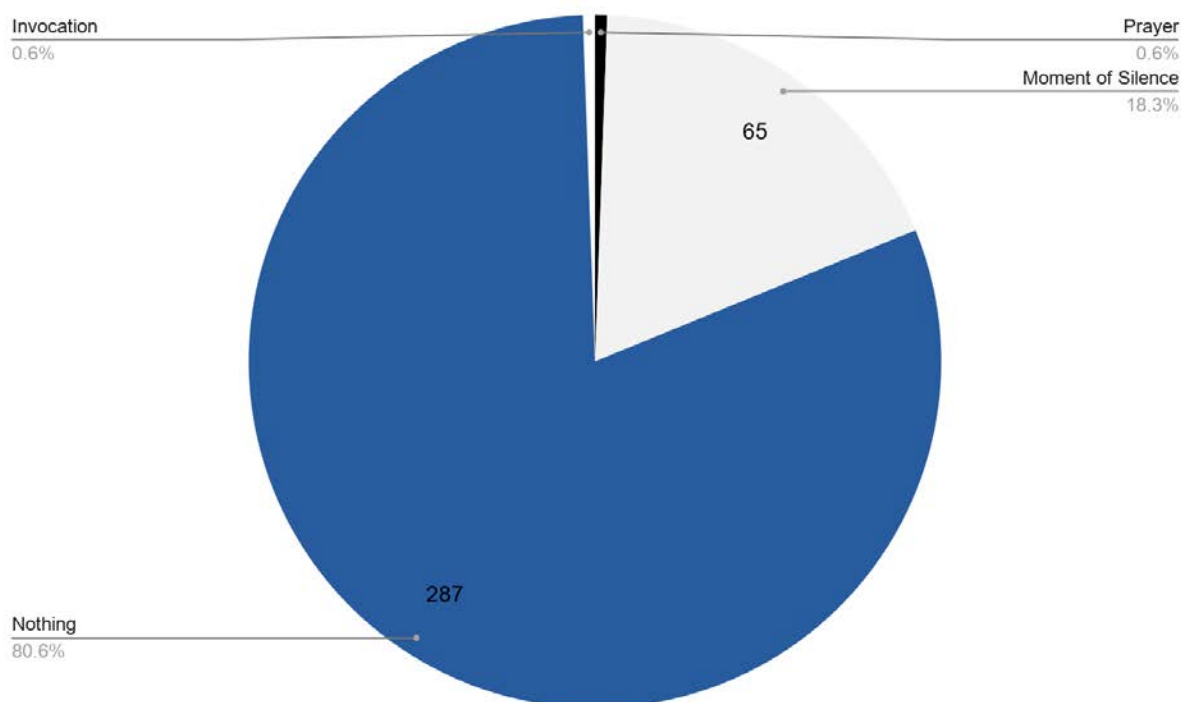


Figure 2 – Frequency of opening practices at regular council meetings of Ontario municipalities

Historical Data and Responses

We explored changes in unconstitutional prayer in Ontario municipalities over time in order to better understand the impact of *Saguenay* and to see how municipalities responded to advocacy both from the BCHA and within their communities. **Appendix C.3** shows historical data collected by the BCHA for municipalities that prayed at their inaugural council meetings in 2014, 2018, and 2022. **Appendix C.3** also displays the response, or lack thereof, of municipalities when they were informed of their obligations under *Saguenay* and urged to discontinue their unconstitutional practice.

Our initial correspondence in 2018 was sent by BCHA’s Executive Director, Ian Bushfield.³⁸ In response, seven (4.1%) municipalities committed to changing their practice, while five (2.9%) denied including prayer in their meetings (despite clear evidence of such). Another 12 (7.0%) municipalities were categorized as ambiguous.³⁹ Footnotes throughout **Appendix C.3** provide context to ambiguous cases where information was available. We did not receive replies from 132 (76.7%) municipalities, represented by “None.” We classified the response from one municipality (0.6%, Russell) as argumentative, as correspondence articulated that the municipality’s inclusion of the preamble of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was not read in a

³⁸ Contact: exdir@bchumanist.ca.

³⁹ Municipalities categorized as ambiguous did not respond in a way that easily fit into any one category (changed, denied, etc.).

way intended to promote religion, while also noting that “There is no intention of changing this wording.”⁴⁰ The final 15 (8.7%) municipalities were not sent letters due to a change in practices from prayer in 2014 to secular in 2018.

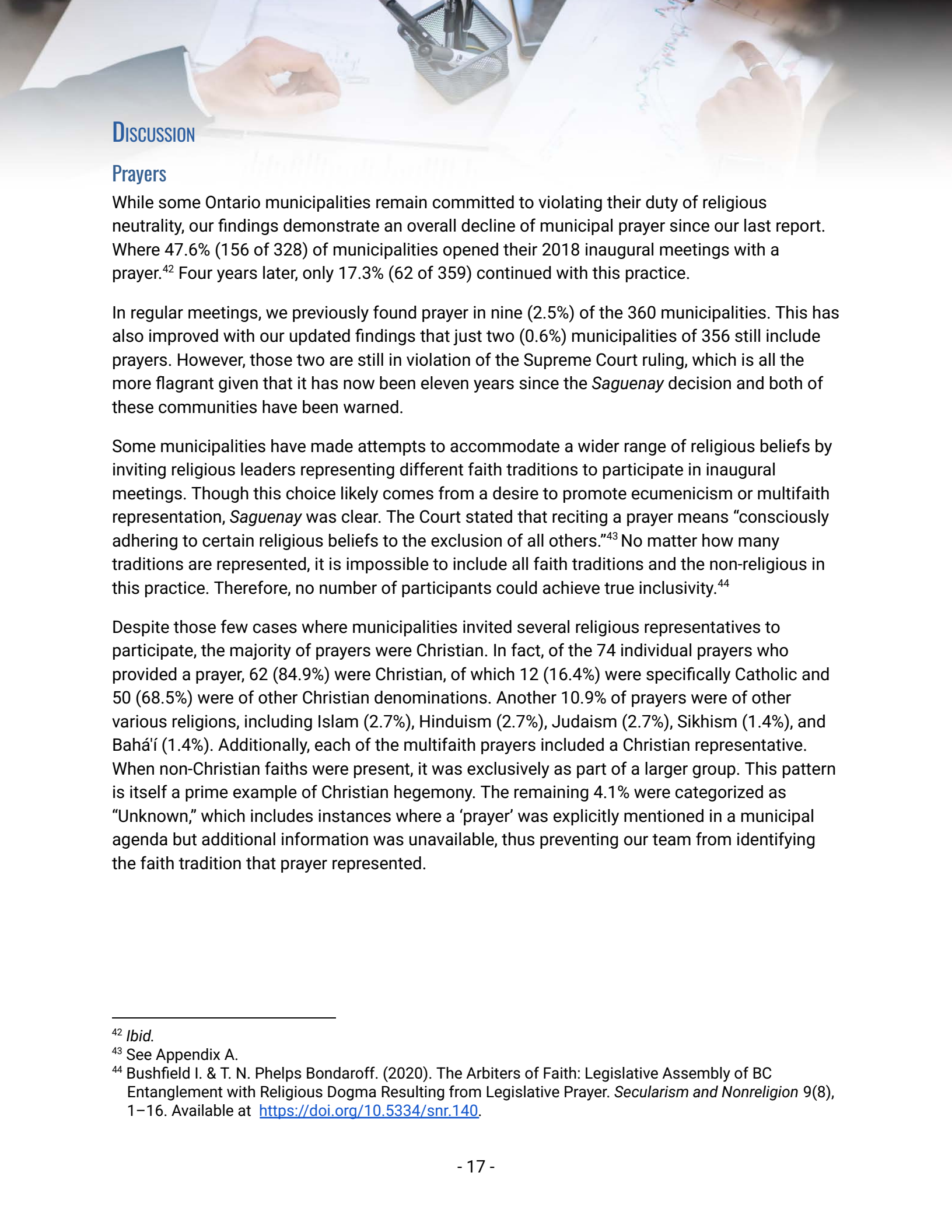
After that round of correspondence, data collected in this report found that 62 of 156 (39.7%) municipalities that included prayers in their 2018 inaugural meetings also included prayers in 2022. Starting in early 2023 and continuing until August 2026, an Ontario-based constitutional lawyer working with the BCHA sent a second letter to those municipalities who included prayers in their regular council meetings or their 2022 inaugural meetings.

In response to those letters, eight (4.7%) municipalities agreed to change their practices, represented by “Changed”; four (2.3%) “Denied” that they prayed; two (1.2%) were ambiguous; one (0.6%) “Acknowledged” the practice, and one (0.6%) was “Argumentative”. Of the remaining municipalities, 113 (65.7%) were not sent letters, represented by “N/A”; 33 (19.2%) did not reply, represented by “None”; and 10 (5.8%) were contacted within the last six months with no reply, represented by “Contacted.”

Our data, illustrated in **Appendix C.3**, demonstrate that unconstitutional prayer persisted across Ontario despite legal clarification and direct advocacy following *Saugenay*. The continued practice in 2022, alongside the limited number of municipalities that committed to change after being contacted, highlights both the impact and the ongoing limitations of advocacy and legal intervention in changing municipal practices.⁴¹

⁴⁰Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), p.154; and see *Ibid.*, pp. 52- 53.

⁴¹ See The Impact of *Saugenay*.



DISCUSSION

Prayers

While some Ontario municipalities remain committed to violating their duty of religious neutrality, our findings demonstrate an overall decline of municipal prayer since our last report. Where 47.6% (156 of 328) of municipalities opened their 2018 inaugural meetings with a prayer.⁴² Four years later, only 17.3% (62 of 359) continued with this practice.

In regular meetings, we previously found prayer in nine (2.5%) of the 360 municipalities. This has also improved with our updated findings that just two (0.6%) municipalities of 356 still include prayers. However, those two are still in violation of the Supreme Court ruling, which is all the more flagrant given that it has now been eleven years since the *Saguenay* decision and both of these communities have been warned.

Some municipalities have made attempts to accommodate a wider range of religious beliefs by inviting religious leaders representing different faith traditions to participate in inaugural meetings. Though this choice likely comes from a desire to promote ecumenicism or multifaith representation, *Saguenay* was clear. The Court stated that reciting a prayer means “consciously adhering to certain religious beliefs to the exclusion of all others.”⁴³ No matter how many traditions are represented, it is impossible to include all faith traditions and the non-religious in this practice. Therefore, no number of participants could achieve true inclusivity.⁴⁴

Despite those few cases where municipalities invited several religious representatives to participate, the majority of prayers were Christian. In fact, of the 74 individual prayers who provided a prayer, 62 (84.9%) were Christian, of which 12 (16.4%) were specifically Catholic and 50 (68.5%) were of other Christian denominations. Another 10.9% of prayers were of other various religions, including Islam (2.7%), Hinduism (2.7%), Judaism (2.7%), Sikhism (1.4%), and Bahá'í (1.4%). Additionally, each of the multifaith prayers included a Christian representative. When non-Christian faiths were present, it was exclusively as part of a larger group. This pattern is itself a prime example of Christian hegemony. The remaining 4.1% were categorized as “Unknown,” which includes instances where a ‘prayer’ was explicitly mentioned in a municipal agenda but additional information was unavailable, thus preventing our team from identifying the faith tradition that prayer represented.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See Appendix A.

⁴⁴ Bushfield I. & T. N. Phelps Bondaroff. (2020). The Arbiters of Faith: Legislative Assembly of BC Entanglement with Religious Dogma Resulting from Legislative Prayer. *Secularism and Nonreligion* 9(8), 1–16. Available at <https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.140>.

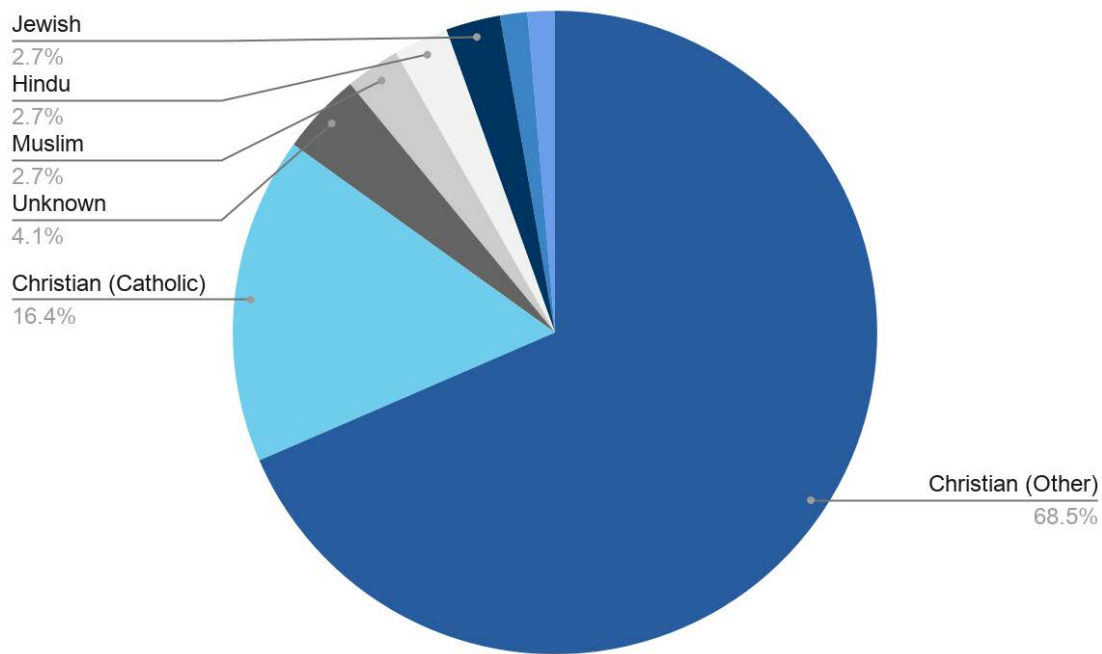


Figure 3 – Religious distribution of prayers in 2022 inaugural council meetings.

The overall decline in municipal prayer is a positive development and reflects increasing awareness of municipalities' constitutional duty of neutrality. Nevertheless, the persistence of prayer, whether it is because of tradition, attempts at inclusivity, or explicit favouritism of a particular faith, demonstrates that the principles of state neutrality have not yet been consistently implemented across Ontario. Municipal governments have a duty to ensure that council meetings are accessible to all residents, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

Prayer and Ceremony

Our research continues to distinguish between inaugural and regular council meetings. The two municipalities (0.6%) with prayer in regular meetings also opened their 2022 inaugural meeting with prayer and another 60 (16.7%) municipalities only included prayer at their inaugural ceremony. This pattern suggests that some municipalities may view prayer not necessarily as an essential component of council business, but as a ceremonial tradition reserved for special occasions.

We've previously discussed a number of hypotheses on why, in most provinces, local governments appear more likely to include prayers in their inaugural meetings than their regular meetings. This includes the ceremonial nature of these events and the irregular nature of inaugural meetings. Fundamentally, however, these are still official government meetings and the requirements of *Sagueenay* apply equally.

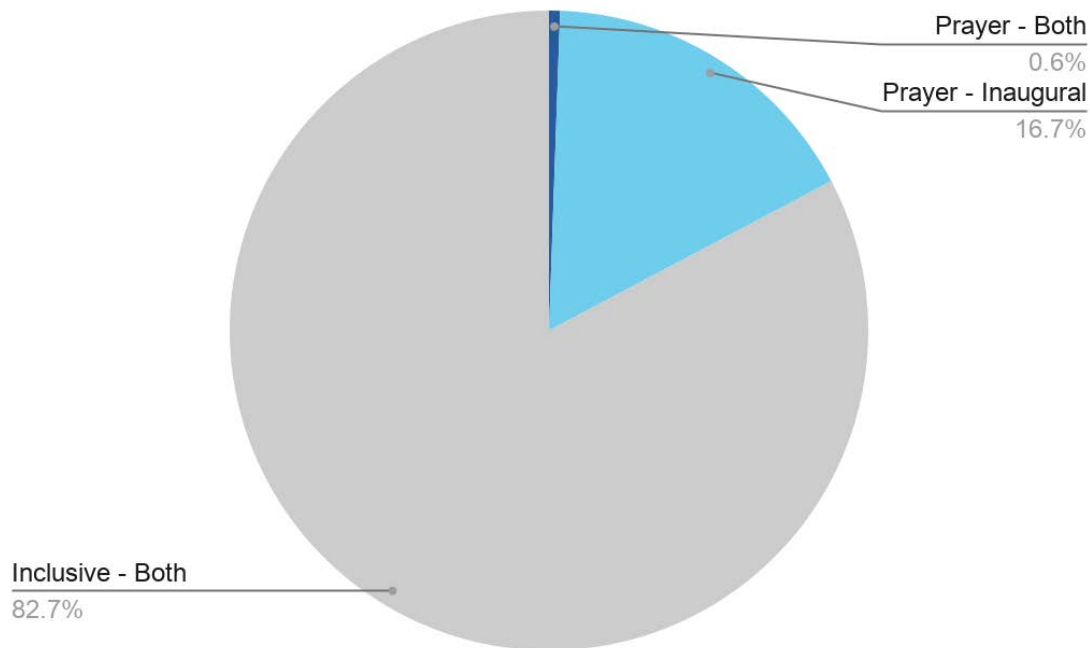


Figure 4 – Proportion of all Ontario municipalities with and without prayers in inaugural and regular meetings.

With the next round of inaugural meetings approaching later in 2026, those remaining Ontario municipalities have an opportunity to bring their practices fully into compliance with *Saguénay*. Removing prayer from inaugural ceremonies does not diminish the significance of these events; rather, it ensures that every newly elected official and every member of the public can participate equally in a civic ceremony that belongs to the entire community.

Language in Prayer

The prevalence of prayer in municipal government is significant in and of itself. The language used within these prayers, however, and what is emphasized by this language, offers further insight into the practice and why it has been proscribed by the Supreme Court.

Through our transcription and coding of the content of inaugural prayers, we tracked the frequency with which religious language was present (see **Figure 1**). The word “amen” appeared in 71.4% of prayers, unsurprisingly as this is a typical interjection at the end of Abrahamic prayers. Its dominance underscores Christian hegemony and normativity. Ending time allocated to prayer with the word ‘amen’ is so ingrained in cultural practices that even secular “prayers” in the BC Legislature were found to end in amen.⁴⁵ In these Ontario municipalities, ‘amen’ was not

⁴⁵ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., I. Bushfield, K. Marshall, R. Prasad, & N. Laurence. (2019). *House of Prayers: An Analysis of Prayers in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2003-2019*. BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/house_of_prayers_report.

being appended to otherwise secular statements, but rather served as a component of what were overtly religious, and most often Christian, prayers.

Further underscoring this was the fact that 90.5% of the prayers analyzed mentioned a deity directly. While 40.5% of these prayers named Jesus Christ or Christ directly, the remaining used other common names for this deity (such as “living creator” in Brighton and “our lord” in Laurentian Valley)⁴⁶, while a handful named non-Christian deities (such as “the only worshipful one” in Kitchener and “Allah” in Newmarket)⁴⁷. This trend again underscores how the content of the prayers was far from inclusive, ecumenical, or even remotely multifaith. Instead, the language associated with Christianity is used time and time again. Underscoring this, the Christian bible was directly quoted in 26.2% of the prayers.

Beyond the basic language of religion, the frequency with which these prayers framed council's selection, its future decision-making, or its need for guidance and wisdom as a matter best left to a higher power rather than the people was also notable and concerning. This framing appeared explicitly in 22 (52.4%) of 42 instances . An additional 12 cases carried the same underlying premise, while leaning more toward a general blessing of council, increasing the total to 81.0%.⁴⁸

One prime example comes from North Huron, where Pastor Jason Gilbert stated during his prayer: "I urge you as a town council, to put God first and seek him for wisdom and counsel as you lead us."⁴⁹ In essence, Gilbert is claiming that council answers to a divine being rather than democracy. A religious figure suggesting that council answers not to its constituents but to a deity is difficult to align with the government's obligation to remain neutral among religious beliefs and refrain from favouring any one of them.

In Havelock-Belmont-Methuen, Pastor Dave Russell stated: “It is God who has given society its leaders, and it is God who endows these leaders with the measure of wisdom required to bring him honour in those positions.”⁵⁰ This pastor frames council's role as one of honouring his god rather than the residents of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen. The same address included:

*"We, the church, are extremely appreciative of this council's recognition of how integral the local church is to the community. In fact, it is historically apparent that the more a society drives out the church and her values, the more prone to corruption and collapse that society becomes, and I am confident that so long as this township continues to recognize God's church as the backbone of its moral character, and seeks her counsel in matters of faith and religion, God will continue to bless this town."*⁵¹

⁴⁶ See Appendix B.4; and see Appendix B.12.1.

⁴⁷ See Appendix B.10; and see Appendix B.16.

⁴⁸ See Appendix C.4.

⁴⁹ See Appendix B.20.

⁵⁰ See Appendix B.8.

⁵¹ See Appendix B.8.

Russell stated, as “fact”, that society is likely to collapse without a certain religious institution, specifically those of his religion. These are not isolated incidents; the same pattern transpires across the dataset. It establishes a narrative in which the council exists not to serve its residents but to advance and uphold religion, most often Christianity specifically (see **Figure 3**).

Multifaith Fails

A small number of municipalities in our sample, including Brampton and Newmarket, incorporated multiple faith traditions within a single ceremony, with Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian participants each offering a portion of the invocation.⁵² While these cases depart from the overwhelmingly Christian default documented elsewhere, a multifaith prayer is still not a neutral one.

Apart from being in violation of the state’s duty of religious neutrality, there are several other issues with these attempts at ecumenicism or multifaith ‘inclusion.’ First, we documented four cases where multiple prayers representing different faith traditions were featured in an inaugural meeting (Brampton, Innisfil, Kitchener, and Newmarket). Notably, Christian prayers were included in all of these meetings as well.⁵³ This is a practice we explored in depth in our report on BC municipal prayer, where despite an effort to include diverse religious perspectives, Christianity was always present.⁵⁴ This once again underscores Christian hegemony, and how those of other faith traditions are still perceived/framed as guests in the space.

In past reports, we have explained how local governments have no clear mechanism for selecting which faith traditions will be represented in meetings, and of course, establishing such mechanisms could violate the state’s duty of religious neutrality.⁵⁵ Even assuming a local government did select representatives from, say, the top four religions as recorded in the most recent census, they would still be incapable of selecting which sects of those faith traditions to represent at their meeting and, furthermore, which specific representatives to invite. Each decision point along this path constitutes a violation of the state’s duty of religious neutrality, hence why the Supreme Court described ‘true neutrality’ as abstention. Selecting one faith over another, one sect over another, or one representative over another are all choices that violate this duty.

Finally, as we have detailed elsewhere, carving out a significant portion of a meeting for not just one prayer, but the prayers of multiple faith traditions favours religion over non-religion, and in so doing, overtly excludes the non-religious. As we saw in Brampton, inviting five religious representatives to deliver prayer at a public meeting privileges religion over non-religion. Allocating a significant portion of public meeting time to prayer sends a clear message that

⁵²The Corporation of the City of Brampton. (2022 November 15a). *Minutes: City Council – Inaugural Meeting*. Available at <https://pub-brampton.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=71104>; and see Town of Newmarket. (2022 November 15a). *Minutes: Council - Electronic*. Available at <https://pub-newmarket.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=36734>.

⁵³ See Appendix C.1.

⁵⁴ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2019).

⁵⁵ Bushfield & Phelps Bondaroff, (2020), p.8.

religion generally (and most often one specific Christian denomination) is more important than other belief systems.

Not only does including prayers from multiple faith traditions exclude those of faith traditions not represented, but it necessarily excludes the non-religious, by privileging religious representation. Newmarket, for example, invited four community leaders from different religious backgrounds to its inaugural meeting.⁵⁶ However well-meaning, this gesture still excludes residents who hold any other number of beliefs, or none at all. When the BCHA challenged the City of Vancouver over the five prayers that were included in its 2022 inauguration ceremony, the City acknowledged “that hosting prayers at the City of Vancouver’s November 7, 2022 inauguration ceremony was a breach of the duty of religious neutrality as set out in *Movement laïque québécois v. Saguenay* 2015 SCC 16.”⁵⁷

Overall, these examples of failed ecumenicism reflect a pattern present throughout this report: the majority of religious content and language present in municipal government is Christian in origin. Even where that default is broadened to include other faiths, it remains grounded within a Christian context. All the while, the underlying premise that council prayer is an appropriate civic ritual in the first place goes unexamined.

Not Entirely Secular

We documented 65 municipalities that include a moment of silence or reflection in their regular meetings and 24 municipal inaugural meetings. An additional two featured secular invocations in their regular meetings. We defined “stealth prayers” in “Open for Unconstitutional Business” as an effort to surreptitiously engage in legislative prayer.⁵⁸ This can take a few forms, but often surfaces in municipal practices as a part of these ostensibly secular elements.

While stealth prayer was previously more common, in part due to the closer proximity to the *Saguenay* ruling, we found that very few municipalities engaged in stealth prayer at their 2022 inaugural meetings or their regular meetings thereafter. This could be largely due to a lack of available records that could have been used to verify the content of some municipalities’ moments of silence. Nevertheless, we did identify some instances where coercive or religious language was used.

Our research found religious language embedded in mayoral or council opening remarks, sometimes in response to a local or global tragedy. For example, at Goderich’s February 26, 2024, meeting, the mayor’s opening remarks mentioned “our thoughts and prayers.”⁵⁹ This phrase has become an empty string of words, as it’s used ubiquitously to convey expressions of

⁵⁶ See Case Studies: Newmarket; and see Further Discussion.

⁵⁷ BC Humanist Association. (2024 June 3). “Vancouver concedes 2022 prayers breached duty of neutrality.” BCHA. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/vancouver_concedes_2022_prayers.

⁵⁸ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp.52-55.

⁵⁹ Town of Goderich. (2024 February 26). *Regular Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-goderich.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISISStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=086c3d9d-f5d9-43c1-b284-3a3ecaee3f08>.

sympathy. At its roots, however, the language remains religious. While an instance like this likely does not qualify as a prayer, it does underscore the importance of elected officials choosing language that speaks to the wide range of individuals in their communities. We are not, in any way, suggesting that councils should abstain from acknowledging or mourning community losses; we recognize how meaningful that support can be. We simply hope that these moments of official state recognition and reflection are inclusive: inviting all to join, regardless of belief.

Another example of a practice straying from secularism took place in Woolwich. In this regular meeting, on October 24, 2023, the mayor began the moment of silence by inviting council to "take a moment to pray or just embrace the thought of peace, whatever form that takes for you."⁶⁰ This moment treats religious practice as the baseline, while secular alternatives are an afterthought. As this was an isolated incident, rather than a frequent or scheduled practice, we did not include it in our count of prayers. It still illustrates the same pattern: even where a council attempts to accommodate non-religious residents, religion is presented as the default.

Both Brantford and Fort Erie open their meetings with an "invocation," as listed on their agendas and in their minutes, and the word choice alone sets the tone, given its strong religious connotations.⁶¹ In Brantford, the invocation is led by the mayor and asks council to "please remain standing" and speaks of "prosperity and righteousness where freedom prevails and where justice rules."⁶² This language and structure is reminiscent of the recreation of a prayer but with the omission of explicitly Christian terms. In Fort Erie, the mayor similarly asks, "Would you all please rise for the invocation?"⁶³ Council rises, bowing their heads, and the clerk reads the invocation aloud:

*"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 chambers: 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."*⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Woolwich Township. (2023 October 24). *Township of Woolwich Council Meeting - October 24, 2023* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftm_aZBowL8.

⁶¹ City of Brantford. (2023 October 24a). *City Council Minutes*. Available at <https://calendar.brantford.ca/meetings/Detail/2023-10-24-1800-City-Council/5d96e992-2743-4856-b971-b0cf0141589c> (retrieved July 9, 2026); and see The Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie. (2023 October 23). *Regular Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-forterie.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=7f0efbd3-9231-40fe-a68e-3a8007747377&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=3&Tab=attachments> (retrieved July 9, 2026).

⁶² City of Brantford. (2023 October 24b). *City Council* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py8bjuwNsG0>.

⁶³ The Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie. (2023 October 23).

⁶⁴ Town of Fort Erie. (2024 February 26). *Town of Fort Erie Regular Council Meeting – February 26, 2024* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EVnplOquH8>.

While these moments are technically secular, small adjustments, beginning with what they are called and how they are introduced, could go a considerable way towards making them more inclusive. We examine Branford further as a case study below.

Finally, where meetings that included a moment of silence lacked video or audio recording, we were unable to verify whether the practice was secular in character (see **Table 2**). We ultimately categorized these practices as “secular,” which could skew our resulting statistics toward municipalities appearing more secular than in reality. We encourage readers to attend their local council meetings and to open a dialogue with their municipality if they feel there is room for improvement.

Secular Practices

Secular practices can range from simply a lack of prayer or religious content, to the inclusion of secular statements or welcomes, and even the recitation of secular poetry, piping, the ringing of bells, or other similar practices.

While prayers and secular invocations were present in four (1.1%) of 356 Ontario municipalities for which regular meeting records were available, 65 (18.3%) included some version of a moment of silence at the start of their regular meetings.⁶⁵ Given the significant variation in terminology across municipalities, we grouped practices in which the words “moment” or “minute” appeared alongside “silence” or “silent” in meeting minutes, or in which an intentional silence was audible in available recordings. We also included practices described as “moments of reflection” where no recording existed. Where recordings or comprehensive minutes were unavailable, we were unable to determine with confidence whether these practices constituted stealth prayer or represented true efforts at secular compliance. All municipalities that participated in a “moment of silence” or similar practice are included in **Appendix C.2** which notes how the practice was listed in the municipality's agenda or minutes.

Though some municipalities still use outdated and religiously charged language, a few stood out for their secular practices. In North Dumfries, council provided a moment of silence that was inclusive in character and grounded the meeting in themes of community and shared responsibility.⁶⁶ In Selwyn, a “moment of silent reflection” directed council members to turn their thoughts to those they serve, a framing that, while purposeful, remained free of religious content. The mayor stated, “Let's please observe a moment of silence so the council staff and members of the public can quietly reflect on our duty to the community that we are trying to serve.”⁶⁷

These examples demonstrate that municipalities do not need to resort to religious prayers to include a meaningful opening to their meetings or council term. Secular practices can serve

⁶⁵ See Table 3; and see Table 4; and see Appendix C.2.

⁶⁶ Township of North Dumfries. (2023 October 23). *October 23, 2023 Regular Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/live/trYGoKWLRCc>.

⁶⁷ SelwynTownship [sic]. (2023 October 24). *Council Meeting – October 24, 2023* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBZNtS6NTis>.

much of the same civic and moral purpose that proponents of prayer often identify as important: creating a moment of reflection, grounding elected officials in their responsibilities, and reminding them of the communities they have been entrusted to serve. The difference between practising prayer and respecting the duty of religious neutrality is that secular practices can draw on shared civic values such as service, responsibility, compassion, community, and respect without privileging any one set of beliefs.

By embracing secular practices, like Selwyn, North Dumfries, and all the others who conduct council meetings without prayer, municipalities can preserve the character of meetings and ceremonies while ensuring that they are genuinely inclusive of all their constituents and consistent with their legal obligations.

Anthems

Though we observed a few cases outside Ontario in previous reports, while collecting data for this report, our team observed a significant number of municipalities that opened their regular council meetings with the signing of the National Anthem. Based on these trends, we opted to collect data on the presence of “O Canada” at regular council meetings in Ontario municipalities. However, this collection occurred after we had finished documenting practices at inaugural meetings, so we are only able to provide the following discussion on regular council meetings, with no longitudinal analysis.

Of the 356 municipalities surveyed for this portion of the dataset, 70 (19.7%) performed the National Anthem as part of their regular meeting.⁶⁸ In most instances, a recording was played, at times accompanied by singing.

In 2018, Parliament modified the lyrics to “O Canada” to make the Anthem gender-neutral, replacing “in all thy sons command” with “in all of us command.”⁶⁹ Several councils in our sample continued to use the outdated version, a practice that ignores the intent of the change. Continuing to use dated, gendered lyrics indicates an unwillingness, or at least indifference, to adopt the inclusivity standard Parliament has set. Municipalities should at least be expected to bring their practice up to the official practice.

A similar case can be made for further change. Removing religious language and imagery from the English and French versions of “O Canada” in favour of a more inclusive alternative would extend the same logic that justified the 2018 amendment to the Anthem's religious content. The BC Humanist Association has taken a clear position against symbolic religious privilege in public institutions, including the National Anthem. As one of the most visible expressions of civic identity, the National Anthem should reflect a population that is increasingly moving away

⁶⁸ See Appendix C.5.

⁶⁹ *An Act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender)*, S.C. 2018, c. 1. Available at https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2018_1/page-1.html.

from traditional monotheistic religious affiliation.⁷⁰ An adoption of these changes would reaffirm that Canada is not a Christian nation, grounded in the Supreme Court jurisprudence that the state has a responsibility to maintain religious neutrality.⁷¹

When discussing the religious content of “O Canada,” it is important to recognize the differences between the English and French versions. It is a common misconception that the French version of the Canadian National Anthem is a direct translation of the English lyrics. In fact, the French version of the Anthem, originally written in 1880, has completely different lyrics which include strong religious references.⁷² The lyrics include references to ‘upholding the cross’ and to ‘valour tempered with faith,’ and as a result, its tone is more overtly religious, and explicitly Christian, throughout than the English version’s current wording, whose religious language is restricted to the phrase “God keep our land”.⁷³

Overall, we observed some councils ensuring (gender) inclusivity while others were reluctant to change. Certain councils avoided the question of lyrics entirely by using an instrumental recording. Where agenda items or minutes referenced the National Anthem without an accompanying recording, we were unable to confirm which lyrical version, if any, was used.⁷⁴

Case Studies

In this section, we examine municipalities that provide an array of cases of prayer and related conduct found throughout Ontario. Many of these cases follow municipalities that explicitly act in defiance of *Saguenay* in either regular or inaugural council meetings. Our research team has compiled records, where available, to document these practices. It is crucial to further examine specific municipalities’ prayer practices. Doing so helps clarify the content of prayer and its surrounding factors, highlighting the state’s responsibility to remain neutral. In these case studies we also discuss the religious distribution of the municipalities of focus for context. No matter the religious landscape, including prayer in a government meeting is in defiance of the law.

⁷⁰ Bushfield, I. & E. Adriaans. (2016 February 1). “Re: Bill C-210 An Act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender) [Letter to Hon. Mauril Bélanger, MP].” *BCHA*. Available at https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bchumanist/pages/435/attachments/original/1454350364/Mauril_Belanger_secular_anthem_letter_2016.pdf?1454350364.

⁷¹ See Appendix A.

⁷² Government of Canada. (2024 January 15). *The History of “O Canada”*. Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada. Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthem-canada/history-o-canada.html>; and see Government of Canada. (n.d.). *O Canada: Our National Anthem*. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Available at https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/celebrate/pdf/national_anthem_e.pdf

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ The BCHA has previously explored advocacy around changing the lyrics of the National Anthem to be more secular, see https://www.bchumanist.ca/use_private_member_s_bill_to_take_god_out_of_anthem.

Laurentian Valley

The Township of Laurentian Valley distinguished itself as a council that prioritizes prayer over inclusivity. From October 2023⁷⁵ to as recently as May 2026,⁷⁶ regular council meetings commenced with the Lord's Prayer, as confirmed in the council meeting minutes.⁷⁷ Mayor Steve Bennett would most often lead the practice and began by offering the perfunctory statement, "anyone who wishes to join us may do so," before reading the prayer⁷⁸ Though he framed the prayer as optional, in records reviewed by our research team, the prayer would be spoken out loud to the room in a preaching manner. This frame, no matter how well-meaning, still privileges those who practise one religion (Christianity) over others, or those who are non-religious.

Further, this false concession was explicitly rejected by the majority in *Saguenay*. Justice Gascon quoted a 1988 Ontario Court of Appeal ruling regarding prayers and Bible readings in a public school, where the school board has offered objecting students the option to opt themselves out of the practice:

*"...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 by s. 28(1)." [Emphasis added; p. 656.]*⁷⁹

In other words, the opt out is in itself discriminatory as it forces people to out themselves as dissenters or objectors. It uses the authority of the state to ask people to either submit to the dominant religious viewpoint or identify themselves as outsiders. In small communities, this can lead to ostracization and discrimination.

At the inaugural meeting on November 22, 2022, a local religious leader, Rev. Robert Gulliver, of the First Evangelical Missionary Church, was invited to deliver remarks and a prayer.⁸⁰ Gulliver framed council's responsibilities through the religious narrative of Moses and Aaron's leadership, drawing parallels between their leadership challenges and those facing the incoming Laurentian Valley Council.

⁷⁵ See appendix B12.2.

⁷⁶ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2026 May 19). *May 19, 2026 - Township of Laurentian Valley: Committee & Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7ZZ6cWNIBc>.

⁷⁷ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2023 October 17a). *Minutes: Regular Meeting of Council*. Available at <https://laurentian.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/105/?preview=65733>.

⁷⁸ See Appendix B.12.2.

⁷⁹ *Saguenay* para 124.; and see *Zylberberg v. Sudbury Board of Education (Director)*, 1988 CanLII 189 (ON CA), 65 O.R. (2d) 641, p. 656.

⁸⁰ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2022 November 22a). *Minutes: Special Council Meeting*. Available at <https://laurentian.civicweb.net/document/60121/>.



Figure 5 – Screenshot of the Lord's Prayer at the October 17, 2023, Laurentian Valley council meeting.⁸¹

The remarks concluded with the blessing, followed by a prayer invoking divine wisdom, strength, and guidance for council members, and closed in the name of Jesus Christ. Reverend Guilliver shared:

*"We ask the Lord that we could understand the blessing you want to bring to us, for we are blessed in this nation. And even in times of turmoil, you are still a faithful God. And I pray that for the council, I pray that for everyone who has to make these decisions going forward that you would help them and that they, at times, might turn to you and ask for direction. And Lord, may you give it."*⁸²

The address is notable for its sustained religious framing throughout: council's role was repeatedly cast in theological terms, with biblical figures presented as comparisons for elected officials. And the prayer's closing invocation, "And may we all look to you for strength, for vision, protection, and direction. To your powerful name and your son who loves us so much, Jesus Christ, our lord and saviour, amen,"⁸³ leaves no room for any other interpretation. It is asking the "Lord" for direction in terms of council decision-making, putting religious dogma above the democratically elected leadership and their constitutional duty of religious neutrality.

⁸¹ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2023 October 17b). *October 17, 2023 - Township of Laurentian Valley: Committee & Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kD6r5B350E>.

⁸² See Appendix B12.1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

As seen earlier, Laurentian Valley has been contacted by the BCHA twice regarding inaugural meeting practice, and we have received no reply.⁸⁴

The prevalence of religious content in an inaugural council meeting is alarming. The exclusionary practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer at regular council meetings and an inaugural meeting built on Christian theology excludes a significant portion of those living in Laurentian Valley from local government.⁸⁵

Brampton

At the 2022 inaugural council meeting of the City of Brampton, Ontario's third-largest city by population, five religious leaders were invited to deliver speeches, all of which were identified as prayer. The prayers were delivered by a Muslim, two Hindus, a Sikh and a Christian, corresponding with the largest four religious groups in the city as recorded by the 2021 Census.⁸⁶ As highlighted in the discussion on multifaith prayers above, Brampton represents one of Ontario's municipalities that aimed to meet inclusion by expanding the list of religious groups invited to participate. Though well-intentioned, the practice of any and all religions at council meetings is a violation of *Saguenay* and the duty of religious neutrality.

Immediately following the Mayoral Address, Brampton's city clerk, Peter Fay, welcomed to the stage "our religious leaders":

- Shaykh Faisal, president of the Islamic Forum of Canada (Muslim);
- Pundit Tripathi (Hindu);
- Pandit Shukla (Hindu);
- Daljit Sekon, the president of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Malton (Sikh); and
- Pastor Jamie Holtom of North Bramalea United Church and chaplain of Brampton's fire department (Christian).⁸⁷

Though the agenda does not include or list a section of "prayer," "invocation," or "blessings," as was common throughout the municipalities found to pray, each speech included direct references to religious texts or deities.⁸⁸

Our research team was able to identify Brampton as including prayer practices since each religious leader was listed and thanked for their contribution to the ceremony in the meeting minutes.⁸⁹ This limits transparency around the practice, as no prayer, invocation, or otherwise

⁸⁴ See Appendix C.3.

⁸⁵ Statistics Canada. (2021a). *Laurentian Valley, Township (Census Subdivision), Ontario*. Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?topic=10&lang=E&dquid=2021A00053547075> (retrieved August 3, 2026).

⁸⁶ Statistics Canada. (2021b). *Brampton, City (Census Subdivision), Ontario*. Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population. Available at <http://tiny.cc/jwna101>.

⁸⁷ See Appendix B.3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ The Corporation of the City of Brampton. (2022 November 15a).

religious terminology was used to describe this portion of the agenda despite the content of the meeting. While varying in length and emphasis, each prayer framed the incoming council's work through a religious lens by invoking a deity, offering prayers or blessings, or reciting religious texts.

Shaykh Faisal began by reciting the traditional Islamic invocation, "In the name of Almighty God, who is most gracious and most merciful."⁹⁰ He described the opportunity to serve on council as a "god-given opportunity," and concluded by offering a prayer that his god would bless the Mayor, members of council, the citizens of Brampton, the Province of Ontario, and Canada.⁹¹ He then invited the audience into an act of worship by reciting "Al-Fātiḥah", the opening chapter of the Qur'an. Faisal's prayer extended far beyond ceremonial greetings, incorporating both a spoken prayer and the public invitation to participate in the recitation of a religious text.⁹²

Pundit Tripathi and Pandit Shukla spoke on behalf of Brampton's Hindu community, stating, "I pray to almighty that he bless our very energetic and authentic Mayor Patrick Brown and all city council members."⁹³ They asked their god to grant council the strength to make Brampton "a prosperous and crime-free city," before concluding with a blessing for "happiness, harmony, peace, and prosperity." Both leaders followed their prayer by tying a red bracelet around newly sworn-in Mayor Patrick Brown's right wrist.⁹⁴

Daljit Singh Sekon devoted much of his remarks to congratulating Mayor Brown and reflecting on his relationship with the Sikh community.⁹⁵ While the majority of the speech was secular, he concluded with a Sikh prayer, during which Sekon invited members of the audience who knew the common prayer to "read aloud" with him.⁹⁶ He explained that reciting the prayer with sincerity generates "positive energy," which is then shared with others.⁹⁷ By encouraging audience participation in a prayer, Sekon introduced a coercive religious element into Brampton's inaugural meeting. By publicly requesting a group's participation, those present were required to either participate or stand out as non-participants.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ See Appendix B.3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp.31-34.



Figure 6 – Screenshot of Pundit Tripathi and Pandit Shukla tying a bracelet to newly elected Mayor Patrick Brown after delivering a prayer to council, November 15, 2022.⁹⁹

Pastor Jamie Holtom, representing the Christian community, grounded his address in the teachings of Jesus, stating, “Jesus said there are two things that are the most important things to remember: One is to love God, and the other is to love others.”¹⁰⁰ He described this as “my prayer for the council,” expressing the hope that councillors would know his god’s love and would “serve God together.”¹⁰¹ He concluded by assuring the council that, “we are praying for you, you’ve got this, God’s got this,” explicitly framing municipal governance within a Christian theological framework and implying that the council’s guidance comes from his god rather than from the democratic will of the people of Brampton.¹⁰²

Each speaker delivered explicitly devotional remarks, invoking divine authority through prayer, blessings, or religious texts. The constitutional duty of religious neutrality requires governments to refrain from participating in or endorsing religious observance, not simply to broaden its representation. By incorporating organized religious expression into an official municipal proceeding, the City continued to associate civic authority with religious belief, excluding residents who hold different beliefs or none at all. As *Saguenay* concluded, in a democracy, public authority derives from the people, not from religious doctrine or divine endorsement.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix B.3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Brantford

Generally, we have found that municipalities that included religious content in their regular council meetings also included some form of religious ceremony or prayer in their 2022 inaugural council meetings. However, the City of Brantford, a municipality that regularly recites an invocation at council meetings, did not include any observances at its 2022 inaugural meeting. Brantford's Mayor recites a secular invocation at the start of regular council meetings after O Canada:

*"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 we can continue to do the work that we must in their memory."*¹⁰³

As previously discussed, describing this portion of the meeting as an "invocation" reflects language that has not been updated to align with a secular and religiously neutral practice. Although the text does not explicitly invoke a god, it retains the form, positionality, and even some of the language of a prayer. References to establishing a city of "prosperity and righteousness" employ strong religious connotations, while the collective appeal to shared moral purpose mirrors the structure of a civic prayer rather than a wholly secular statement of public service. The invocation therefore continues to blur the distinction between civic authority and religious expression, despite the absence of explicit references to a particular deity or faith.

St Thomas

The City of St Thomas featured extensive Christian theological content at its inaugural meeting on November 21, 2022.¹⁰⁴ Council entered the chambers led by Mayor Joe Preston, who was accompanied by Pastor Jeremy Best of Faith Church, the sole individual outside of council to process alongside the Mayor according to the official minutes.¹⁰⁵

Pastor Best delivered a "Charge to Council" which centred on an extended retelling of the biblical Book of Esther. He applied Esther 4:14, "who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this," as a direct parallel to the newly elected council, stating that "God has placed this council in this city, in this chamber for such a time as this."¹⁰⁶ The address went on to frame the city's recent economic recovery in explicitly religious terms, describing years of plant closures and population decline followed by renewed growth as evidence that

¹⁰³ City of Brantford. (2022 November 15). *City Council Inaugural* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvF40awjHvw>.

¹⁰⁴ City of St. Thomas. (2022 November 21a). *November 21, 2022 Inaugural St. Thomas City Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwJ3exBswqs>.

¹⁰⁵ City of St. Thomas. (2022 November 21b). *The First Meeting Of The One Hundred And Forty-Third Council Of The Corporation Of The City Of St. Thomas*. Available at <https://www.stthomas.ca/common/pages/GetFile.ashx?key=W0skAYC1> (retrieved July 10, 2026).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

“God has called us to this city for such a time as this” and that council had been placed in the chamber by the divine.¹⁰⁷

“We’ve been saying to our people, we’ve been praying with our people. We believe that God has called us to this city for such a time as this, that the city is changing rapidly beneath our feet, that he’s placed us in the position. He has the resources we have to do work and to take care of people in a new way. And I believe firmly that God has placed this council in this city, in this chamber for such a time as this.”¹⁰⁸

Unlike a generic call for reflection or unity, this framing casts council's governance as the fulfillment of a specific religious narrative, with sitting council members positioned as contemporary versions of biblical figures. Council subsequently passed, without objection, a motion of “sincere appreciation to Pastor Jeremy Best and [O Canada singer] Stephanie Brown.”¹⁰⁹

The prevalence of extensive biblical narrative and explicit invocation of the divine at a municipal inaugural meeting raises the same concerns identified elsewhere in this report and throughout the Saguenay Project. Over two-fifths, 43.9%, of St Thomas residents identified as having “no religion and secular perspectives” in Census 2021, while all Christian denominations combined were 53.4%.¹¹⁰ An inaugural ceremony built around an extended, and narrow, Christian theological narrative, applied directly to the mandate of elected officials and staged through the Mayor’s own procession into the chamber, is at odds with religiously neutral government. Even if every resident in St Thomas identified as Christian on the most recent census, this practice would still violate the state’s duty of religious neutrality.

Kitchener

The City of Kitchener is an example of a municipality attempting, and ultimately failing at inclusivity. This resulted in an inaugural meeting that gave a platform to religious leaders to deliver religious content. The City’s 2022 inaugural meeting was structured around two distinct non-secular elements.

First, the invocations. Swami Chaitanya Jyoti Ji Maharaj (Head Preacher of the Bramarishi Mission of Canada) and Father Myroslaw Tataryn (Pastor at Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Transfiguration) gave their respective speeches.¹¹¹ During her portion of the invocation, Swami Chaitanya Jyoti Ji Maharaj recited several mantras, such as the Gayatri Mantra, and applied

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix B.32.

¹⁰⁹ City of St. Thomas. (2022 November 21b).

¹¹⁰ Statistics Canada. (2021c). *Distribution (in Percentage) of Religious Groups, St. Thomas (City), 2021*. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Dguid=2021A00053534021&topic=1>.

¹¹¹ City of Kitchener. (2022 November 21a). *Special Council Meeting Minutes*. Available at <https://pub-kitchener.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=aad521fb-8d25-4002-9a76-2d41706a37b5&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English> (retrieved July 10, 2026).

theological ideas to councillors' civic duties. Father Tataryn invoked religious texts and figures, including Saint Michael. He concluded his portion with a benediction.¹¹²

Later in the meeting, the agenda listed a "Reflection," a title that sounds deceptively secular, but was delivered by Father Toby Collins, pastor of St Mary's Parish.¹¹³ While the address began in a broadly secular tone, discussing themes of community leadership, love, and joy, it gradually moved into explicitly religious territory, closing with the following prayer:

*"I share this prayer with you, hundreds of years old: Lord our Creator, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith... For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Thank you once again for this opportunity to share a few words. May God bless you all."*¹¹⁴

Even with three religious leaders drawn from varying traditions taking part, the ceremony still excludes a significant share of Kitchener's population. They cannot represent the entirety of a religion, or all religions with multiple guests. This municipality's approach reflects some effort toward inclusion, but inaugural meetings built around invocations and prayer remain a violation of *Saguenay*.¹¹⁵

Pembroke

The City of Pembroke is one of only two municipalities identified as having prayer at both regular meetings and its 2022 inaugural meeting. At the inaugural meeting, the municipality held both an "Opening prayer and reflection," delivered by Deacon Adrien Chaput of St Columbkille's Cathedral, and a "Prayer of Benediction," delivered by Pastor Kevin Wilson of Wesley Community Church.¹¹⁶

There is no possibility that either of these could be categorized as a secular "reflection," as the agenda item title claims. Both of these prayers cited Christian scripture directly: Deacon Chaput read from the Gospel of John, while Pastor Wilson from the First Book of Kings. Both invoked Jesus by name and closed with the explicitly Trinitarian formula "in the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit."¹¹⁷ This is Christian content, not vague spirituality that could be mistaken for a reflection.

Deacon Chaput's remarks closed with the following:

"Now, oh lord, we dedicate this council's inaugural ceremony to you. May this be the beginning of a new dawn for the city of Pembroke as we humble ourselves before

¹¹² See Appendix B.10.

¹¹³ City of Kitchener. (2022 November 21a).

¹¹⁴ See Appendix B.10.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix A.

¹¹⁶ City of Pembroke. (2022 November 29a). *City of Pembroke Inaugural Meeting of Council*. Available at <https://calendar.pembroke.ca/meetings/Detail/2022-11-29-1900-Inaugural-Council-Meeting/f885a193-1a8d-4bca-8252-af6c01092cac>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

*you, and acknowledge you alone as our lord, our saviour and redeemer. We pray this, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit. Amen."*¹¹⁸

This passage explicitly dedicated a public government meeting to a specific deity, and did so on behalf of all Pembroke residents. A further pattern persists, as we have frequently observed, in both the opening prayer and the prayer of benediction: political language explicitly melded with religious invocation. Both clergy members frame their god's influence as extending directly into the conduct of the newly elected council:

*"I pray for your blessings upon them, I pray for your hand to direct them, I pray that you would give them wisdom and knowledge and guidance. Lord, as they make decisions, may we as a people be there to support them and to pray for them. God, may your hand be upon them."*¹¹⁹

Furthermore, including two clergy members from the same broader faith tradition reinforces the exclusionary nature of the practice. This formulation assumes participation in prayer as the default and continues to exclude the 31.1% of Pembroke residents who identified as not religious in Census 2021 from full and equal participation in a proceeding of their own government.¹²⁰ And as previously mentioned, even if Christianity is the majority in a municipality, or if there is a large religious population, the Municipality still has a duty of religious neutrality.

As for Pembroke's regular meetings, our team found that the mayor now opens council with the following: "Those that wish, each in your own way silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings."¹²¹ While this represents an improvement over the recitation of the Lord's Prayer that occurred up until February 2020,¹²² it remains inconsistent with the legal requirements of *Saguenay*. As previously discussed, making prayers "optional" still requires attendees to self-identify as religious, or not. In a country that upholds freedom of religion and conscience, there cannot be a requirement to disclose such information simply to participate in local governance.

Warwick

The Township of Warwick's 2022 inaugural meeting is a unique example of a municipal prayer practice that teeters between secular and religious. The speaker, Reverend Christine O'Reilly, was

¹¹⁸ See Appendix B.25.1

¹¹⁹ See Appendix B.25.1

¹²⁰ Statistics Canada. (2021d). *Distribution (in Percentage) of Religious Groups, Pembroke (City), 2021 Table 98-10-0342-01*. Available at https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=E&dguid=2021A00053547064&objectId=2_2.

¹²¹ See Appendix B.25.2.; and see Appendix B.25.3.

¹²² City of Pembroke. (2020 February 4) *Pembroke City Council, February 4, 2020* [Video], 37:53. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rHwoV0ehLo>.

invited to give an “Address to Council”, as listed in the meeting minutes.¹²³ She spoke on myriad topics, but most notably:

*“And while it is not my place in this politically correct era to stand here and pray for you, please know it is a practice in my regular life, and it is a practice in the congregation I serve. We pray regularly, and specifically for those who lead us at all levels of government, including you. Please be assured of my prayers and the prayers of our church family for you.”*¹²⁴

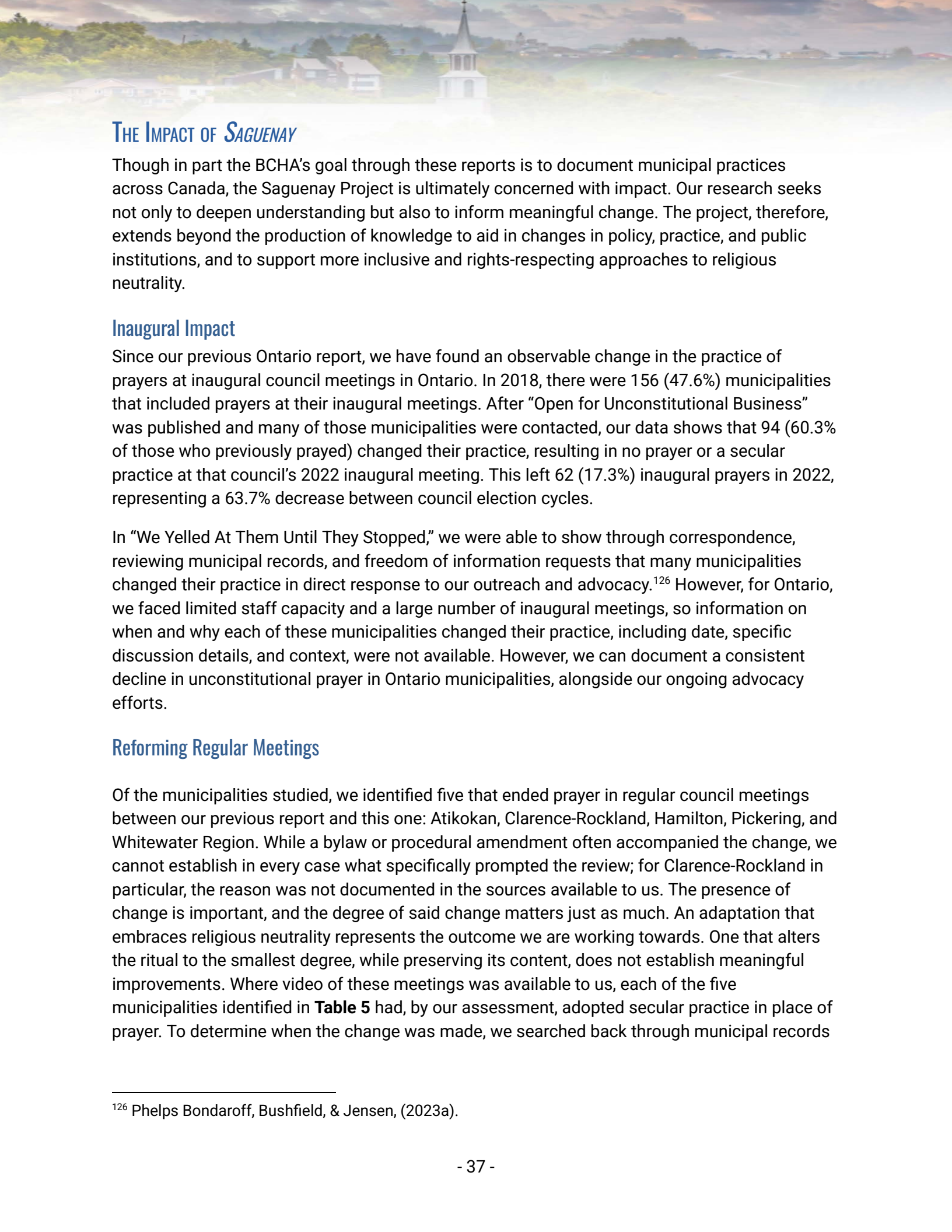
If the chosen speaker highlights how much they pray and how much they will continue to pray for council, that has a similar impact as an actual prayer. O'Reilly evidently recognized that prayer was prohibited when she referred to inclusive government as the “politically correct era,” but still proceeded to discuss her church and prayer practice. Even if we grant the municipality the benefit of the doubt that they intended for the content to be secular based on the label in the agenda, they still provided a platform and privilege to a religious leader. The local government must be aware of the positionality of the person they have invited to deliver content at their meeting, and in this case, inviting a member of the Christian clergy appears as the privileging of this person’s religion over others.

It is important to note that *Saguenay* ruled that the government must remain religiously neutral, not simply that governments cannot open with a religious prayer.¹²⁵ That neutrality impacts more than just the content of the prayer, but any privileged religious elements surrounding it. An invited clergymember who delivers a prayer completely devoid of religious content or language could still be perceived as favouring that religion over other religions or non-religion. The best practice, therefore, is to avoid inviting religious representatives to present before government meetings, inaugural or otherwise. To align with previous report classifications of stealth prayer(s), and based on the standards set by *Saguenay*, our team includes this atypical case as prayer. Malicious compliance is not embracing neutrality, and frankly, defeats the purpose.

¹²³ Township of Warwick. (2022 November 15). *Special Council Meeting Minutes*. Available at <https://warwick.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/85984/?preview=94019> (retrieved August 17, 2026).

¹²⁴ See Appendix B.36.

¹²⁵ See Appendix A.



THE IMPACT OF *SAGUENAY*

Though in part the BCHA's goal through these reports is to document municipal practices across Canada, the Saguenay Project is ultimately concerned with impact. Our research seeks not only to deepen understanding but also to inform meaningful change. The project, therefore, extends beyond the production of knowledge to aid in changes in policy, practice, and public institutions, and to support more inclusive and rights-respecting approaches to religious neutrality.

Inaugural Impact

Since our previous Ontario report, we have found an observable change in the practice of prayers at inaugural council meetings in Ontario. In 2018, there were 156 (47.6%) municipalities that included prayers at their inaugural meetings. After "Open for Unconstitutional Business" was published and many of those municipalities were contacted, our data shows that 94 (60.3% of those who previously prayed) changed their practice, resulting in no prayer or a secular practice at that council's 2022 inaugural meeting. This left 62 (17.3%) inaugural prayers in 2022, representing a 63.7% decrease between council election cycles.

In "We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped," we were able to show through correspondence, reviewing municipal records, and freedom of information requests that many municipalities changed their practice in direct response to our outreach and advocacy.¹²⁶ However, for Ontario, we faced limited staff capacity and a large number of inaugural meetings, so information on when and why each of these municipalities changed their practice, including date, specific discussion details, and context, were not available. However, we can document a consistent decline in unconstitutional prayer in Ontario municipalities, alongside our ongoing advocacy efforts.

Reforming Regular Meetings

Of the municipalities studied, we identified five that ended prayer in regular council meetings between our previous report and this one: Atikokan, Clarence-Rockland, Hamilton, Pickering, and Whitewater Region. While a bylaw or procedural amendment often accompanied the change, we cannot establish in every case what specifically prompted the review; for Clarence-Rockland in particular, the reason was not documented in the sources available to us. The presence of change is important, and the degree of said change matters just as much. An adaptation that embraces religious neutrality represents the outcome we are working towards. One that alters the ritual to the smallest degree, while preserving its content, does not establish meaningful improvements. Where video of these meetings was available to us, each of the five municipalities identified in **Table 5** had, by our assessment, adopted secular practice in place of prayer. To determine when the change was made, we searched back through municipal records

¹²⁶ Phelps Bondaroff, Bushfield, & Jensen, (2023a).

to identify the meeting where the change occurred. We then looked at meetings prior to this change to determine what measures, if any, were public.

Table 5 – List of Ontario municipalities that have updated their regular meeting practices.

Municipality	Date of last Prayer	Summary
Atikokan	August 14, 2023 ¹²⁷	Handled by municipal staff and voted on by council. Changed from silent prayer to moment of reflection. ¹²⁸
Clarence-Rockland	December 19, 2022 ¹²⁹	Unknown reason. Changed to a “Moment of Reflection.”
Hamilton	February 26, 2020 ¹³⁰	Council officially amended the “Order of Business” from “Invocation” to “Ceremonial activities.” ¹³¹
Pickering	June 26, 2023 ¹³²	Council voted and updated “Order of Business” from “Invocation” to “Moment of Reflection.” ¹³³
Whitewater Region	March 15, 2023 ¹³⁴	Council passed a by-law to amend the Procedural By-law, removing prayer from regular council meetings. ¹³⁵

¹²⁷ Town of Atikokan. (2023 August 14). *Council Meeting Agenda, 20th Meeting of the 40th Council*. Available at <https://atikokan.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/195/?preview=117277>.

¹²⁸ Town of Atikokan, By-law No. 30-23, *Proceedings of Council*. Available at <https://atikokan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/30-23-Proceedings-of-Council-SEARCHABLE.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Cité de/City of Clarence-Rockland. (2022 December 19). *Réunion du conseil municipal – 19 décembre 2022 / Municipal Council Meeting – December 19, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ_7bRZjPZI.

¹³⁰ City of Hamilton, By-law No. 21-021, *A By-law to Govern the Proceedings of Council and Committees of Council (consolidation)*, Available at <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2026-05/21-021-consolidation-feb2026..pdf>.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² City of Pickering. (2023 June 26). *Council Meeting Minutes*. Available at <https://corporate.pickering.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=251141&dbid=1&repo=PICKERING>.

¹³³ City of Pickering, By-law 8019/23, *Being a By-law to Govern the Proceedings of Council, Any of its Committees, the Conduct of its Members, and the Calling of Meetings*, Available at <https://corporate.pickering.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=250959&dbid=1&repo=PICKERING>.

¹³⁴ Township of Whitewater Region. (2023 March 15a). *Regular Council Meeting Agenda*. Available at <https://whitewaterregion.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=310>.

¹³⁵ Township of Whitewater Region. (2023 March 15b). *Regular Council Meeting Minutes*. Available at <https://whitewaterregion.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=310>.

Response to Advocacy

Our work, researching compliance with the *Saguenay* decision, empowers our advocacy for government religious neutrality. Reports such as this one provide both organizational pressure and raise public awareness around the duty of religious neutrality of all levels of government. During our research, we established which municipalities do not comply with *Saguenay* and applied legal pressure as needed. Once identified, and following our conventional attempts to notify the municipality of their constitutional obligations, lawyers associated with the BCHA then contacted those municipalities that included prayers at inaugural council meetings, regular council meetings, or both.

Our data suggest that a combination of these pressures led to a decrease in municipal prayers in Ontario. While the 63.7% decrease in inaugural prayer suggests a move in a more constitutional and secular direction, 17.3% of all Ontario municipalities still prayed at their 2022 inaugural council meeting. Alongside ongoing non-compliance, our research also identified municipalities that have replaced explicitly Christian prayers with multifaith ceremonies or other forms of organized religious observance (Brampton, Newmarket, Innisfil, and Kitchener). While often presented as more inclusive, these practices continue to raise constitutional concerns. These changes are not progress, as the duty of neutrality requires governments to refrain from participating in religious observance altogether, rather than broadening the range of religious traditions represented.

The responses received from municipalities demonstrate a range of approaches to *Saguenay*. Some municipalities acknowledged the legal requirements established in by the *Saguenay* decision and amended their practices accordingly, while others defended their existing ceremonies by appealing to tradition, community expectations, or the inclusion of multiple faiths. This trend of resistance to change continues to appear in Ontario, despite the Supreme Court of Canada's clear findings that historical practice or equal representation among religions does not satisfy the constitutional duty of neutrality.

While some municipalities are reluctant to change, others take accountability for violating the legal requirements of religious neutrality. For example, the Mayor of Penetanguishene publicly apologized for the prayer at the 2022 inaugural meeting.¹³⁶ Mayor Doug Rawson shared, "I'll apologize for any oversight, but again it was meant to be an opportunity to be inclusive of our community."¹³⁷ It is unclear how inviting a religious leader was intended to be inclusive, but the town's response suggests a religious leader will not be invited to pray at the 2026 inaugural meeting. The CAO Jeff Lees announced that staff would ensure adequate steps were taken to ensure this would not be repeated.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Howard, D. (2024 July 23). "Penetang Mayor 'Apologizes for Oversight' After Lord's Prayer Recited in Council." *MidlandToday*. Available at <https://www.midlandtoday.ca/local-news/penetang-mayor-apologizes-for-oversight-after-lords-prayer-recited-in-council-9252316> (retrieved August 26, 2026).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Municipal resistance to constitutional change demonstrates that continued advocacy remains necessary.¹³⁹ Although *Saguenay* settled the legal principles more than a decade ago, compliance has proven to be uneven. Ongoing research, public reporting, legal correspondence, and community education have proven to be effective tools for promoting compliance and ensuring that municipal governments uphold the constitutional principles of religious freedom, equality, and state neutrality. Expanding these efforts will remain essential to advancing constitutional compliance in Ontario, and across Canada.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ See Emerging Themes: Reluctance to Change.

¹⁴⁰ For the BCHA's official recommendations, see Executive Summary.

EMERGING THEMES

Patriarchy and Prayer

In this section, we pay particular attention to the gendered aspect of prayer at municipal council meetings. Interpreting patterns of gender and municipal prayer requires a balance between consistent data collection and a commitment to respecting diverse gender identities. In our research, gender was inferred based on the contextual information available in publicly accessible records. This included the pronouns used to refer to individuals in meeting minutes, videos, or organizational biographies, as well as visual presentation where no explicit gendered language was available.

Because the gender identity of these individuals was not confirmed directly, our classifications should be understood as estimates rather than definitive identifications.¹⁴¹

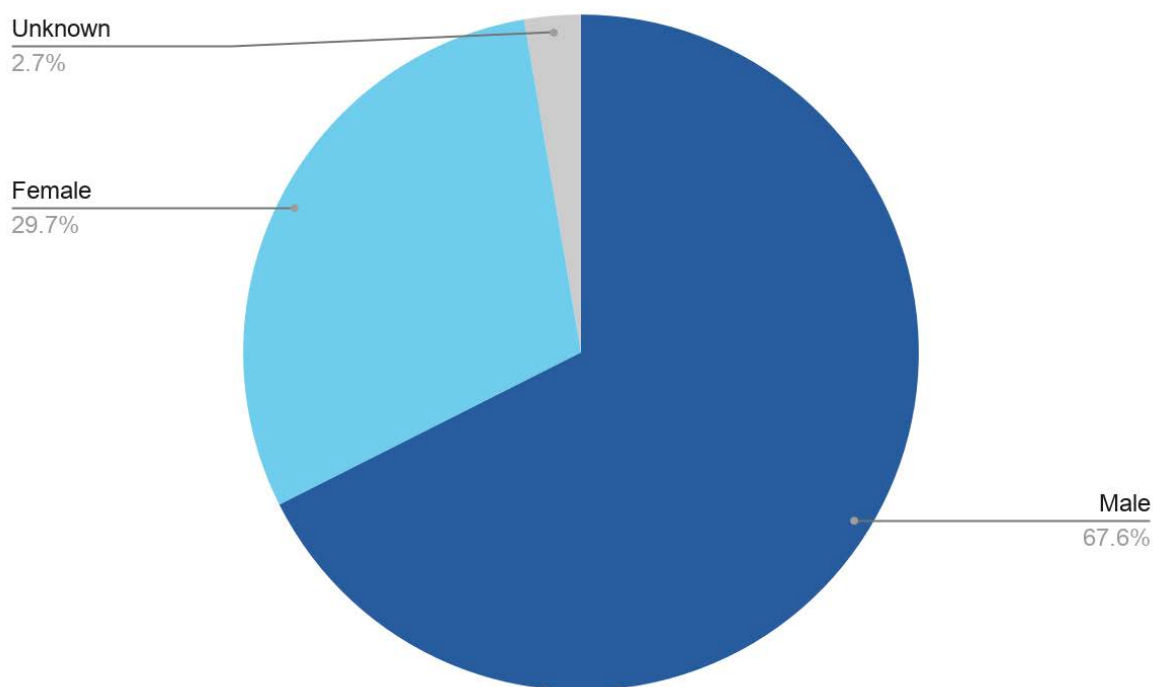


Figure 7 – Gender representation of prayer leaders in 2022 Ontario inaugural council meetings.

As seen in **Figure 7**, across Ontario municipalities that included a prayer or religious blessing during their inaugural council meeting, 50 (67.6%) of prayers were delivered by men, compared

¹⁴¹ Our research team recognizes that we may have incorrectly gendered some individuals throughout this process. If we have done so, please reach out to the BCHA so the mistake can be corrected. We sincerely apologize for any harm or distress an instance of misgendering may cause. Additionally, this approach relies on a binary gender classification and does not account for non-binary or gender-diverse identities, reflecting a limitation both of the available data and our data collection methodology.

with 22 (29.7%) by women. Although men remained the clear majority of prayer leaders, this represents a 5.2% decrease from our 2018 report, suggesting modest movement toward greater gender balance over successive municipal election cycles. This distribution remains noticeably disproportionate when compared with Ontario's population, where women comprised approximately 50.9% of residents according to the 2021 Census.¹⁴²

Unlike many other ceremonial elements examined in this report, the gender distribution of prayer leaders cannot easily be attributed to circumstance. Whereas land acknowledgements were frequently delivered by municipal officials or employees, and less frequently by invited Indigenous representatives whose participation reflects existing territorial relationships, prayer was almost always delivered by an invited member of the community. Therefore, municipal councils exercise considerable discretion in determining who is invited to provide these observances. The predominance of male prayer leaders consequently reflects not only the demographic composition of local religious communities, but also municipal choices regarding whose religious authority is recognized and publicly represented within civic ceremony.

The historical association between religious authority and masculinity has been extensively documented within the study of religion.¹⁴³ Religious institutions have traditionally reflected broader patriarchal social structures in which positions of authority were reserved primarily for men. In fact, leadership within many of the studied denominations represented in municipal council meetings are either exclusively or predominantly male. Even among denominations that have ordained women for decades, senior clergy continue to be disproportionately male.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, municipalities that continue to rely upon local clergy to deliver prayer at council meetings reproduce longstanding gender disparities embedded within religious institutions themselves.

Our findings illustrate how historical institutional patterns, such as patriarchy, continue to shape contemporary civic ceremony. One way to describe the disproportionate representation of men and male-presenting individuals invited to deliver prayer at municipal meetings is through what social science scholars describe as “path dependency”, where present practices continue to reflect historical arrangements even as broader social norms evolve.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Statistics Canada. (2023). *Gender, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang%3DE%26SearchText%3Dontario%26GENDERlist>.

¹⁴³ Tam, C. (2025). Sexism in Canadian churches: A literature review. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 1–22. Available at <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/1474225X.2025.2489262>.

¹⁴⁴ Bacon, M. (1986). *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 24.; and see Lee, Y., D.P. King, & B.R. Fulton. (2025). Barriers Inhibiting Women's Path to the Pulpit and the Gender Gap in Compensation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12952>.

¹⁴⁵ Pierson, P. (2000). Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics. *The American Political Science Review*, 94(2), 251–267. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586011>.

However, the proportion of male prayer leaders did decline between 2018 and 2022, suggesting that some Ontario municipalities have broadened the range of religious representatives invited to participate in civic ceremonies or that local religious groups themselves are elevating more women to leadership positions. Although men remain substantially overrepresented in religious leadership overall, our research indicates a modest diversification of the individuals selected to perform ceremonial civic religious functions, unconstitutional though they may be.

Despite the indication that gender representation of those delivering prayer is improving at municipal meetings, broader questions regarding the relationship between ceremonial municipal meetings and public representation remain. Inaugural council meetings are among the most symbolically significant events within the municipal electoral cycle. They signify not only the democratic election of local government, but also publicly communicate institutional values and present an image of the community to residents. Therefore, any individuals invited to participate in these ceremonies, whether it be prayer or remarks on democracy, occupy positions of symbolic authority. The power given to those whose voices have been determined worth highlighting creates a space where the authority of a person delivering prayer extends beyond the religious content of the prayer itself. Those selected to speak at an inaugural council meeting represent the voices that municipality deems appropriate to offer moral or spiritual guidance to the newly elected council.

From this perspective, the predominance of male prayer leaders reflects more than the gender composition of local clergy. It also reflects broader assumptions concerning authority within public institutions. Feminist scholarship has long argued that authority across organizations has historically been gendered, with men more frequently occupying visible leadership positions while women's contributions have often occurred through less publicly recognized forms of service.¹⁴⁶ When municipalities invite members of the public to participate in public meetings, they grant those individuals and their affiliated organizations a degree of public legitimacy and symbolic authority. Where these invited speakers are overwhelmingly male, as is the case with prayer, municipalities reinforce the perception that male voices are more closely associated with any combination of moral, spiritual, or civic authority. Though, as previously discussed, this pattern reflects historically prevailing religious leadership structures, it is nonetheless reproduced through municipal decision-making.

With this in mind, the gender of the individual delivering a prayer does not, in itself, determine the inclusiveness or character of the ceremony. Nor does the presence of a female prayer leader necessarily indicate greater institutional diversity or equality. Municipal practices are shaped by local demographics, institutional structures, and longstanding community relationships that vary considerably across Ontario. The observed gender imbalance therefore provides insight into one dimension of municipal ceremonial practice rather than serving as a comprehensive measure of gender equity within local government. Here, we advocate for local governments to

¹⁴⁶ Canadian Women's Foundation. (2022 May 30). *The facts: Women and leadership in Canada*. Canadian Women's Foundation. Available at <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-leadership-in-canada/>.

comply with *Saguenay* and remove prayer from council meetings. It should be noted that no amount of gender equity in the delivery of prayer would make progress toward this constitutionally ordered goal. Consistent overrepresentation of male prayer leaders, however, does represent a notable pattern in how authority is publicly recognized within these civic spaces, and warrants further examination.

As we urge municipalities to align their practices with *Saguenay*, questions surrounding whose voices are authorized to speak, and whose authority is publicly recognized, remain an important dimension of discussions concerning the future of municipal council meetings and ceremonies.

Reluctance to Change

Few municipalities responded to the standards of *Saguenay* with a blanket rejection, though that does occur at times.¹⁴⁷ More often municipalities made some effort to appear compliant, while leaving the core of the religious practice untouched. Across our research, this occurred in several ways.

One example is the directives to attendees to assume postures associated with prayer. "Let's all bow our heads" or "let's all rise" appear throughout our dataset to varying degrees. However, their intent is consistent: they ask everyone present, regardless of belief, to physically participate in an act of worship to take part in local government. When the wording of a prayer changes, but the instruction that otherwise marks the moment as religious continues, the practice is still being recreated in substance, even if the explicit language has been removed.

Pembroke is an example of a municipality's reluctance to enact a meaningful change. This municipality moved away from reciting the Lord's Prayer to its current prayer,¹⁴⁸ which makes a vague attempt at inclusive language. They transitioned to the mayor directing, "Those that wish, each in your own way [to] silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings."¹⁴⁹ This adaptation demonstrates that Pembroke is capable of change: the shift from an explicitly named, Christian prayer to a more open-ended one. But the language that replaced the Lord's Prayer does not achieve true inclusion. Because of the coercive structure, the invitation to join in prayer remains, even as the specific religious content is less prominent. Pembroke demonstrates different sides of what this section concerns: change is possible, but sometimes, when it does happen, there can be resistance to meaningful inclusion.

This aversion is evident in the way municipalities label these moments, which are implemented to replace prayer. In some instances, these moments were changed into 'invocations', despite the religious connotations, and verbal directions aimed at tampering with attempts to create a more inclusive practice. As explored above, the label and language strongly contribute to preserving the religious nature, regardless of what the agenda label claims. When the title of

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix C.3.

¹⁴⁸ City of Pembroke. (2020 February 4).

¹⁴⁹ See Appendix B25.2; and See Appendix B25.3

invocation is combined with a practice whose structure and delivery emulate aspects of prayer, this comes across as a reluctance to change, captured in a new name.

This same resistance exists, more starkly, in inaugural meetings. Our research found that 62 of the 359 municipalities included prayer as part of their inaugural ceremonies. One explanation as to why councils seem more willing to adapt regular meeting practices than inaugural ones may be that inaugural meetings are viewed as a special occasion, a deviation from normal practice. For these events, individuals are more willing to defend proceedings as ‘tradition,’ and that traditions ought to be above or at least resistance to adaptation. Alternatively, some may believe that prayer is necessary to solemnify the ceremonies. This logic does not hold up under closer inspection. An inaugural meeting, as the first official moment of a newly elected council, and often the most publicly attended meeting of its term, is the moment a municipality should be exhibiting the standard it wants to represent moving forward. One that evolves tradition to include everyone in the community.

As we saw in Warwick, the speaker was invited to give an “address to council”, a seemingly secular practice, but took the opportunity to include talk of praying extensively for council.¹⁵⁰ Acknowledging that prayer is not to be included, but proceeding to discuss multiple subjects related to prayer and Christianity is a mode of malicious compliance that disregards the intention of *Saguenay*.

These observations point to a theme that exists throughout this report: Those who make changes, when it occurs, often attempt to preserve the religious elements of the practice it replaces.

Christianity in Council

Christianity has long dominated the Canadian government and has clear historical roots, traceable to the earliest stages of colonial institutions.¹⁵¹ Municipal prayer in Ontario does not pull evenly from the religious diversity of the province, and instead draws primarily from one tradition, in a pattern consistent with, and inherited from, that colonial structure.

The 2021 Census reports that 52.1% of Ontarians identified with a Christian denomination, while 31.6% reported no religion. The remainder were composed of a range of religions, including Islam (6.7%), Hindu (4.1%), Sikh (2.1%), Jewish (1.4%), and Buddhist (1.2%).¹⁵² Each subsequent census has shown continued growth in both religious minorities and those with no religious affiliation.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix B.37.

¹⁵¹ Rawlyk G. (1995). Religion in Canada: A Historical Overview. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 538, 131–142. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1048331>.

¹⁵² Statistics Canada. (2022). *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

From our reviews of transcripts and the selected religious speakers, the share of prayers drawing on Christian sources substantially exceeds the 52.1% of the province's population who are Christian, meaning that Christian content in municipal prayer has been disproportionate to the population. Of the religious representatives in our sample with identifiable religious affiliation, 62 were Christian clergy specifically, representing 84.9% of the total individuals, compared to 12 (16.2%) drawn from all other faiths combined.¹⁵⁴ As discussed earlier, other religious leaders were rarely included on their own. When present, they were part of a multifaith group. The unifying principle across these examples is that where religion is present, Christianity is too.

Our previous Ontario report, examining the past wave of inaugural meetings, found the same imbalance at a similar scale. A strong majority of the prayers, 151 (90.4%), were delivered by representatives of various Christian sects or referenced explicitly Christian sectarian language.¹⁵⁵ In congruence with our current findings, this suggests that Christian dominance in Ontario municipal prayer is not an element of any single election. It is a pattern that continues across multiple cycles of inaugural meetings, separated by several years and, in many municipalities, by a change in council representatives.

As discussed above, close to eight in ten prayers in our inaugural sample framed council's authority, its decision-making, or its need for guidance as belonging to a higher power rather than to the electorate that placed them in office (see **Figure 1**). This "Lord Guiding Council" framing echoes a specifically Christian, and specifically biblical, theology of divinely ordained governance. In Penetanguishene, the officiant opened by quoting directly from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Let every soul be subject under the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the creator. Powers that be are ordained of God."¹⁵⁶

North Huron's inaugural prayer went further still, explicitly setting divine authority against democratic authority: Council members "were freely elected by the citizens of this great community," the officiant said, but "you have been granted this great honour of governing by God."¹⁵⁷ This prayer frames elected office as a grant from the speaker's god. In Havelock-Belmont-Methuen, Pastor Dave Russell told council directly that "it is God who has given society its leaders," and warned that a society "prone to corruption and collapse" is one that "drives out the church and her values."¹⁵⁸ This language and phrasing names the church as the source of civic legitimacy, and frames the constitutionally-mandated alternative as social

¹⁵⁴ Our category of "all other faiths" includes the four cases where religion was unknown; see also Multifaith Fails; see also Appendix C.1.

¹⁵⁵ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), p.14.

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix B.26.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix B.20.

¹⁵⁸ See Appendix B.8.

decline. Christianity has been so interwoven with the government that statements like that feel appropriate to some.¹⁵⁹

Christianity also persists as the default in regular council meeting prayers, even as the prevalence has decreased significantly. Of the 356 municipalities in our regular meeting findings, only two, Pembroke and Laurentian Valley, retained prayer rather than a moment of silence, reflection, invocation, or nothing. Both were Christian in content: Laurentian Valley's mayor recites the Lord's Prayer to open each meeting, and Pembroke's mayor leads council in a prayer of guidance, with strong Christian elements for the inaugural meeting.¹⁶⁰ This aligns with our past findings. Our previous Ontario report identified nine municipalities with regular meeting prayer, and each of those prayers for which content could be confirmed was Christian as well. From Laurentian Valley's Lord's Prayer to Whitewater Region's opening address to "almighty God" to Clarence-Rockland's "Notre Père."¹⁶¹

Municipal council meeting prayers are a disproportionately Christian practice, one whose persistence and underlying reluctance to change have been documented across this report. Inclusion of residents of all religions and none remains achievable only through the religious neutrality that *Saguenay* requires.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Beaman, L. G. (2021). Our Culture, Our Heritage, Our Values: Whose Culture, Whose Heritage, Whose Values? *Canadian Journal of Law and Society / Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 36(2), 203–223. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2021.14>.

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix C.4.

¹⁶¹ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp. 30–31.

¹⁶² See Appendix A.

ANALYZING INDIGENOUS CONTENT

Critically Self-Locating

An important aspect of working within the topic of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, is critically self-locating ourselves when making claims and analytical judgments about Indigenous content. The following is a statement and self-location of Isabelle Easton, BCHA research officer and co-author of “Amen, Again!”

“As the lead author of the Indigenous Content section of this report, I recognize the importance of identifying myself as a cis-gender, white-settler woman.¹⁶³ My approach to this research is shaped by my privilege as a multi-generational white-settler. My understanding of Indigenous knowledge, and of Indigenous–settler relations is constantly shaped by an ongoing study of Indigenous politics and decolonial praxis. I recognize that academic studies and work, including this report, requires sustained reflection on the ways my colonial assumptions influence me, my research, and consequently the governance of the settler state. I approach this section, and all my research by first unlearning these assumptions, then reorienting myself and respecting the distinct rights, histories, and traditions of Indigenous communities. I recognize that my academic background is rooted in colonialism, and, in all available opportunities, ground my work in Indigenous scholarship. My goal in this section is to emphasize the importance of Indigenous self-determination and the diversity of Indigenous communities, the words, arguments and ideas of which are not my own, but belong to Indigenous voices. I aim to document our research team’s observations on how Indigenous content has become incorporated into municipal meetings in so-called Ontario, while recognizing that meaningful reconciliation, where it is sought by Indigenous communities, is relational, locally grounded, and ultimately defined solely through the perspectives and priorities of Indigenous communities themselves.”

Note on Methodology for Indigenous Content

Since the BCHA began collecting data for the Saguenay Project, we have encountered a wide array of Indigenous content spanning from the most commonplace and clearly secular content, to invited Elders delivering Christian sermons. It is the BCHA’s obligation not to exclude or ignore such cases, but instead to reckon with the relational and colonial implications of that content.

Our overall methodology throughout this project is shaped by precedent set by court rulings such as *Saguenay* and other jurisprudence regarding the freedom of religion. Due to the complex, violent and ongoing process of settler-colonialism, and the historical positionality of the BCHA and its membership, BCHA is not equipped to pronounce on whether specific Indigenous practices constitute ‘prayers’ in the sense that *Saguenay* envisions. In short, it is

¹⁶³ This statement and these disclosures were provided voluntarily by the co-author. While there are other aspects of privilege and intersectional identity markers that could be included, they have been omitted to protect the privacy of our staff.

unclear and undetermined how these ‘edge’ cases should be categorized. In order to maintain consistency with our past practices, and avoid establishing an illinformed precedent, our studies have avoided classifying any Indigenous content as a “prayer.” The following notes on methodology aim to clarify how we assessed and analyzed the Indigenous content in Ontario throughout the report, as well as articulate that our methodology when studying Indigenous content at times is separate from our methodology used to study prayer practices.

First, Indigenous content or practices are broadly intended to promote ‘reconciliation’.¹⁶⁴ We highlight this in our past work, and it also formed a core part of Justice Griffin’s findings in his BC Court of Appeal ruling (and the lower court judge) that decided a smudging ceremony and hoop dance at a Port Alberni school did not violate the duty of neutrality. Our research uses this ruling as precedent to determine that the inclusion of Indigenous culture, spirituality, and even religion in civic events does not conflict with the state’s duty of religious neutrality.

Second, as we explored in “Decolonizing Legislative Prayers”, the practice of using Christian prayers to open legislative meetings was introduced to serve a particular coercive purpose by the state to promote the authority of the Church of England. It is that coercion (coupled with state sanctioned violence, assimilation, confinement, and erasure) that has led to the development of the duty of religious neutrality in Canadian jurisprudence from *Big M Drug Mart* through to *Saguenay*.

Third, many Indigenous practices cannot be considered religious in any meaningful sense of the word. Contrary to certain political discourses, the typical land acknowledgement is a statement of historical and political fact. Not to mention that speeches from an invited local Indigenous leader may be entirely devoid of religious or spiritual context.

Finally, it is crucial to note that our report, methodology, and data are informed by and exist within the hegemony of settler-colonial violence and erasure. Recognizing this, the BCHA is tasked with the responsibility to refuse to be blind to the truths of the settler-colonial project, and actively support efforts within the organization (and within ourselves) to dismantle it.

Overview

The inclusion of Indigenous content in civic ceremonies has become an increasingly common feature of public life across Canada. From universities and schools to legislatures, hospitals, sporting events, and municipal councils, public institutions have sought to acknowledge the territories of the Indigenous Nations upon which they reside, and to recognize the continuing relationships between Indigenous peoples and their ancestral lands. Municipal governments have been no exception. Across Ontario, inaugural council meetings increasingly incorporate territorial or land acknowledgements, traditional welcomes, songs, drumming, smudging ceremonies, speeches from Indigenous leaders, and other cultural protocols that were seldom observed in municipal proceedings only a decade ago.

¹⁶⁴ Reconciliation is a contested term. See below our discussion which aims to complicate our understanding(s) of recognition and reconciliation politics.

This transformation reflects broader changes in Canadian public life following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Final Report in 2015.¹⁶⁵ The Commission documented the profound and ongoing harms caused by the residential school system and issued 94 Calls to Action directed toward governments, educational institutions, faith communities, and civil society.⁹⁰ Although none of the Calls to Action specifically require municipalities to incorporate land acknowledgements or ceremonial practices into council meetings, the report fundamentally altered public discussions surrounding Indigenous-settler relations. As a result, governments of all levels increasingly came to view public recognition of Indigenous communities as one visible means of participating in the broader ongoing process of “reconciliation.”

Findings

Our research in this report focuses primarily on municipal compliance with the *Saguenay* decision by auditing provinces for municipal prayer. Though prayer is the primary focus of our report, our research team has also collected data on the inclusion of Indigenous content in both inaugural and regular council meetings. Our findings aim to provide a statistical measure for the increasingly common inclusion of Indigenous content across many sectors, including colonial-state government proceedings.

Of the 360 Ontario municipalities included in this study, one lacked sufficient documentation to determine whether Indigenous content was present during their 2022 inaugural council meeting. Among the remaining 359 municipalities, 179 (49.9%) incorporated some form of Indigenous content in their 2022 inaugural meeting, a dramatic increase from the patterns documented in our previous research (12 municipalities prior to 2018, and 64 at 2018 inaugural meetings).

By 2024, 222 (62.4%) of municipalities included Indigenous content at their regular meetings. The greater percentage of municipalities engaging with Indigenous content in 2024 regular meetings compared to 2022 inaugural meetings may be attributable, at least in part, to the timing of data collection. The inaugural data speaks to meetings held across late 2022 to early 2023, while the regular meeting data included up until early 2024. Over this period, Indigenous content appears to have become increasingly common and, in some cases, mandated as policy. The higher occurrence of Indigenous content observed in regular meetings may therefore reflect the growing adoption of practices aimed at reconciliation or even a shift in Canadian political culture.¹⁶⁶

Discussion

For the purposes of this report, and consistent with our past practice, the term “Indigenous content” was chosen for its intentionally broad character. Municipalities engage with Indigenous governments, communities, and traditions in ways that differ substantially across the province,

¹⁶⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Available at <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.800288/publication>.

¹⁶⁶ This point is speculative, see Future Research.

making any narrow definition both impractical and misleading. Rather than limiting our analysis to territorial acknowledgements alone, we use the term to encompass the broad range of Indigenous protocols, ceremonies, cultural practices, diplomatic protocols, and educational components that appeared during inaugural and regular council meetings.

This distinction is important. While territorial acknowledgements have become the most publicly recognizable expression of municipal reconciliation efforts, they represent only one manifestation of Indigenous inclusion in the meetings we studied. Municipalities incorporated Indigenous content through a remarkable diversity of practices, including:

- Territorial or land acknowledgements delivered by mayors, clerks, chief administrative officers, or councillors;
- Traditional welcomes by elders;
- Welcoming addresses from chiefs representing Indigenous communities;
- Smudging and pipe ceremonies;
- Honour songs, drumming, and traditional singing or messages;
- Educational remarks about treaties, Indigenous histories, or reconciliation; and
- Combinations of several of these practices within the same ceremony.

The diversity of practices we witnessed across the province also reflects the extraordinary cultural, political, and legal diversity of Indigenous peoples within Ontario itself. Ontario is home to more than 130 First Nations, alongside Métis communities, and substantial urban Indigenous (including Inuit) populations. These First Nations include Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Algonquin, Lenape, Mushkegowuk Cree, and many other Nations whose territories, languages, governance structures, treaty relationships, and ceremonial traditions differ considerably from one another.¹⁶⁷ Their relationships with co-locating and neighbouring municipalities likewise vary according to local histories, treaty obligations, and ongoing political relationships.

Recognizing this diversity is essential when evaluating municipal practices. Contemporary Indigenous scholarship increasingly cautions against treating Indigenous peoples as a single political or cultural community. Rather, Indigenous resurgence emphasizes the revitalization of individual Nations, each possessing distinct legal traditions, diplomatic protocols, and systems of governance. It is not the BCHA's intention or place to identify a single "best practice" for all municipalities, as it risks reproducing precisely the homogenization that reconciliation seeks to overcome.

For instance, one cultural interpretation of land acknowledgements stems from Robert Jago, a historian and writer from the Kwantlen First Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe. Jago argues that contemporary institutional acknowledgements have gradually shifted away from the Coast Salish welcoming protocols that originally informed their use, becoming increasingly

¹⁶⁷ This list of Indigenous nations is incomplete. For a further list of nations, and a visual tool outlining their territories, see <https://native-land.ca/maps/native-land>.

performative as they spread throughout Canadian institutions.¹⁶⁸ As acknowledgements became more widely adopted, he suggests they increasingly functioned as symbolic performances through which institutions could publicly demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation while remaining disconnected from the Indigenous legal orders and relationships that originally gave such protocols meaning.¹⁶⁹

Jago suggests that in order to align with the origins of land acknowledgement and respectfully and meaningfully engage with Indigenous culture, that the language remain relatively simple, offering a three-part formula: "Introduce and situate the speaker, acknowledge the stewards of the territory, [and] explain the intent behind the event."¹⁷⁰ This follows suit with Jago's study that demonstrates territorial acknowledgements originated from Coast Salish culture, and recommends that modern acknowledgements adhere to *c'ac'izel* code.¹⁷¹

While Jago emphasizes that territorial acknowledgements should remain grounded in Indigenous protocols and local relationships, he also notes that their widespread institutional adoption has increasingly distanced them from their original purpose.¹⁷² This concern is echoed by Joe Wark, who argues that land acknowledgements have been repurposed within Canadian institutions as part of state-sponsored reconciliation initiatives rather than as expressions of Indigenous political protocol.¹⁷³

Originally intended to resist the erasure of Indigenous peoples and colonial violence, institutional acknowledgements have, according to Wark, often become routine symbolic exercises that serve settler institutions more than Indigenous communities.¹⁷⁴ He contends that many acknowledgements function as "box-ticking" exercises or performances of reconciliation that invoke a generalized and depoliticized conception of Indigeneity while leaving underlying colonial relationships unchallenged.¹⁷⁵ Rather than engaging with Indigenous peoples as contemporary political communities, these practices may reinforce what Wark describes as a settler narrative of benevolence and completed reconciliation.¹⁷⁶ His critique suggests that the significance of a territorial acknowledgement depends not simply on its inclusion, but on whether it remains connected to Indigenous protocols, local relationships, and meaningful engagement beyond the ceremonial moment.

¹⁶⁸ Jago, R. (forthcoming). The Origin and Meaning of Land Acknowledgements; and see KPU Arts. (2025 May 12). *The Truth Behind Land Acknowledgements - May 12, 2025* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f4dIE3kgv4>.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Wark, J. (2021). Land acknowledgements in the academy: Refusing the settler myth. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 51(2), 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2021.1889924>.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Across literature engaging with acknowledgements and Indigenous-settler relations, it is clear that meaningful municipal engagement cannot be measured solely by whether Indigenous content is present, but by whether relationships develop between municipalities and the Indigenous governments with whom they share territory.

Here we do not attempt to evaluate the quality, authenticity, or appropriateness of municipal Indigenous engagement. Nor do we attempt to rank municipalities according to their commitment to reconciliation. Such an exercise would not only exceed the scope of this research, but would also rest upon the mistaken and settler assumption that reconciliation can be measured against a universal standard. Given the diversity of First Nations and Indigenous communities throughout Ontario, meaningful engagement will necessarily differ between municipalities. Instead, we document the prevalence and diversity of Indigenous content in municipal inaugural meetings while situating these developments within broader conversations about reconciliation, Indigenous resurgence, and municipal governance.

This distinction is particularly important because land acknowledgements themselves, as evidenced by our previous discussions, have become the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Their rapid institutional adoption has generated both praise and criticism from Indigenous scholars, community leaders, and practitioners.

Hayden King, one of the authors of one of Canada's most widely used institutional land acknowledgements, has since argued that many acknowledgements have become routine administrative exercises that too often substitute symbolic recognition for meaningful political action.¹⁷⁷ Dr. Rachael George similarly characterizes the concept of reconciliation as a settler-invented “move to distract,” warning that highly visible symbolic gestures may divert attention from more difficult questions surrounding Indigenous jurisdiction, treaty implementation, resource sharing, and self-determination.¹⁷⁸

These critiques should not be understood as arguments against the use of territorial acknowledgements themselves, but rather King, George, and others caution against evaluating reconciliation solely through visible symbolic practices. In fact, it is crucial that as citizens and research institutions we complicate and challenge exactly what we mean by reconciliation. Authors such as Glen Coulthard discuss how recognition and reconciliation politics centre around the state's attempt to reproduce colonial relationships and maintain authority over Indigenous people and lands.¹⁷⁹ In this context, the base measurement for what reconciliation is, and looks like, should be challenged. If state sanctioned reconciliation promotes the

¹⁷⁷ Rudder, K. (2019 January 29). “Hayden King and others question the effectiveness of land acknowledgements.” *The Eyeopener*. Available at <https://theeyeopener.com/2019/01/hayden-king-and-others-question-the-effectiveness-of-land-acknowledgements/>.

¹⁷⁸ George, R. (2020). A Move to Distract: Mobilizing Truth and Reconciliation in Settler Colonial States. In A. Craft & P. Regan (Eds.), *Pathways of Reconciliation* (pp. 87–116). University of Manitoba Press. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780887558566-005>.

¹⁷⁹ Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, white masks : rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.

celebration and inclusion of Indigenous culture only when it is divorced from any threat or challenge of the political authority or sovereignty of the state, that 'reconciliation' only succeeds in the reproduction of colonial relationships and structures.¹⁸⁰ One may conclude that municipal reconciliation efforts then work to naturalize and reassert the state's authority that is used to erase, dominate and contain Indigenous people so that their Identities are reduced to that of in opposition of and in relation to the identities of settlers.¹⁸¹

Viewed together, this scholarship suggests that Indigenous content should be understood neither as inherently transformative nor as inherently performative. Rather, its significance depends upon the broader relationships within which it is situated. A territorial acknowledgement developed and delivered in partnership with neighbouring Indigenous Nations, accompanied by sustained collaboration and mutual engagement, may serve a very different function from one inserted into a meeting agenda without consultation or ongoing relationship.

It is important to note that our research and discussion on Indigenous content documents one quantifiable indicator of changing municipal practices, rather than a measure of reconciliation. The remarkable increase in Indigenous content observed across Ontario municipalities reflects an important change in civic governance over the past decade. Equally important, however, is the diversity of approaches through which municipalities have sought to engage with Indigenous communities. Diversity in this context should not be viewed as an inconsistency requiring standardization, but rather as evidence that meaningful relationships are necessarily local, relational, and grounded in the distinct communities and Nations whose territories municipalities occupy.

To take a closer look at a few of the hundreds of different ways municipalities engaged with Indigenous content, our research team gathered case studies of a few examples, which are shared in the following section. These do not intend to, nor could they, represent the rich diversity of practices included in all 179 municipalities with Indigenous content.

Case Studies

The diversity of Indigenous content we observed across Ontario can not be captured by the limited number of case studies our research team was able to include in this report. This should inform the conclusion that Indigenous content and inclusion cannot be reduced to a single description or inform a single municipal recommendation of what warrants a practice appropriate. Rather than converging toward one standardized model, municipalities appear to be developing a wide variety of approaches that reflect local relationships, differing institutional capacities, and varying understandings of reconciliation.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Hunt, S. (2021). Settler Colonialism. In M. Valverde et al. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Law and Society* (pp.213–216). Routledge. Available at <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429293306-43>.

Ajax

In the town of Ajax, council invited an Indigenous guest to deliver an Indigenous blessing and smudging ceremony at their 2022 inaugural meeting.¹⁸² Elder Kim Wheatley of Turtle Clan from Shawanaga First Nation presented in cultural regalia and provided an address that emphasized responsibility and democratic practices.¹⁸³

Before beginning the smudging ceremony, she noted that recognizing the traditional land of her people was an “important first start,” in demonstrating the responsibility and accountability the councillors are obligated to uphold.¹⁸⁴

She shared that, “when we smudge, we take that smoke, we draw it over our head so we think all the good things,” and echoed this sentiment for the eyes, ears, mouths, and heart.¹⁸⁵ She asked council to think of the natural world, and all within it, mentioning many things such as, “the sands, the soils, the plains... and the mountains”; “the grasses, the shrubs, the trees... the evergreens and all the medicines”; and “the swimmers, the crawlers, the flyers, the two-legged, those that live up in the sky and those that live beneath the earth.”¹⁸⁶ She connected each of these to lessons for council to consider: “to make space for beautiful beings,” to honour and protect community, and to think of all the town’s people present or not.

Elder Wheatley then offered a “celebration song, to honour council.”¹⁸⁷ She shared a part of her culture, asking the audience to participate in a “buffalo yell” instead of applause at the end of the song to honour ancestors, the council and people in chambers, and future generations.¹⁸⁸

This format allowed Elder Wheatley to share her community's culture with council and those present. Here, council, and by consequence this report, witnessed a smudging ceremony and blessing. Both “smudging” and “blessing” were frequently listed not only in Ajax’s agenda, but in the agendas of other municipalities in Ontario. By investigating Ajax’s meeting content, light is shed on the meaning of the practices in Shawanaga First Nation. As discussed previously, it is important to note that though practices can be similar or reflect similar meanings, no one example or case study can inform a universal way that an Indigenous community may use or assign meaning to that practice.

¹⁸² See Appendix D.1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix D.1.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Bracebridge

In the town of Bracebridge, council welcomed James Simcoe of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation to give a smudging ceremony. He joined council and brought with him “some of our medicine, or sage,” to smudge with.¹⁸⁹ He described the practice and what it means to the Chippewas: “we’re going to clean, we’re going to cleanse, feel good, we’re going to feel hopeful for the upcoming future, for the hard work council is going to do.”¹⁹⁰

Before beginning to circle the room and pour smoke over the councillors and himself, he instructed those present on how to bring the smoke over themselves, “It’s just like washing.”¹⁹¹ He circled the room, sharing the practice, then was followed by an honour song performed by the Oshki Gnebig Mnis Youth Singers of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.¹⁹²

In Bracebridge, we can see how culture can be shared and can contribute to the “grounding” part of a ceremony or meeting.¹⁹³ Here, the Chippewas of Rama First Nation were able to participate in the meeting in an autonomous and secular way that can aid in relationship building between their community and the municipal government.

Leamington

The Municipality of Leamington serves as an example of the most prevalent form of Indigenous content across our report. At the beginning of each regular meeting, a pre-written land acknowledgment was recited.¹⁹⁴ The land acknowledgement was consistently the same and was most often read by the mayor. At the municipality’s 2022 inaugural meeting, the land acknowledgement was read by Brenda Percy, the municipality’s Clerk/Manager of Legislative Services.¹⁹⁵

“The Municipality of Leamington acknowledges that this land is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie Peoples and specifically, the traditional territory of the Caldwell First Nation. The Municipality of Leamington values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island – North America who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix D.2.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ See Conclusion.

¹⁹⁴ Municipality of Leamington. (2024 February 13a). *The Corporation of the Municipality of Leamington, Minutes of the Council Meeting*. Available at <https://events.leamington.ca/meetings/Detail/2024-02-13-1800-Council-Meeting/179e1c4a-4aaa-416b-b61c-b149013bcc1d>.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Municipality of Leamington. (2024 February 13b). *Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://csg001-harmony.sliq.net/00321/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20200820/-1/12201> (retrieved August 27, 2026).

Our research found that the majority of municipalities that included Indigenous content did so in the form of a “land acknowledgment.” Leamington is an apt example of what this practise generally included, which is a member of staff or council, reading a standardized, often previously voted on acknowledgement. Though in Leamington, the content of the land acknowledgement does not move beyond the pre-written statement, in some municipalities, members of council or staff share more personalized stories, anecdotes or teachings from the Indigenous culture and people on whose land they reside.

In regular meetings, 222 of the 356 (62.4%) of the municipalities included Indigenous content, of which the majority were also some variation of a territorial acknowledgement.¹⁹⁷ The format and content of Leamington’s statement is becoming more prevalent in meeting proceedings in municipal Ontario, which reflects the general increase and practise of Indigenous content observable in other Canadian provinces.

Muskoka

The District Municipality of Muskoka’s 2022 inaugural council meeting featured three distinct elements worth exploring: (1) Tina Kilbourne, council staff, gave a land acknowledgement; (2) Chief Philip Franks of Wahta Mohawk First Nation gave a Thanksgiving Address; and (3) Chief Rhonda Williams-Lovett of Moose Deer Point First Nation delivered an invocation.¹⁹⁸

In the early stages of the meeting, Tina Kilbourne, Muskoka’s project manager of the Continuous Improvement Unit, was called upon to deliver a land acknowledgment statement.¹⁹⁹ Kilbourne began by reflecting on her own “learning journey” with Indigenous culture and reconciliation.²⁰⁰ In her reflection, she noted that the council committed to creating the town’s “Land Acknowledgement Guidelines and Framework” (LAGF) at the first Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table meeting in June of 2019.²⁰¹ She added that the LAGF helps any individual who delivers a land acknowledgement to do so in a “personal, heartfelt and honest way.”²⁰²

Kilbourne then moved to her land acknowledgement, sharing that Muskoka is the “traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, which includes the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy.”²⁰³ She also acknowledged that the “Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Nations” have relationships to the territory.²⁰⁴

She continued by acknowledging the three sovereign nations that are “home” to the Wahta Mohawks First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation and the Moon River Métis, the first and second of which are represented by the guests invited following Kilbourne’s

¹⁹⁷ See Appendix C.7.

¹⁹⁸ See Appendix D.4.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Acknowledgement.²⁰⁵ She continued to note the Treaties that include land within the municipality, calling on all levels of government to respect them.²⁰⁶ She ended the acknowledgement by sharing an Indigenous teaching that she called the “seven sacred gifts for guidance,” or the “Grandfather’s seven gifts,” which include “love, truth, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty and bravery,” and thanked attendees in English and in Ojibwe.²⁰⁷

This acknowledgement was one of the more lengthy and personal of those that had transcripts or recordings available to our research team. Notably, Kilbourne shared that the LAGF was created in conversation with Indigenous community in Muskoka with the intention to allow the municipality to more meaningfully and intentionally engage with the practice of land acknowledgements. Though statements like Muskoka’s may not be appropriate for every Indigenous culture in Ontario, clear consultation combined with a call to action for council to not only speak of reconciliation, but to act on it, stood out to our research team.

The meeting moved forward with the district Clerk, Amy Back, sharing a few words on the previous council’s work to build “meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities.” She asked Chief Philip Franks of Wahta Mohawk First Nation to deliver the “Mohawk Thanksgiving address.” Muskoka’s council did not have an available recording, and the transcript of the Thanksgiving Address was not attached to the agenda as the Land Acknowledgement and Invocation were, so we are unable to share the specific content of the address. However, Muskoka’s minutes do provide that the address was “traditionally used by First Nations to open and close major gatherings or meetings,” and included a resource about the Thanksgiving Address that was produced by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.²⁰⁸

The last guest invited to speak was Chief Rhonda Williams-Lovett of Moose Deer Point First Nation. She was introduced by the Clerk to “deliver the invocation.”²⁰⁹ As an Indigenous leader, Chief Williams-Lovett’s presence and participation may be understood as additional Indigenous content to the land acknowledgement and Thanksgiving Address. The use of the word “invocation” was flagged by our research team, as it is a key word often associated with prayer, warranting a closer look at the content of the speech.

Chief Williams-Lovett begins by thanking the organizers for the invitation and acknowledging the partnership established through the “Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table.”²¹⁰ She also congratulates the newly elected council and mayor.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. (n.d.). *Thanksgiving Address*. Available at <https://akwesasne.travel/our-stories/thanksgiving-address/>.

²⁰⁹ See Appendix D.4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Chief Williams-Lovett then shifts to a discussion of religion and personal faith. She says, “The one true constant though is our ability to believe in a Higher Power.”²¹² She continues to ask the room to bow their heads and “agree with me in prayer.”²¹³ The prayer includes a passage from 1 Timothy, reading to the room, “First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”²¹⁴ She then asks that this god guide the decisions of Muskoka District Council for the duration of their term.²¹⁵

The language of this speech is very similar to the problematic language discussed in the prayer section above; however, the context is different and important. Due to Chief Williams-Lovett’s participation as a representative from an Indigenous community, she may have been invited by the council with the purpose of further reconciliation and relationship building. Our research team does not have access to the exchange between Chief Williams-Lovett and council, and therefore we can not verify that council invited her to deliver the religious speech or prayer that was given.²¹⁶ Since Chief Williams-Lovett is not representing the municipality, but Moose Deer Point First Nation, it would be inappropriate for the municipality to direct what she can and cannot say in this context.

Religious neutrality is complex in the context of Indigenous culture due to a long history of violent state-led assimilation, containment, and attempted erasure of Indigenous people, as well as syncretism contributing to cultural practices that may be meshed in part with those of colonial religious traditions. In light of this historical context, municipal institutions should not be prescriptive when inviting Indigenous communities to participate in council meetings. By directing the way an Indigenous representative engages with the colonial structures of a settler government can reproduce the very relationship that has historically stripped Indigenous peoples the authority to define and practice their own traditions on their own terms.

With this context, and to maintain consistency with previous BCHA reports, we have excluded Muskoka from our 2022 inaugural meeting prayer statistics.²¹⁷ Though Chief Williams-Lovett’s invocation contained explicitly religious content, language, and tone, we, like municipal councils, are unable to prescribe or define the way that Indigenous content should or should not present in council meetings.

Councils should create opportunities that allow Indigenous leaders to determine how they wish to participate, including whether and how they incorporate cultural, spiritual, or ceremonial

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Further investigation expands outside the scope of this report but could include filling a Freedom Of Information request.

²¹⁷ Kerri, K., Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., & Bushfield, I. (2024). *An Impossible Task: Unconstitutional prayers in Saskatchewan municipal council meetings*. BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/an_impossible_task; and see Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp. 22 and 35.

elements. The role of council should be to welcome and facilitate Indigenous participation without prescribing its form or directing an Indigenous representative to “pray” or deliver an “invocation”.

Upon inviting, and then introducing, Chief Williams-Lovett to deliver an “invocation,” Muskoka’s council had already prescribed how she should engage with the meeting, and the type of speech that is expected of her. This means that the language a council uses becomes significant. For instance, if a council invites an Indigenous leader to “pray” or give an “invocation,” they may be influenced to give a religious speech. Rather, if council maintains the duty of neutrality and uses secular language by inviting a representative to provide a “welcome” or simply to “participate” in the meeting, the Indigenous representative is given autonomy to decide how they engage with council. Elsewhere, we have described this as people ‘colouring within the lines,’ that is, when someone is invited to do a specific action, they tend to structure the actions they take along what they were invited to do.

Ultimately, a closer look at Muskoka demonstrates some unique ways that Indigenous content surfaces in Ontario municipal meetings. Most notably, Muskoka is distinct because of the LAGF, and for providing an example of the importance of secular language and open-endedness when inviting Indigenous communities to participate in meetings in their own sovereign and autonomous way.



LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Potential Sources of Error

Despite searching municipal websites, submitting direct inquiries by email, and reaching out by phone, our research team was unable to locate inaugural meeting records for one municipality (Chapleau) and regular meeting records for four municipalities (Athens, East Zorra-Tavistock, Markstay-Warren, and Thessalon) for the selected dates. Gaps of this kind may be resolved by future research, but current data can only reflect the municipalities for which records were accessible.

Our method of review was limited by the available records, the responsiveness of municipalities, and technology constraints. Even where agendas and minutes were available, it remains possible that some prayers were overlooked. For instance, where a prayer, invocation, or religious representative was not referenced in the agenda or minutes, there is the distinct possibility that prayer may have occurred without our knowledge. Similarly, we would review a recording or transcript where an agenda listed a ‘moment of silence’; however, in instances where recordings were not available, we were unable to verify the exact practice. So a municipality may list a ‘moment of silence,’ but then introduce it with subtextual (a ‘stealth prayer’) or overt (‘a moment of prayerful reflection’) religious connotations. These limitations could lead to errors in the categorization of municipalities’ practices and create a data set that may present an artificially more secular result.

Were a prayer to occur privately among council members, it would likely not constitute a violation of *Saguenay*. As per the Supreme Court’s decision, the duty of religious neutrality applies to official municipal business, not the personal conduct of councillors. Municipal councillors, like all Canadians, have the freedom to practise or refrain from practising any religion of their choice, a distinction and right the BCHA respects and protects.²¹⁸

Another factor that has had an impact on our findings was our qualifications of what constituted a prayer. In our past Ontario report, invocations were categorized under the same umbrella as prayer.²¹⁹ After our observations, scanning through records, and finding that the label and content were the same for both the past observations and this one, our team found that those moments leaned more towards a secular moment than explicit prayer – even with the strong religious connotations of the title.

This report focuses on the formal practices of municipalities, since these are typically more available to the public, and therefore more readily available to study. Informal practices are considerably more fluid and impractical to track systematically. We note briefly the importance of council members using secular and inclusive language throughout council proceedings, and

²¹⁸ See Appendix A.

²¹⁹ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022).

we identified moments of religiously coded language in this review. However, our sample included regular meetings on two specific dates per municipality. It is plausible that other informal speeches or practices which defy neutrality occurred without being captured due to a lack of documentation, or simply occurred outside the dates of our research scope.

Another possible source of error is the overrepresentation of identified religious content in municipalities with thorough record-keeping. Our research methodology centred around the use of municipal records to make observations on the presence of religious content. We found that agendas, minutes, and recordings were not always available. We also found great variation in the level of detail of record keeping. For instance, some municipalities included minutes with transcripts of speeches, and others may have only listed “invocation” as an agenda item without including the deliverer in writing.

Taking this into account, municipalities with less detailed record-keeping were less likely to be identified as practicing ‘stealth prayer’ or having included other religious content in their ceremonies. These discrepancies stress the importance of transparency in public institutions, not only for the sake of secularism, but for government accountability and more accurate knowledge production on Canada’s municipal governance. We commend those municipalities that provide detailed agendas, minutes, and audiovisual recordings of their meetings. We encourage all municipalities to improve their standards and ensure the continued availability of past recordings, independent of the whims of individual technology platforms.

Municipal procedures and bylaws are also subject to revision. In addition to the information drawn from our previous report, “Open for Unconstitutional Business”, data collected for this report spanned from 2022 to 2024.²²⁰ Due to the gap between the last data collected and the release of this report, any subsequent changes to practices, whether that be removal of religious content or new inclusion of it, may not have been reported.

Lastly, transcriptions of prayers were completed by BCHA and volunteers. Our staff transcribed recordings largely manually. When closed captioning was unavailable or audio was damaged, our team used reasonable deductions to determine the content of the speech. In cases where audio was not clear enough to determine, or spoken in a language that our team does not speak, gaps are noted with a description of why that section of audio was not transcribed.

If you identify an error in our data, please contact us so we may update our dataset and findings accordingly.²²¹

²²⁰ Additional cross-referencing with more recent meetings and documents occurred where necessary.

²²¹ Email: info@bchumanist.ca.

Future Research

Though our emerging themes and Indigenous content sections widen the breadth of this report, there are themes and elements that our research team did not have the capacity to study in-depth, or that went beyond the parameters of our project.

One central component of this study was prayer practices at the inaugural council meetings held following the 2022 municipal elections. This followed suit with our previous research, which considered inaugural prayers after the 2018 elections.²²² Ontario's next municipal elections are scheduled for October 2026 and will produce a new wave of inaugural meetings shortly after the publication of this report. Additional research could go further back, reviewing inaugural ceremonies following the 2014 and 2010 elections, providing a glimpse into practices that pre-date *Saguenay*.²²³ Examining practices at those meetings would allow for a longitudinal comparison across multiple election cycles, offering a more comprehensive picture of the degree to which municipalities in Ontario are and are becoming compliant with *Saguenay*, with any remaining scofflaws facing potential litigation. It would also allow for further discussion on the increasing number of municipalities who include Indigenous content in municipal meetings.

Future research should be mindful of and pay close attention to both the frequency and types of Indigenous content that are practised at municipal meetings. As we note in our Indigenous content section, relationships between Indigenous communities and colonial municipalities should only be defined by those groups, as the diversity between Indigenous communities negates any possible universalized approach. The increasing number of municipalities that include Indigenous content in both inaugural and regular meetings indicates that, with further research, the issue may even contribute to debates surrounding Indigenous politics and Canadian political culture.

Further research may benefit from treating Indigenous content in municipal meetings as separate from the study of prayer to allow for more specific coding. Such differentiation would also allow for studying the types of engagement that occur between Indigenous communities and municipalities in Ontario. Any such research must approach the work with respect and account for Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing. Before beginning a project like this, it would be crucial to reach out to each Indigenous community that may be involved in a study and engage critically with, for, and toward a project that does not extract from or abuse those communities.

This report has also identified a gap between municipalities that received formal correspondence raising concerns about their practice and those that documented change as a result. However, this information was not tracked consistently and is not always included across past *Saguenay* Project reports. To better explore municipalities and their "Reluctance to Change," further research on the content of municipal responses could be a valuable addition to

²²² Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022).

²²³ One could theoretically study practices dating back to the nineteenth century but records become increasingly difficult to locate, even from a decade ago.

expand the breadth of our research. A closer study may involve the degree of municipal responsiveness to this tactic of advocacy, a linguistic analysis of how city staff, councils, and individual council members, frame their responses and whether changes follow a formal, consistent timeline. This would help illustrate what forms of advocacy and communication are most effective at achieving *Saguenay* compliance.

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. In fact, most provincial legislatures continue to open with overtly Christian prayers, as do the House of Commons and the Senate.²²⁴ This ongoing practice provides many avenues for future research and advocacy. The BCHA is committed to continuing to investigate prayer in all governmental contexts.

²²⁴ Phelps Bondaroff, Bushfield, & Jensen, (2023a); and see Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., R. Prasad, N. Laurence, A. Darveau-Morin, I. Bushfield & A. Thom. (2023b). *Legislative prayer across Canada*, 3rd ed. BC Humanist Association. Available at <https://www.bchumanist.ca/prayer-across-canada>

CONCLUSION

This report examined prayer and related practices across 360 Ontario municipalities with a population over 1,000, drawing on both 2022 inaugural meeting data and a sample of regular council meetings held in 2023 and 2024. Prayer was confirmed at the inaugural meetings of 62 (17.3%) of the 359 municipalities with available data. Ontario has the highest rate of unconstitutional municipal prayer of any province surveyed in the Saguenay Project. That figure has decreased from the 156 (47.6%) municipalities that included prayer at inaugural meetings in 2018, a drop of 63.7%.²²⁵ At regular meetings, prayer drastically decreased. Only two (0.6%) of 356 municipalities with available data, Laurentian Valley and Pembroke, routinely opened with prayer. This compares to our previous reporting, where nine (2.5%) municipalities included regular meeting prayers in our dataset spanning 2018–2020.

Men delivered a disproportionate share of the prayers in Ontario municipalities, with Christian content overwhelmingly dominating religious components of inaugural and regular meetings. Case studies of Laurentian Valley, Brampton, Brantford, St. Thomas, Kitchener, Pembroke, and Muskoka illustrated a range of responses, from outright defiance to superficial adaptation. Additionally, there was an increase in the number of municipalities who practised moments of silence (4.7% inaugural, 6.4% regular).

Replacing prayer with a moment of reflection, or incorporating a more inclusive ceremony altogether, is an impactful change. Many who choose to unconstitutionally pray in municipal meetings argued that prayer was necessary to ground the meeting; however, a 2024 Research Co. poll found that 39% of Canadians wanted their provincial legislatures to open with a moment of silence or reflection and another 22% wanted to see nothing at all.²²⁶ Inclusive practices, such as a moment of silence, demonstrate that a government is open and welcoming for everyone, not just those who share the same religion as members of council. On the surface, language changes may seem like a minor adjustment, but the impact is meaningful. Councils have the opportunity to make their communities places where all residents can take part, or they can resist change and maintain exclusion as the standard, while risking costly litigation.

In municipalities that have already done away with prayer, whether in regular or inaugural meetings, councils across Ontario and Canada have managed to maintain and uphold a sense of community, unity, and mindfulness. The Supreme Court was clear when it ruled prayer at municipal council meetings unconstitutional. Will your municipality follow the law? Secular meeting practices are not only a replacement for old and exclusionary traditions, but an opportunity to build more inclusive, welcoming, and democratic councils where every member of the community can feel represented and respected.

²²⁵ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), p.1.

²²⁶ Canseco M. (2024 August 28). "Half of Canadians Endorse UK-Style Mandatory National Service," Research Co. Available at <https://researchco.ca/2024/08/28/service-canada/>.

Finally, our research found significant growth in Indigenous content in Ontario municipal council meetings. These practices occur in a majority of 2022 inaugural meetings (49.9%) and regular council meetings (62.4%). Crucially, our conclusion is not that a measurable increase in the presence of land acknowledgments, or even the increase of invited Indigenous speakers and guests, equals an increase in reconciliation, Indigenous resurgence, or autonomy in the province. Rather, this increase should be understood as exactly what it is, an indicator that land acknowledgments are becoming more common practice across municipal proceedings. The degree to which 'reconciliation' has been worked toward can not, and as established in our discussion should not, be generalized. Reconciliation is a contested and constructed term, which can be forced onto Indigenous communities to alleviate what often boils down to white-settler guilt from municipalities. The BCHA urges municipalities in Ontario and across Canada to challenge their own conceptions of reconciliation, and seek more localized Indigenous perspectives and guidance for how best to engage with, support or advocate for the autonomy of Indigenous people(s).

Municipal government is where residents turn when they want to see change in their community, and that relationship depends on trust in council, the mayor, and other government representatives. That trust can be easily broken when residents are shown that their government disregards constitutional law, and also works to serve some residents over others. Even in communities where the majority of the population shares a common faith, there is bound to be a portion of that community that does not. Public institutions belong to everyone, and no one should be made to feel like an outsider in their own community. Despite the progress we have documented in Ontario municipalities, additional action is needed to ensure that municipal council meetings are welcoming to everyone, regardless of religious belief or lack thereof.

Specifically, the BCHA recommends:

- Municipalities must remove 'prayers' and/or 'invocations' from inaugural and regular council meetings.
- Municipalities should avoid using religious language, such as 'invocation(s)', to describe secular practices.
- Invited guests at inaugural and regular meetings must be selected in a religiously neutral way that does not result in perceived favouritism of a particular religious group or of religion over non-religion.
- 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. Moments 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.
- When including the National Anthem in council meetings, municipalities should ensure the version they select is the most recently approved version by Parliament.

- Municipalities should not be prescriptive when inviting Indigenous communities to participate in council meetings.
- Municipalities are encouraged to review their practices around all formal meetings and events to ensure the content of those meetings are secular and train staff and council in the duty of religious neutrality.
-

Upholding secularism in government should not be a difficult decision. It is the only choice that includes every resident – and it is the law. Councillors who are unwilling to embrace their entire communities, or comply with the constitution, should not be councillors at all. It is the role of council, after all, to serve everyone in a community despite their differences.

The BCHA remains cautiously optimistic moving forward, not only because of the improved findings in this report, but also due to the advocacy being done by communities to fight for more secular governments. In a world where our differences seem to be separating communities, where proposed bills target vulnerable populations, and elections are challenged by extremist and fascist groups, it is crucial to ensure that our governments prioritize secularism and inclusivity.²²⁷

There is still much work to be done. The BCHA will continue to build on the Saguenay Project with the hope that municipalities choose practices that are inclusive and welcoming.

No one is above the law. Municipalities have a responsibility to uphold the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and ensure that civic institutions serve everyone, regardless of their beliefs. It is time for municipalities to move beyond prayer and religious ceremonies and adopt meeting practices that respect every member of the community. Municipal prayer has no place in public governance. The law is clear: when governments speak for everyone, they must be neutral.

²²⁷ Montpetit, J. (2023 June 5). "Inside the fundamentalist Christian movement that wants to remake Canadian politics." *CBC News*. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/fundamentalist-christian-movement-1.6793677>.

APPENDIX A: THE *SAGUENAY* DECISION²²⁸

Section 2(a) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees Canadians the “freedom of conscience and religion.”²²⁹ 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.”²³⁰ 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,²³¹ 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.²³²

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.²³³ After the mayor ignore 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*.²³⁴ The following May, the Commission concluded that the prayer was discriminatory. Simoneau and the MLQ filed a case with the Tribunal in July 2008.²³⁵

²²⁸ Reproduced from Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022).

²²⁹ *Charter*, s 2.

²³⁰ *Saguenay*, para. 71; and see Boissinot, J. (2015 April 17). “The end of prayer in the councils of the nation.” *The Globe and Mail*. Available at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/the-end-of-prayer-in-the-councils-of-the-nation/article24010902/>.

²³¹ 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.

²³² *Saguenay*, para.75.

²³³ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

²³⁴ *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.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 11.

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 '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.²³⁶ 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."²³⁷ Further, the bylaw was for a "religious purpose" and therefore also a breach of neutrality.²³⁸ 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.²³⁹

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."²⁴⁰ 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."²⁴¹

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."²⁴² 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

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 12.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 18; and see *Quebec Court of Appeal*, 2013, QCCA 936, 363 D.L.R. (4th), para. 37.

²⁴¹ *Saguenay*, paras. 20 and 21.

²⁴² *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>.

that a ruling is reasonable so long as it falls within a “range of possible, acceptable outcomes” and can be supported by evidence and the law.²⁴³ 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.”²⁴⁴ 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.”²⁴⁵ 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.”²⁴⁶ 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.”²⁴⁷

The Supreme Court of Canada codified the test for which standard applies in its 2008 ruling in *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*.²⁴⁸ 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.²⁴⁹

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

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*, 2008 SCC 9. [2008] 1 S.C.R. 190, para. 55.

²⁴⁷ IIndi. (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/>.

²⁴⁸ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*; and see *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 55.

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 to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber,” declared the bylaw inoperative, and awarded Simoneau \$30,000 in damages.²⁵⁰ 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.”²⁵¹ 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.”²⁵² 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.*²⁵³

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.”²⁵⁴

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.”²⁵⁵ 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

²⁵⁰ *Saguenay*, paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, para. 23.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, paras. 68 and 71.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 137.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 73-75.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 120.

*fight because I worship Christ. I want to go to heaven and it is the most noble fight of my entire life.*²⁵⁶

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 behalf of the state, and thus turning council meetings into a “preferential space for people with theistic beliefs.”²⁵⁷

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.²⁵⁸

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.”²⁵⁹

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*.²⁶⁰ 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.”²⁶¹ 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

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 92 and 116, emphasis removed.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 113 and 120.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 120 and 121.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 50.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 166.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para. 165.

Tribunal, and is in fact its 'daily fare.'²⁶² 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."²⁶³ Justice Abella elaborated that "we have never dissected the right in order to subject its components to different levels of scrutiny."²⁶⁴ 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.*²⁶⁵

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."²⁶⁶ 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."²⁶⁷

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.*²⁶⁸

²⁶² *Ibid.*, para. 167.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, para. 169.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 170.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 173.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 168.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 74.

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.

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."²⁶⁹ 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."²⁷⁰ This reticence to comply with the law underscores the importance of our research into prayer at municipal council meetings across Canada.

²⁶⁹ Beaman, L.G. (2020). *The transition of religion to culture in law and public discourse*. London, UK: Routledge.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

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B.1: Arran-Elderslie

Population: 6,913

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁷¹

Reverend Craig Bartlett:

"I invite you to bow your heads or take whatever gesture of spirituality that is comfortable to you. Holy one, you are known by many names, and you are beyond all names. You are the spirit of life, the spirit of love, the spirit of community and the spirit of justice. We ask your blessings on the people who have been elected to lead the municipality of Arran-Elderslie, a community in which we live, work, play, and worship. We hope that they, as leaders, will see their roles not only as makers of decisions or as fixers of problems, but also as listeners and learners.

May they be people who are not only agents of change, may they also be people who are open to change, change even within themselves. May they remember, especially in times of noisiness, discussed as political debate, that they are not only leaders but also servants, and that it is their responsibility, and ours, to serve the common good of all. May they remember that no matter where we live, everyone, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of faith or lack of faith, regardless of identity of any kind, is our neighbour. May they remember the calls of prophets throughout the ages to respect and protect the least of those among us. Children, elder, the poor, the hungry, the homeless, those who live with illness of any kind, immigrants, displaced people and strangers in our midst, those who live on the margins of society, those who are alone and those who are forgotten. May they, and we, have the wisdom and courage to know and do what is right, and 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, the spirit of justice, and by the spirit of love. We hold up these prayers and wishes in the name of all that we hold sacred and holy. In the name of all that we hold to be good and right and true. Maybe so. And let everyone say— Amen."

B.2: Aylmer

Population: 7,699

Inaugural meeting, November 16, 2022.²⁷²

Major Rick Shirran:

"Thank you for the privilege of being able to do this. Shall we pray together?"

²⁷¹ Municipality Of Arran-Elderslie. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting Of Council* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-arranelderslie.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=2d338e11-0e11-4624-8e30-3c9df24b64b4>.

²⁷² Town of Aylmer Ontario. (2022 November 16). *Inaugural Meeting of Council for 2022-2026* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-IFnani7_4.

Lord God our father, we acknowledge your presence here with us this evening. At this inaugural meeting of this council, we seek guidance and blessing. These are new days for our council members and for this community. This is a new administration, these are new community leaders, your word tells us in the book of first Timothy three that if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. We also read in Titus 1 and 2 that an overseer must be above reproach; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard, or violent, or greedy for gain. For those who aspire to leadership, 1st Timothy 3 also gives us a list of credentials and characteristics that a person in leadership should possess. We- My prayer for the members of this council is that they would seek to possess all that is good and pure and noble in your sight. We also know that the office of leadership is not always filled with joyful days. Over these next months and years, the members of this council may face many tough decisions, many sleepless nights and possible opposition as they go about their daily tasks of administering the community of Aylmer. Keep them strong in their resolve to do the right thing for that day and for the days ahead.

May they seek your wisdom and strength, and at the end of their tenure, may they be able to look back and say that many good things have happened. Bless them and their families. We are reminded today, lord, that you are a good, good father. With this in mind, we each pray for and lift up our local leadership for you to bless and to guide. In appreciation of their service and responsibilities, we come before you and with their needs in reference as well as seeking for peace among our nation. We thank you for our mayor elect, and for our deputy mayor elect and our councillors who serve people in our community. I pray that they would serve with renewed vigour to address the needs of our community.

Today, many of our cities and towns in Canada, many in our cities and towns in Canada are at a crossroads. Therefore, we seek your blessing and favour upon our municipal leaders. May they engage with the citizens of Aylmer in productive measures to continue to apply strategies for health and safety, as well as launching a solvent solid plan for economic re-establishment and growth. May they corporately find a balanced strategy to address the needs of our town and surrounding area, with while enabling each citizen to be able to move forward in positive participation in our community. We pray for outstanding leadership at this time. So we look to you for paradigm shifts as needs demand lord. Thank you for your good and gracious favour, which you bestow willingly on people as we pray in intercession at this critical time in our history. We look to you lord as our saviour and redeemer. Give our mayor and counsellors capable assistance through the administration and staff who serve our town with them. May each one gladly contribute in any way, whether humble or significant. We pray for unity of purpose so that good strategies and plans may be implemented quickly. Bless the town council as they meet, and provide for and protect each member and their families these days. In Jesus name we pray and gladly bless you lord with praise and honour. Amen and amen."

B.3: Brampton

Population: 656,480

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁷³

Shaykh Faisal:

“(Speaks in Arabic) I’ll begin in the name of all mighty God who is most gracious and most merciful. My name is Shaykh Faisal. I am the president of the Islamic Forum of Canada, and one of the religious leaders of the Muslim community of Brampton. It is my honour to speak on behalf of the Muslim community of Brampton at this inauguration of the 2022-26 City of Brampton council. I take this opportunity to congratulate the honourable mayor Patrick Brown and all members of council on their victory in the recent municipal election. It is important for the city of Brampton to have a leadership that cares for everyone. The elected members of council have this God-given opportunity to show this feeling of care and concern. Working together and moving forward to get things done in this city is a great responsibility bestowed on all members of council. During the last term of council, fighting hate and Islamophobia were important issues; the exemplary leadership of Mayor Patrick Brown and members of council was a shining light for municipalities across Canada. Doing the right thing for everyone is what makes Brampton stand out as a leader in Canada. It is my hope and prayer that Mayor Patrick Brown and all members of council will continue to be that shining light for all Canadians.

I conclude these brief remarks with a special prayer that all mighty God bless Mayor Patrick Brown and all members of council, all the citizens of Brampton, bless this province of Ontario, and bless our beautiful country, Canada. With this intent in our hearts, we turn to God Almighty and pray. I will recite a special prayer from the holy Qur’an, which Muslims recite many times every day. It is called Al-Fatiha. (Speaks in Arabic). May the peace of God Almighty be with each and every one of you. Thank you.”

Pundit Tripathi and Pandit Shukla:

“I am Pundit Tripathi, and my colleague is Pandit Shukla. As a Hindu priest, I’m flattered to be here on behalf of all (Hindu) followers, as well as all Bramptonians. At the occasion of this oath-taking ceremony, I pray to the Almighty that he bless our very energetic and authentic Mayor Patrick Brown and all city council members. I pray that God provide strength to our, to the members to make Brampton a prosperous and crime-free city, (in Hindu). May they bring happiness, harmony, peace and prosperity for all of you (inaudible). Thank you so much.”

Daljit Sekon:

²⁷³ The Corporation of the City of Brampton. (2022 November 15b). *City Council – Inaugural Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-brampton.escibemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?id=972b1d63-a5f2-4597-9a0c-ea1f9f85d37b>.

“(Speaks in Punjabi). My name is Daljit Singh Sekon. I am the president of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Malton. I’m here to congratulate Patrick Brown for his second term to be a mayor of the city of Brampton. I have known Patrick for many years. Throughout those years, he was always there whenever we need him. So I want to give special thanks to Patrick for (inaudible), on those issues. I noticed that not only the second nation he stands with every community. So he’s a very genuine guy, I notice he is whatever he is behind doors closed, he is that in public as well, and I know the next four years will go smoothly and Brampton is in good hands.

And I notice one thing, whenever I meet him, morning, noon or evening, he is always full of energy. I don’t know what the secret is, maybe we’ll have to ask his wife what kind of drug he takes. I’m looking forward to working with Patrick and the council and may (inaudible) to bless them, his team, an amazing team. At the end, we do the (in Punjabi), the two lines.

I want to ask everyone here who can read them to read aloud with me. (all speak in Punjabi). Ask the best for all. What you do basically when you read this line, when you read with full passion, you start receiving the full positive energy. So, the positive energy when you throw on others, what will come back to you? Positive. So that’s the (in Punjabi) that they give us. And we’re looking forward, and thank you so much, everyone (in Punjabi).”

Pastor Jamie Holtom:

“Good evening, everyone. My name is Jamie Holtom, I’m part of the ministry team at North Bramalea, and I’m also the chaplain for the Brampton fire department. I’m privileged to play that role in our city. I uh, am honoured to represent the Christian community this evening and really excited to, I love the vision that Patrick shared tonight for our city, and really excited to serve together in our city.

Jesus said there are two things that are the most important things to remember. One is to love God, and the other is to love others. That’s my prayer for the council as we come together tonight and get ready to move into action, that we would know God’s love for us, that you would know God’s love for you, on some of those days where maybe you get more complaints than compliments, do you know what I mean? Does that day happen once in a while? So that you would know that you are loved deeply in a very real way, and that we would love others, that we would love one another. And loving one another doesn’t mean that we always agree with each other, but it means we are always aligned with each other. And out of that alignment and that love, it will just flow out into our city as we serve God together. I’ll leave you with a phrase that a very close spiritual mentor of mine always shared with me when I was taking on a new assignment. She would say, “Go get ‘em.” And I knew what she meant, she meant, we’re with you, we’re praying for you, you’ve got this, God’s got this, go get ‘em. So friends, we are with you, we are praying for you, you’ve got this, God’s got this, go get ‘em. Thank you.”

B.4: Brighton

Population: 12,108

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁷⁴

Reverend Wanda Stride:

“(4:29 Audio Cut out) to reflect upon the peace and goodwill that we hope is in this room and will be here for the years to come. Let us pray, living creator, bless us on this evening with a sense of hope, gratitude and purpose. As we begin work with a new Council in our municipality, I give you thanks to each person who was willing to make the sacrifice of time and their gifts to serve our area in this way. And I especially give thanks for the peaceful process that brought us to this evening’s inaugural meeting.

And so, as we look ahead to another four years together may you bless this council with a sense of purpose help them to wade through the details and obstacles to remember why they decided to let their name stand for service in this way bless them with a sense of trust that they may assume the best of each other and of the people who come before them with concerns or suggestions and finally bless them with your peace a peace that defies understanding so that they may be grounded and loving and compassionate in all decisions and all interactions no matter how chaotic the world feels around us I pray for respectful and dignified relationships between the staff of Brighton between the counselors and the citizens of this beautiful community for those of us who will be affected by their decisions give us also a sense of purpose and trust and peace so that we may feel empowered to hold these people accountable when necessary in a respectful and honoring way and may we share our support and gratitude when we have that opportunity bless this new partnership I pray and all the work that is to come before us. Amen.”

B.5: Dysart et al

Population: 7,182

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁷⁵

Pastor Bev Hicks:

“As I always begin when I, uh, always state when I begin giving an invocation to anything like this. I usually state what our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* states, whereas Canada was founded upon the principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. So I'm here today to give spiritual input...

²⁷⁴ Brighton Ontario. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Ceremony - Term of Council 2022-2026* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-p_Boia6Otk.

²⁷⁵ Municipality of Dysart et al. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting of Council - November 15, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62ZBkw4yzlw>.

At this point I'm just going to invite everybody, if they would, to pray with me while I just pray God's blessing, direction and guidance for you all over the next four years. God in heaven I come before your throne on behalf of the members of this Council today may your wisdom and strength rest upon them may they serve with Integrity honesty and be trustworthy may they work and strive together in unity. I pray for your blessing upon their homes and families that they be safe and peaceful homes. May this be a prosperous four years for them, successful four years free from any setback hindrance or interruption. May they serve in humility yet take pride for the service that they do. I ask this in the name of your son Jesus. Amen. Thank you everyone and God bless you."

B.6: Haldimand County

Population: 49,216

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁷⁶

Pastor Wesley DeVries:

"Let's pray. Heavenly father, we thank you for this opportunity tonight to welcome in new leadership in our community. I thank you for blessing Haldimand as we look back at our rich heritage and see what you have done in the past, how far you brought us and how blessed our community truly is. And right now we pray for wisdom for our leaders. We pray for our new Mayor, Shelley Bentley, as she takes leadership tonight. We pray for your wisdom and direction. We also thank you Lord for bringing in Natalie, Sam and Patrick O'Neill and for what you're going to do as they bring their thoughts to the table and as they work together with uh, with this community in order to bring the plans and the changes and the things that are best according to the citizens of the local residence of Haldimand and I thank you lord that you will direct each of the leaders of our community and give unity of direction in their plans and we pray for your blessing on all the Council meetings to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

B.7: Hanover

Population: 7,967

Inaugural Meeting, December 5, 2022.²⁷⁷

Pastor Lyndsay McGregor:

"Well, please join me as we pray for our Council. Lord of all we come and we gather as people who have a sincere love for our town of Hanover, and we give thanks for the wonderful diversity of people of all generations, organizations, activities and businesses that are within our community. Lord of all you have heard each council member swear into office, and we are here

²⁷⁶ The Corporation of Haldimand County. (2022 November 15). *Special Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-haldimandcounty.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?id=b9a9864a-7fbc-4a5d-b90d-2a4940973015>.

²⁷⁷ Town of Hanover. (2022 December 5). *Council Inaugural - December 5, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umcB_jgOmeA.

to support and bless the dedicated individuals who have been elected to serve as Hanover's Town Council. We give thanks for each of our council members as they come with unique skills and perspectives, and life experience.

Be present with our Council as they provide leadership to our town. Give them wisdom, strength, courage and compassion as they continue to provide vision and direction for the growth and the development of our community. Lord of all, may each person here continue to encourage the leadership of our town, our Council and all the staff to all who in so many different ways contribute to making Hanover a vibrant town that is welcoming, friendly, caring and supportive community. And we are deeply thankful, Lord. Lord of all, as Hanoverians, we are grateful for our town of Hanover. We celebrate our town and look forward to the future with confidence. Content and happy to echo the words of our founder, Abraham Buck, 'it is good for us to be here.' So watch over us, I pray. Amen."

B.8: Havelock-Belmont-Methuen

Population: 5,083

*Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.*²⁷⁸

Pastor Dave Russel:

"We, the church, are extremely appreciative this council's recognition how integral the local church is to the community. In fact, it is historically apparent that the more a society drives out the church and her values, the more prone to corruption, and the more collapse that society becomes. And I am confident that so long as this township continues to recognize God's church that's the backbone of its moral character, and seeks her counsel in matters of faith and religion, God will continue to bless this town.

This leads me to a passage that I have selected for today's ceremony that I'd like to share with you. It is, of course, found in God's word, now the Book of Proverbs. It was written by a man named Solomon. It is clear by what we find in scripture that, aside from Jesus Christ Himself, Solomon was arguably the wisest man to ever live, no offense to any of you people right now. In fact, he was so renowned for his god-given wisdom that many other kings and queens ruling at that time would take long trips in order to seek his counsel, and they would go themselves. Now, aside from amassing thousands of miles of land and property as a king, he also was one of the wealthiest human beings in history, with many historians estimating, according to today's standards, his net worth to be in the trillions.

Now, as remarkable as all this is, it was just the man, and all that he was, and all that he had was from God. And I say that because I want us to understand that the verse I'm going to share with you may have been written by a man who, by the world's standards, might have been idolized

²⁷⁸ Township of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Council Meeting Tuesday, November 15, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvFZ9SILKoo>.

and worshiped for all he had, he would have been nothing without God's blessing. So ultimately this is God's counsel and God's wisdom, even though it's written by Solomon, and of course Solomon obviously saw in his life the blessing of its instruction, and I hope that really all of us do as well.

The verse we're going to look at is Proverbs 29, verse 2, and I promise this is not a sermon; it's just a short observation, and it certainly applies to the leaders that we've elected here today. This is what it says, Proverbs 29 verse 2: 'When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.' I'm going to read it one more time: 'When the righteous increase, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.'

Now, although it is very unlikely that any of you will share in the financial success that Solomon saw as a leader, you do share something in common with him: God has put you in a position of leadership. In fact, elsewhere in scripture we are told that it is God who has given society its leaders, and it is God who endows these leaders with the measure of wisdom required to bring Him honour in those positions. And although it is impossible to please everyone, you'll find out, if you haven't already figured that out, this instruction from Proverbs should definitely be a guide for all of you, and really for all of us.

We have all experienced the difficulty of being under the authority of someone who is unrighteous. Maybe it was an employer who made it very difficult for you to endure your job. Maybe it was a teacher who made us regret going to class. And maybe some of you had the unfortunate experience of having a parent that ruled you harshly, and the long-term effects of that have probably been devastating. On the other hand, when there is someone we look up to because we know that they use their authority in an honourable way, we are thrilled when we see them prosper.

I would suggest that the members of this council have at least gained the respect of those that have voted for you, and clearly, as this is not the first term that some of you have served, you are obviously doing something right. But I would implore you to consider these wise words from Proverbs as you embark on this next journey in your respective positions. You, as did King Solomon, have God to thank for where you are today, and I hope that this thought keeps you humble.

And may remember that the folks at Havelock Fellowship Baptist Church are praying for all of you. And now I would just like to invite you to bow your heads with me as I offer prayer on behalf.

Heavenly Father, thank you for these individuals and the responsibilities you have given them. May remind them often of this precious truth we've looked at today. May you impress upon them the reality that you will hold them accountable for how they ruled the citizens of Havelock. Would you also cause your church to keep them in constant prayer, and may we also deal with them graciously and patiently as we seek to be faithful ambassadors of your son, Jesus Christ,

Our Lord. It is in his precious name that we ask these things, and for his glory alone. Amen. Thanks.”

B.9: Innisfil

Population: 43,326

Inaugural Meeting, December 7, 2022.²⁷⁹

Reverend Howard Courtney:

“Your Worship, Lynn Dollin, Deputy Mayor Kenneth Fowler, members of council, today you receive the mandate given by our local residents to govern this community of communities. Today, this municipality launches into a new day. The past council has worked hard and together making difficult decisions to bring us into a day of growth and increased prosperity. It has not come without pain and with challenges, sometimes imposed by higher jurisdictions.

These council chambers are a place of respect where differing opinions can be voiced and yet where each individual can feel safe and respected. Over this past season of COVID, this town hall has often been vacant while on online virtual meetings were held. But, we hope all of that is forever history.

In your office as you serve this community, you will do so better by building bridges instead of barriers. The level of cooperation that you show to those who work alongside you will be reflected by the residents around you. You will need to partner with those beside you to see things from a bigger perspective, to see the town as a whole as opposed to simply your ward.

You will need tolerance and patience in planning and putting into motions things that won't be a reality until you're actually in your next term or the next council are in place. And to do this, you must see yourselves and the staff of the municipality all on the same team flying the same flag together. There will always be unexpected things that take place in council's purview. And this past council, of course, found themselves mourning the loss of our two so cynical police officers. You will need to stand together and work together in a variety of situations. There are outstanding long-term issues relating to transportation, development, health care, infrastructure, affordable housing, hidden homelessness within our town, social and mental health, and cultural diversity. All of these will need your continued attention and your commitment to address them. Our future and the future of those who follow us will be significantly impacted by your decisions.

I challenge you to wisely take the calculated risks that are necessary, that separate us from other municipalities, allowing us to rise above the usual and acceptable, and remain a community of excellence, viewed positively across the province and across our country as a community that embraces its people and encourages balanced growth and economical development for all. I challenge you to respect the culture and the heritage of our town. I

²⁷⁹ Town of Innisfil. (2022 December 7). *Council Inauguration Ceremony - December 7 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7kba2rltes>.

challenge you as elected leaders to walk with personal integrity, financial accountability, and municipal transparency. We are positioned for success. Let's together seize the opportunities before us, and may God bless you as you serve this term together.

Let us pray. Oh God, our helper, our guide, our comforter, we bow to acknowledge your goodness and your blessing that's been so richly poured out upon this municipality. We thank you, oh God, for the rich inheritance that we have received. Brought to us through the wisdom, diligence, and hard work of those who've gone before this council. We are thankful for a community that we can enjoy the gift of life and health that we've been blessed with. We recognize that every breath we have is a gift from above. We thank you for the freedom we share and the privilege of our democracy that has been expressed in the election of this council. We thank you, Lord, for each member of this council who stands before us today. They have willingly, with open hearts and open minds, surrendered their lives to the scrutiny of this community with a hope to make this, the town of Innisfil, a better place. Bless each of them along with their families, oh Lord, we pray. We invoke your help as we enter this new season. Be with us in this ceremony of inauguration today. We offer these, our leaders, our support to pray for them, to encourage them, and to assist them in their term of office. Protect them, oh God. Keep them from fraud, from bribery, and from corruption of every kind. Impart wisdom and understanding as they wrestle with the issues that they will face. And God, keep our land glorious for years to come. We ask these things in the name of God the Father, God the Son, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Rabbi Zevi Kaplan:

"Congratulations.

Almighty God, master of the universe, we stand before you in prayer. Bestow your divine blessings upon our newly reelected mayor, deputy mayor, and members of council of the town of Innisfil. Grant these public servants who have been democratically elected to make laws and decisions for the citizens of our town with compassion, mindfulness, and sensitivity in the noble pursuit of justice, morality, and righteousness. May they find favor in the eyes of God and humankind so that all decisions, regulations, and legislation be enacted with fairness, equity, and inclusion so that they be graciously accepted and embraced by all.

The town of Innisfil has recently suffered a devastating tragedy when two of our finest have lost their lives while in the line of duty. Their loss has created a painful void for their families, friends, and for all of Innisfil. Their grief is shared by us all.

In the words of King David, Psalm 121, 'I lift my eyes to the mountains. From where will my salvation come? My salvation is from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.' In wake of tragedy, the most influential Jewish leader in modern times, universally known as the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory, taught that the question we must not ask ourselves is why, rather we must ask ourselves, "What can we do?" May you, almighty God, grant us all the understanding that the ultimate way to eliminate such catastrophe is by

embodying the universal values of the seven commandments issued to Noah after the great flood, the foremost of which is not to commit murder.

Council is gathered here tonight to fulfill another one of these commandments to govern by just laws. May you almighty God grant those chosen to serve and protect us all the protection they may need. As is stated in Psalm 127, if the Lord will not guard a city, the vigilance of its watchmen is in vain.

May our town know of no such tragedy a tragic events again. Instead, may our town serve as a beacon of light for peoples of all backgrounds and walks of life, and may we merit to see true peace here in our municipality, in our province, and throughout the world. And may we merit to witness the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, they will beat their swords into plowshares, nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. And let us say amen."

B.10: Kitchener

Population: 256,885

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.²⁸⁰

Swami Chaitanya Jyoti Ji Maharaj:

"In our system, whenever we have any inaugural, we recite the four mantras, I recite those and I will let you know what they convey to the community. The first is Gaitri Mantra. We call it Gaitri Mantra. [speaks Sanskrit] that supreme Brahmit who is all pervasive, supreme truth, wisdom and bliss, the divine solar creator and the only worshipful one. We meditate on the splendor of this radiance and pray to him that he enlightens our intellect. The Rishi says that, he never says that, please oh God give me this, give me that. He says, please guide our intellect. If the intellect is guided, you will do the good things. And if your intellect is not developed, you cannot do good things.

So Gaitri Mantra, we recite in any augural, before we pray to God, please guide our intellect. The duties that we are doing, they need intellect. If we are not intelligent, we cannot perform all the duties. So the next mantra we recite on the inauguration is, [speaks Sanskrit]

[speaks Sanskrit] All of you know, the most computer friendly language, these days declared. He says, [speaks Sanskrit] oh God may all be happy. We don't say only we will be happy, our community will be prepared, oh God may all be happy. [speaks Sanskrit], may all be healthy. [speaks Sanskrit], may all face good things in life. [speaks Sanskrit], no one have suffering in his life.

²⁸⁰ City of Kitchener. (2022 November 21b). *Special Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-kitchener.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=aad521fb-8d25-4002-9a76-2d41706a37b5&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English>.

We pray for the whole humanity in this. And the other mantra, which teaches us, that what should we work? [speaks Sanskrit] May we all be protected, may we all be nourished, may we work together as great energy. May our intellect be helped and let there be no enmity among us. Om, peace in me, peace in the nature, peace in the divine forces. Everywhere there should be peace. This mantra is very powerful. And in the Gaitriya Mantra, they have done the research, they say, it has 24 syllables. Every syllable has 110,000 great wives in one second.

So powerful. When we recite this, we pray to God, please give us the wisdom, so that we can do all our duties in the way they should be done. And this is a very powerful prayer, that in every inaugural, wherever we have any authority, we recite these mantras. And the last mantra is [speaks Sanskrit]

All is infinite. God is infinite. And nothing can be taken out from Him, and nothing can be put into Him. He is all perfect. We should pray to Him every day. And we should pray to God. And now, in this inauguration of the council, they are having so many responsibilities. And they should be done with wisdom, love, and service. This mantra says, please do all your duties with wisdom, love, and service. With wisdom, you decide the things. And with love, you should take everyone in you. And nothing is, nothing, no one is separate from us. They are our own, all communities, our family. And we should do all the things as a matter of service to all of them. So, on this occasion, I congratulate all the elected and re-elected councillors. And I pray to God, please give them the wisdom, so that they can use their, you can do their duties in the way they should be done. My heartfelt congratulations and blessings to all of you. Thank you.”

Father Myroslaw Tataryn:

“Mr. Mayor, members of Council, family members, and guests, first of all, it's an honour to be here with you this evening. And I wish to thank you, Mr. Mayor, and the previous Council, and all the citizens of Kitchener, for the continued support and assistance that you've offered the people of Ukraine over the past almost 9 very difficult, difficult months. In particular, I would note the overwhelming hospitality which you were showing those Ukrainians who came to our city over this period. Thank you.

Today is, of course, a very special day for all members of Council, family members. But it's also a particularly important day for members of our Ukrainian community. It is for us Saint Michael's Day. Saint Michael is regarded as the angelic protector of Ukraine's Kyiv, and by extension, the protector of all of Ukraine. He protects not by force or by sort of his own power, but rather by reminding everyone: human strengths and power have limits. There is, however, a greater power and a greater strength which give all humanity meaning and view, transcendent values, and inform the path of the righteous. In other words, this day reminds us of the greater values to which we should all commit ourselves and strive for in our day-to-day engagement.

It is for this reason that one of the great churches of Kyiv is named after Saint Michael, and has a church monastery which has an important historical role and message for us today. The church has come to symbolize for Ukrainians a place of safety and hospitality. Historically, the

ceasing tolls of its bells were a warning signal to citizens of Kyiv that an enemy attack was imminent. During the most violent days of the Maidan protest in 2014, citizens were invited into the monastery complex as a place of sanctuary. There they were given food and a place to sleep, a place of welcome and hospitality, a valuable example of resolve today.

As you begin your work for the residents of Kitchener, I ask the creator to grant you the wisdom in following this example, to continue to make this city a community that embodies the path of the righteous and justice for all, a city of safety and hospitality for every person who steps on its soil, a community that appreciates this land is one which has been known to us by the creator, and which we are to care for and pass on to future generations. May you be a Council of compassion, of love, and of wisdom in all the decisions you make, and may you be blessed in all the work you do. Thank you.”

Father Toby Collins:

“You probably won't recognize me outside of that Bobcat loader I usually am seen with, and it's a joy to be here. It's an honor. And, you know, Barry, when I was thinking about what it is to be a good community leader, I did think of several times when I've seen you, you know, in public, and then just in people's homes sometimes, and we shared meals and wings and beer, you know, at Musunuski's. And through it all, I'm edified at your love for people of all walks of life. It is a remarkable thing to see that, and inspiring for myself and for many people here. I definitely think that is a quality that I see in many leaders in Waterloo Region, but especially in your leadership as you continue to move forward.

In fact, my mom, you had conversation with her, I guess, along the way or something, but she doesn't like many politicians, I'll tell you that. And she said, you know, 'I like Barry, you know, he's real, he's real, and he treats his responsibilities like it's his vocation in life.' And so I hope you continue to serve in the capacities that you are.

And as I reflect more about what it is to be a community leader, I mean, Barry's joined by many other leaders in Waterloo Region who exemplify great characteristics. One of them is love. Love is the source of much of what we do to embrace each other as brothers and sisters, to face our past with courage, humility, and a desire to heal. Love is what opens up our doors to new relationships that, you know, when we think we've got everything figured out for ourselves, you know, there's somebody new who may need our help. Or maybe it's us that need some new perspective on things that brings life to us all. So love, I think, undergirds a lot of what we're doing. And if we are to move forward as a community that's interested in achieving more, and healing and growing together, I think we would do well to find love in the many different faiths and cultures and religions and the diversity of humanity that exists here in the region, and especially in the city of Kitchener.

Next, I just want to comment on the word joy. I think, you know, as we move out of this time of being in bubbles and changing rapidly, and in such severe ways at times, you know, the unrest and division seems to be in the air that we breathe. I think a good leader recognizes that and

then moves forward and says, "You know what, there is a future." You know, if we all pitch in, if we all work together, we're all honest with each other, and, you know, kind of take ownership of that which we, you know, kind of are still grieving maybe the loss of, we can move forward into a norm that we have yet to experience together. So I think somebody who can identify that and then take the lead, ultimately, I think, radiates joy, because they have a hope in their hearts, a hope in humanity that everything's going to be okay in the end, you know, if we stick it out and work through these difficult times.

And finally, I just want to comment on something that has already been said in different ways this evening, and that is being able to recognize the humanity in each and every one of us. You know, as I do work at Better Tent City, most of all the people there, and many of the homeless in downtown Kitchener, want to know that their lives matter, and they want to be remembered, okay? And that's true for us all. You know, as I work for the different benefactors who often live different lifestyles, I remember David Butler from Allaire Homes, he's building this encampment with us, with Barry's cooperation and other people, and, you know, he looks at me and he says, "I don't know if I can live in this space in between, you know? We're building this, it's like a trailer park, and it's so difficult and challenging in many ways. And I have to leave this afternoon and go build a three-hundred-thousand-dollar renovation on a home where nobody is going to stay in it," he says. "It's so difficult." But to live in that tension, and to find the humanity in people who perhaps have an abundance of resources and the humanity in those who have much less, I think, is the key to living in that gray area that exists, and to let go of the temptation to move into the black and white.

So, from a christian tradition, I would like to offer, in closing, the prayer of St. Francis, because I believe St. Francis was a great leader. I believe he inspires Pope Francis today, who's doing great work in Canada and around the world to help us all heal and reconcile, and to move forward in a spirit of love and joy. And so I share this prayer with you, hundreds of years old:

Lord, our Creator, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy. Oh Creator, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, and to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to share a few words. May god bless you all."

B.11: Lambton Shores

Population: 11,876

*Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.*²⁸¹

Reverend Dr. Christine O'Reilly:

"Good evening, everyone. I see a lot of familiar faces, but for those who don't know me, I'm Christine O'Reilly, usually called Chris, and I'm the pastor at Knox Church here at Thetford and I have served here since 1988, so I've been around for a little while. I was 10 when I came so... I want to thank you for the privilege of being with you this evening, and in case you see me scooting out, it is not that I'm abandoning you in any way, shape or form, but I [indecipherable] with Doug a couple of days after he asked me to do this, I got a call from Warwick Township council that I come and address their inaugural meeting of council at 8 o'clock tonight. So I will be leaping and dashing through the snow once more; it's a good time for me to go. Anyway, I do thank you so much for the privilege of being with you this evening, the first meeting for the new council of Lambton Shores. And I want to thank those of you sitting right here at the front for your willingness to serve on council, and I also want to thank those who ran for office this time and were not voted in. I do want to wish you well in the term ahead. These are times that are filled with anxiety, uncertainty and division, and yet, in my experience, there is always a stubborn hope within the human heart, mind and soul that keeps looking ahead to better things and better days.

So, I address you today as those who have been chosen for leadership in our community. And leadership is something that we are in desperate need of these days. Leadership that is not simply about winning an election but seeking to serve. Leadership is not easy. As someone who also leads in our community, albeit in a very different way than political office, I know personally how difficult it is. I know that leadership means making hard decisions and not being able to make everyone happy. Leadership also means being able to listen when you would much rather be doing the talking; more often I might wish to, being humbly able to say, 'I could be wrong.' A leader I admire named Gordon MacDonald, who is now well into his 80s, once said this: 'What the world needs now is not smarter, more intelligent people; what the world needs now is deeper people. Deeper people, because deeper people make good leaders.' Deeper people who make good leaders are people who do not just react but reflect and respond. Deeper people who make good leaders are people who are eager to learn. Deeper people who make good leaders know what they don't know and are willing to find out. Deeper people who make good leaders are humble. Deeper people who make good leaders are compassionate, and deeper people who make good leaders value character above conquest and the common good above personal reward.

²⁸¹ The Municipality of Lambton Shores. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-lambtonshores.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=5b0c8c87-f1c0-4496-a8f6-d8789a9bf339&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English>.

As you work with each other this term, as you face each other and sometimes face off against each other and as you deal with the public, may I humbly ask that you always remember to see the person, not just the politics, the problem, or the preference before you. Everyone on this council and every member of the public is carrying something hard and heavy. They are fighting some battle that you may know nothing about. And as I tell the youth groups at our church all the time, that I have two rules for them. The first is to be respectful, and the second is to be kind. And I think those aren't bad rules even when your youth is in the rear-view mirror of your life.

This year we've lost someone that I've always admired and considered a wonderful leader, Queen Elizabeth the second. Her death hit me harder than I expected, probably because I've never known anyone else but her, and also because of my heritage: the child of immigrants from Northern Ireland who arrived in Canada not long before I was born, my father, who served as a member of the Royal Horse Guards, the Blues. We watched the Queen on Christmas Day as a family every year, a tradition that I still follow. We always grew up respecting the Queen. I was aware of the Queen's deep Christian faith, which we both shared and also how she learned and grew along her long life and those many leadership roles that she carried. I doubt that we will see the likes of her again. She, who at 21 years of age, was thrust into leadership and pledged her whole life to service. A promise that she kept faithfully and well. Archbishop Justin Welby said these words at her funeral, words that caught my attention. 'The pattern for many leaders', he said, 'is to be exalted in life and forgotten after death.' People of loving service are rare in any walk of life. Leaders of loving service are rarer still. But in all cases, those who serve will be loved and remembered, when those who cling to power and privileges are long forgotten. Deeper people who make good leaders are servants. In your role as council members, and in mine as a pastor, we are all about service. That is the legacy that I hope all of us leave. And while it is not my place in this politically correct era to stand here and pray for you, please know it is a practice in my regular life, and it is a practice in the congregation I serve. We pray regularly, and specifically for those who lead us at all levels of government, including you. Please be assured of my prayers and the prayers of our church family for you. And please also be assured of my thanks for your willingness to serve and my willingness to serve in any way I can, and that we share a common desire for the good of the community of people that we live in and with, and yes, that we love. Let's be deeper people. Thank you very much."

B.12.1: Laurentian Valley: Inaugural

Population: 9,450

Inaugural meeting, November 22, 2022.²⁸²

Reverend Robert Gulliver:

"All right. I'm not quoting or signing anything. Good to go. Congratulations. Well done. Hard work. Harder work ahead. And I don't have to tell you that. I thought about the responsibility that you have, and the fact that you have invited me, so first off, thank you for the invitation. And secondly, know that as a church, as a church family, we're very much a part of what goes on in the community. Because this is our community, and we're active in it. And I started to think about leadership, and I thought, as I listened to you say what you were saying, there's a lot about integrity, there's a lot about honesty, there's a lot about transparency, there's a lot about carrying out duty in the positions you have. And today, as I was thinking about coming and sharing with you just briefly and then, of course praying, I thought of two great leaders who had a difficult time with people. Because when you're leading people, not everybody is in agreement.

And sometimes even when you sit at this table, you're not always in agreement. But you have to walk out the door knowing that you have made the decision together, no matter what. And there were two men, Moses and Aaron, who were asked to lead a group of people way bigger than probably the responsibility that you have, and that was six million people. And when you have six million people, you have six million problems. And so these two men had to take this on. And as they were doing this, there were times when they wanted to give up. Because in the role of the leader, it's not always easy to lead. And sometimes you say, 'Why did I say yes to this in the first place?' But here you are. After four years, you're going to carry it out and do a great job. And you're going to need all the support we can give, and you're going to need prayer. You're going to need prayer for God to give you wisdom, strength, and understanding. And so, that's what I want to do. I want to pray for you, and there was a time in Moses and Aaron's life where God spoke to Aaron; he said, and to Moses he said, this is a prayer to bless people. Because we don't hear enough of that; we hear more cursing than we do blessings. And so he said, this is a blessing prayer. And maybe some of you have heard it, and so I just want to read it, and then I'll— then I'm going to pray. So this is what it comes from: Numbers chapter 6, verses 22 to 27, and it says the Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron and his sons, they were priests, this is how you are to bless the people: say to them, The Lord bless you and the Lord keep you. The Lord makes his face shine upon you, and may he be gracious to you. The Lord turns his face toward you and gives you peace. There couldn't be a better blessing.

Let's pray. Lord, I ask today that you would make this real not only for those who have said yes and are now on this new journey, but for all of us, for this entire valley. We ask, Lord, that we

²⁸² Township of Laurentian Valley. (2022 November 22b). *November 22, 2022 -Township of Laurentian Valley: Inaugural Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caTRUwQ4jzE>.

could understand the blessing you want to bring to us, for we are blessed in this nation. And even in times of turmoil, you are still a faithful God. And I pray that for the council; I pray that for everyone who has to make these decisions going forward that you would help them, and that they at times might turn to you and ask for direction. And Lord, may you give it. May they find peace in their hearts and souls and rest when the times seem weary. May they find strength when they need each other. And whatever decisions they make, may, at the end of the day, may they have a sense that they have made the right one. And help us as a community to support them, help us to encourage them, help us to come alongside them, help us, Lord, to do what we can. And may we all look to you for strength, for vision, protection, and direction. To your powerful name and your son who loves us so much, Jesus Christ, our lord and saviour, amen. Thank you.”

B.12.2: Laurentian Valley: Regular

Population: 9,450

Regular Meeting, October 17, 2023.²⁸³

Mayor Steve Bennett:

“Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our regular council meeting of October 17. I’ll start off with the Lord’s Prayer. Anybody who wishes to join me may do so, and please remain seated. 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; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. Thank you”

B.12.3: Laurentian Valley: Regular

Population: 9,450

Regular Meeting, February 20, 2024.²⁸⁴

Mayor Steve Bennett:

“Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our regular council meeting of February 20th. I’d like to start off with the Lord’s Prayer. Anybody who wishes to join me may do so, and please remain seated. 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; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”

²⁸³ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2023 October 17b). *October 17, 2023 - Township of Laurentian Valley: Committee & Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kD6r5B350E>.

²⁸⁴ Township of Laurentian Valley. (2024 February 20). *February 20, 2024 - Township of Laurentian Valley: Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cHSDJWAwcQ>.

B.13: Markham

Population: 338,503

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁸⁵

Reverend Coward:

"Let us pray. Spirit of life, who calls us to live and work together in community. We gather in thanksgiving for, and in recognition of those whom this city has elected to lead. The mayor, councillor and regional councillors. So we turn to you, faithful and tender God. Voice of the voiceless, power of the powerless. We praise you for your vision of a community of wholeness and the reign of peace in which all who hunger and thirst are nourished. In which the stranger is welcomed, the hurting are healed, and the captive is freed. Give us such faith that we may have life abundant in this city, in this region, in this province, in this nation. And that we may dream good dreams of what we can not see. Guide this counsel by your truth and love. Until they and all your people make manifest your reign of justice, of compassion, and of reconciliation. This we ask in the name of your anointed one, our serving king. To whom and with you and spirit, one holy God, the honour, glory, and blessing, this day, this term, and always. Amen."

B.14: Midland

Population: 17,817

Inaugural meeting, November 16, 2022.²⁸⁶

Father Michael Knox:

"Creator God, our father. We give thanks for the gift of life. The gift of creation, all around us, sustained by your spirit and love. And we give thanks for those present here in this chamber. And especially for those encircled, bound together in a chain of office, in dedication to the service of God's people. Sworn tonight, to a life of service. Each of them have come with gifts, made in your image, in your abundant love, that they bring forth in their lives, of the past, and now of the present. And they place them before you in oaths taken and promises made, for the greater service of your kingdom, and this country. We ask for your spirit to be upon them. To bless their minds. That, dignified by the crown, they may truly be efficient. Give them reason. Let their minds be open to listening to the voices of others. And making good choices based on their lives of love, of family, and meaning. Bless their souls, the seat of wisdom. That beyond reason, they may look to the greater lives around them, and the mysteries of love. That their hearts may always turn to the poor and those in greatest need. That their hearts may always be open by the inspiration of your light, to the realities of the world around them. Finding struggles and joys and answering with sincerity, with truth."

²⁸⁵ City of Markham. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural [sic] Meeting Markham Council 2022-2026* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi7owLHvIS8>.

²⁸⁶ Town of Midland. (2022 November 16). *Midland Town Council Inaugural Meeting - November 16, 2022* [Video]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JB1_BS2e5c.

Bless their bodies to give them good strength, for the great tasks that they have taken upon themselves at the service of others. Keep them in good health, and always ready to rise to your need, and to the service of your people. We extend this grace and pray, O lord, that the families that have strengthened them and brought them to where they now sit may also be blessed. That their homes be blessed. And that as their hands extend beyond this chamber, in reason and faith. In love and in action. This community, this municipality, this town may also be blessed. As we grow all the more together, towards a greater desire of peace, unity, prosperity, hope, safety, and a civilization of love. And we make this prayer through Christ, our lord. Amen.”

B.15: Mississippi Mills

Population: 14,740

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁸⁷

Reverend Mary Royal-Duczek:

“It is my pleasure to be here tonight for this inaugural meeting of the council. I told my 6 year old daughter Maria that I was coming to this inaugural meeting and she was quite impressed and asked if there was also going to be an inaugural ball. So maybe that is something to look into for the future. To mayor Lowry, to the councillors, new and old, thank you. Thank you for your willingness to serve our community in this way. Thank you for the sacrifices you will make over the next four years in order to fulfill your commitment to us, your constituents. Thank you for all the behind the scenes work, conversations, research, late nights that we will never see. Tonight, as you come together to begin this journey, may you be open to hear what those who disagree with you have to say. May you be open to see things from a different perspective. May you treat others with respect, and may you work to make this community a better place for everyone to live. May you continue the work before you from the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. May you remember our relationship to the land and our responsibility to care for it. May you remember those in our community living in poverty and how all of your decisions will affect them. May you offer the leadership required as we continue to wrestle with an ever changing global pandemic landscape. May you have the strength to show weakness, to apologize as needed. To admit when you don’t know something, to ask for help when needed and to commit to care for yourselves as required. Tonight, a new journey begins. A journey of talking, listening, reading, debating, discussing, learning, sharing, teaching, caring, laughing, loving and leading. And as you offer this leadership, may you feel held, in love, in peace and in comfort. Amen.”

²⁸⁷ The transcript for this municipality was collected by volunteers prior to the writing of this report. After it was collected, the recording was deleted and is no longer available.

B.16: Newmarket

Population: 87,942

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁸⁸

Imam Mohammed Sohaib:

"My dear respected audience, may the peace and blessings of God be upon all of you. It is truly an honour to be standing here in front of you all and to be here with you all. I am so thankful to everyone, everyone who has organized this event, and congratulations to the new council. We pray that God descends peace and blessings onto every single one of us, our families, our community, and the whole world at large, amen. I will start off by reciting the first chapter of the holy Qur'an, which is the opening chapter, the Surah Al-Fatiha, and it is also a prayer; we pray that God accepts this prayer on our behalf. (Sings in Arabic). The translation of this sūrah, of this chapter of the Qur'an, in the name of allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. In the name of God, the gracious, the merciful. All praise and thanks is for God, the lord of all worlds, the most compassionate, the most merciful. The master of the day of judgement. You alone we worship, and you alone we ask for help. Guide us along this straight path, the path of those you have blessed, not those you are displeased with or those who are astray. Amen.

And just before I conclude, I thought I'd just share a few remarks. I'm not the best of speakers, but I hope that whatever I say is a means of benefit for all of us. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, he says in .. which is a statement of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, he says that the leader of the people is "khadimuhum." Those that serve the people, those are the true leaders, and our Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, he says that the best of people are those that are most beneficial to others, and this role, this role of leadership, this is a great responsibility. And our Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, says that you are all a shepherd to your flock, and everyone will be answerable before God with regards to this responsibility.

And I would just like to mention an incident of the great Caliph, the second Caliph of Islam; his name was Umar ibn al-Khattab, and there is a very beautiful story of his that demonstrates beautiful qualities, and I pray that we can all inculcate these qualities. During the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab there was a great famine, and Umar ibn al-Khattab, he had taken this very hard upon himself, and he already lived such a simplistic life, but he made his life even more simple and he would survive on just a few morsels of food, and he would say that, 'how can I eat when my beloved sisters and brothers are starving and they are hungry.' And the scholars mention that he had starved himself for so long that the colour of his face had changed. So during this famine, Umar ibn al-Khattab, he would actually go out in the night and see and attend to the people and see if they have any needs. It's mentioned that he came across a place, the outskirts

²⁸⁸ Town of Newmarket. (2022 November 15b). *Inaugural Council Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-newmarket.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?id=9f97e17c-c179-4815-add6-9e2bdbfb4978>.

of the city of Medina, and he saw that there was a family; they were living in a tent, and there were children crying. So he approached the tent, and he asked; he sought permission, and the mother was inside, and he asked, 'Why are your children crying?'

So she said, 'we haven't eaten anything for three days.' And he noticed that she was stirring something in a pot, so he asked, 'what are you, what are you doing?' She said, 'All I have in here is water, and we've just put some rocks and some stones, and I'm just stirring it with this hope that maybe it will distract the children.' Thinking you know, that the food is coming soon. And they might just go to sleep in the meantime. And she said a statement that 'God will judge between me and Umar.' and she didn't know that she was addressing the leader of the believers at the time. And this had a great impact on Caliph, and he didn't reveal who he was. And he quickly went back into the city, and he got a few necessities, and he put it onto his back, and this was a very heavy load. And he had his attendant with him, and his attendant offered and said, 'Please let me hold it for you.' And so Umar he said, that, 'Will you carry my load and my luggage on the day of judgement? No. It is my responsibility.' and he carried it, and keep in mind he was around 60 years old at the time, and he quickly made his way back to their tent. And the Caliph, he prepared the food, and he served the family, and he gave food to the children. After giving them food, he went to the side, and he just stayed sitting there. And his attendant asked, 'O leader of the believers, are we not finished?' And he said, 'I want to see these children smiling just as they were crying. I want to see them smile.'

So this was, this is a very beautiful example of, you know, leadership qualities that we should all have within ourselves. I hope that what I have said is a means of benefit to one and all. Thank you so much, and may the peace and blessings of God be upon all of you. Thank you so much."

Rabbi Mendy Grossbaum:

"Good evening, friends. It's been a quick four years, but we've been blessed. We must count our blessings. There's a passage in the scripture that reads, "all the heavenly blessings will come upon you and reach you." There are many blessings which come upon us, yet regrettably they don't reach us. At celebrations of this nature, we are reminded of these blessings we possess, the blessings we possess and are grateful and we to mark and recognize them as well. We recognize that we live in this great country, a democracy, this great town where we enjoy municipal elections and civil elections. We must count our blessings, and with elections currently happening on the other side of the border, we're reminded that sometimes it takes others a long time to count and recount.

Please join me in prayer. God and God of our fathers, mighty and revered God, we beseech you with your abundance of mercy. Restore the world onto its true basis, under the guidance of kings and rulers who shall reign with justice and righteousness. Without discrimination between nation and nation, race and race. Fill our hearts with tolerance, respect and forgiveness; bestow upon us wisdom and understanding so that we appreciate the sacred mission entrusted to us. O mighty God of heaven, shed your grace on the newly re-elected mayor, the regional counsellor, and the custodians of the seven wards who have been chosen to make laws and decisions. The

decisions of our town. Bless them with wisdom and understanding in the noble pursuit of justice and equality. May they be found favourable in the eyes of God and man, so that all decisions, regulations and legislation be enacted with fairness and fortitude so that it will be graciously and embraced by all. Bless us gathered here, all residents of Newmarket. Grant us to appreciate our good fortune, to live in peace and harmony, governed by wise counsel and decisive leadership. May our wonderful town serve as a human abode for people of all faiths and all walks of life. While we pay homage to our good fortune, we beseech you oh merciful and gracious God to guide the leaders of free societies to stand strong and firm to help the innocent inhabitants of Ukraine, but more end destruction. Send the angels of blessing and success to welcome them here and elsewhere. May we witness the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy: nations will beat their swords into plowshares, and not learn war anymore. (Speaks in Hebrew). He who makes peace in the heavens above, he shall make peace below, amongst us, in our municipality, our province and throughout the world, and let us say, amen."

Reverend Linda Wheler:

"My name is Linda Wheler, and my husband and I and our eldest son moved to Newmarket in 1984. We had our first house on Sunny Point, and we lived there for 15 years, and it was home, and we loved this town. We had to move for a job, but, in 2014 we were able to come home again, and I really do consider it home. And so I thank the mayor and counsellors for all that they offer, for their leadership that makes this town so special. (turns away from the mic, inaudible). I offer this prayer.

Let us pray. Creator God, holy one, for the gift of life we praise you. For Jesus, who reveals its meaning and purpose, we thank you. In the world without and in our lives within, there is so much that is confusing and contradictory. Many voices counsel us, many forces pressure us, many things tempt us. God of grace, we need your light to lead us, your hand to hold us, and your love to complete us. We give thanks for this beautiful town of Newmarket, and with hope and faith we ask your blessing upon the council. We ask that you bless the council as they begin a new session; may they work well with one another; may the council work together for the common good; may they make decisive decisions that are beneficial not only for this generation, for the generations yet to come. We ask that you bless Mayor Taylor; give Mayor Taylor and Deputy Mayor Vegh and all the councillors the gift of honesty. The gift of strength to resist temptations that power may bring. Help them to be a people of vision of courage, and commitment, to serve all people. Enable them to be the voice for the many that feel they have no voice, open their hearts to the many who struggle to make ends meet, and enable them to care for the land and air and water of this region so that the environment remains whole and healthy.

And God, we pray for our counsellors, mayor and deputy mayor individually as well. We pray for balance, so that with so much demands on their time, they may find balance for a healthy and joy-filled life. God of grace, you have a vision of what peace is. Help us to live in that peace and towards that peace. In our homes, in our community, in this town and in the world. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the prince of peace. Amen."

B.17: Niagara Falls

Population: 94,415

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁸⁹

Reverend Isaac Flagg:

"It's my great honour to be here tonight and to be able to pray for our new Council. And I am I'm so glad to be a part of the Niagara Falls Fire Department and to be a chaplain, where we work together across Faith communities to serve our community. And so, while I pray tonight, it's my hope that all Faith groups will gather together will unite together in prayer for our Council as they serve in this term. Let's join together in prayer. Spirit of life and love who moves in and through around and among us bless all."

B.18: Niagara-on-the-Lake

Population: 19,088

Inaugural meeting, November 22, 2022.²⁹⁰

Reverend William Roberts:²⁹¹

"Thank you, and it will be an invocation. We'll have a blessing at the end of the ceremony and might I ask you to please be seated, for this opening prayer. So greetings to you uh, Lord Mayor Elect. And the, Councillors Elect, and special guests and friends. Um, I'd be remiss also if I didn't acknowledge um, Andrea Kaiser, regional councillor elect. You ran a great campaign there Andrea. Although uh, Paulo and I don't know why the Ontario elections uh, municipal elections committee don't give us gold, silver and bronze for our finish on election night. But as all of us who were candidates um, in the recent campaign, we may have encountered some cynicism and some apathy. But more especially speaking for myself when I think for all of us, we came to treasure even more so the many people, places and things all over Niagara-On-The-Lake. We came to better appreciate in our town and townspeople the many special and sacred values. And as uh, good Canadians I hope we hold to the trinity of civic values of uh, our belief in peace, order, and good government. So for these sacred values, let me offer, uh, this prayer. Throughout all of human civilization, courts and councils have met to serve the common good. And to provide wise judgement in the affairs of women and men. So may this council, with all the issues, challenges, and matters before them, serve with distinction in applying principles of fairness and collaboration. As they deliberate on the directions they take, and the decisions they make on behalf of us all. And as people for centuries have gathered in cities, towns and villages

²⁸⁹ City of Niagara Falls. (2022 November 15). *November 15, 2022 Inaugural City Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ke97_ANGM.

²⁹⁰ Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. (2022 November 22). *Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Agenda, Council Meeting, Tuesday, November 22, 2022, 7:00p.m.* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-notl.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=17519>.

²⁹¹ Reverend William Roberts gives a "Prayer" as listed in the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

to create and share wealth, and well being, so may we in the Niagara-On-The-Lake with our natural and historic heritage, our villages and farmlands, our flowing creeks and vibrant culture, may we with our new mayor and council flourish in this town, this place we call home. And as leaders in every age have stepped up with vision and courage to meet the needs of those other than themselves, so may our newly elected representatives provide the leadership of service, courage and vision we need to advance Niagara-On-The-Lake in an often uncertain future. And may all that we collectively hold as sacred trust, these values of peace, order, and good government, be manifested in our newly elected mayor and council, for Niagara-On-The-Lake, so be it. Amen. Amen.”

Reverend William Roberts:²⁹²

“Wow. So um, thank you Marnie and um, such Jeffersonian ambitions Gary but I must attest that a personal level both um, Gary and Tammy, the devotion that these two have shown in community and the church and now as our mayor um, and the council together, I don’t know if I need to bless you but I’m going to give you a blessing anyway. Would you please stand? And for this um, closing blessing I want to borrow from the Jewish tradition. Because the Jewish tradition, um, they’re going to sing a blessing, what they call berakhah, is both a way of setting apart for special care and attention, certain people, places and things, but also acknowledges um, that we in turn are being blessed by them, and by the goodness and the benefits that they share. So may wisdom, courage and humility abide with Lord Mayor Gary, with Tim, with Gary, with Wendy, with Maria, Sandra, with Nick, Adrianna, and deputy mayor Irwin. And may goodness and grace be with Marnie, Victoria, and all the town directors and staff. And may council and staff together be blessed with caring hearts and steadfast wills. That in the many responsibilities to which they bring their best selves, they will be for us an example and a blessing to all of us. And to lift us all up so that together we can all say, amen. Amen. Now we’re going to sing, for the first time in my life I think, God Save the King. So let’s get ready to sing, Juliet.”

B.19: North Glengarry

Population: 10,144

*Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.*²⁹³

Father Jonathan Blake:

“Can we do this together? (Both Speak French)

²⁹² Reverend William Roberts gives a “Benediction” as listed in the agenda at the end of the meeting.

²⁹³ The transcript for this municipality was collected by volunteers prior to the writing of this report. After it was collected, the recording was deleted and is no longer available. The portions of this transcript in French were subsequently lost; and see The Corporation Of The Township Of North Glengarry. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting of Council*. Available at <https://events.northglengarry.ca/meetings/Detail/2022-11-15-1900-Inaugural-Meeting/9c506649-fbb5-4627-8df5-af5c01141fd1>.

It's our honour to be here today. Almighty and eternal God. You have revealed your glory to all nations. God of power and might, wisdom and justice through your authority is rightly administered. Laws are enacted and judgement is decreed in the light of divine wisdom and direct deliberations of our North Glengarry council and shine forth on all the proceedings. May they seek to preserve peace and promote happiness and continue to bring us blessing of liberty and equality. Again, honoured to be here, today praying for you, praying for- with you as well. I uh, walked into the office today and I- I got this for uh, a little souvenir you know. We're- we're stressed because Pittsburgh is playing tonight versus Toronto. So go Pittsburgh. I know there's a couple of Toronto fans here as well, but again it's my pleasure to be here today. Mon frère."

Père Didier Kaba:

[Speaks in French]

Father Jonathan Blake:

"We likewise commend to your unbounded mercy, all citizens of North Glengarry, that we may be blessed in the knowledge and sanctify in the observance of your holy love. May we be preserved in union and that peace which the world can not give, and after enjoying the blessings of this life be [audio unclear] to those which are eternal. [Speaks in French]"

Père Didier Kaba:

[Speaks in French]

Father Jonathan Blake:

"Amen. Merci, merci beaucoup."

B.20: North Huron

Population: 5,052

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.²⁹⁴

Pastor Jason Gilbert:

"Good evening. I would like to thank the newly elected reeve and town officials for affording me this great honour to be here this evening to do this invocation. The call to public office is a noble calling. The Bible declares that all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. And although you were freely elected by the citizens of this great community, you have been granted this great honour of governing by God.

The Bible teaches that those who govern, are god's servants, placed in this position for our good. As a citizen of North Huron, I want to thank you. For not only allowing your name to stand

²⁹⁴ Township of North Huron. (2022 November 21). *Inaugural Council Meeting - November 21, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_LYLxtR4-4.

for election, but for stepping up to fulfill a very important role. A very high and noble calling. And I urge you as a town council, to put God first and seek him for wisdom and counsel as you lead us. Now, you might not be aware of this, but people complain about the government, and so your task over these next years will be a thankless one. You will be misunderstood by people, you will have evil spoken of you, you will face opposition, you will have to make tough decisions that will not be popular, you will have to endure slander.

But please know, that there are many of us who support you, who stand behind you, and who have committed to pray for you regularly. There are many of us who've got your back, who will be available for you when you need support and encouragement, and there are many of us who are grateful to God for you. And as a pastor in this community I stand ready to be of service to you. And to the citizens of this great community I ask that you uphold these public servants in prayer. That you thank them often for rising to this task. That you give them a pat on the back every once in a while. And that you also offer encouragement. And that when you disagree with their decisions you go through proper channels to voice your grievances and not to slander any of them. Let this be our moment to really come together as a community. And so to our reeve, and town officials, I urge you to put God first in every decision, to listen and serve the people in this community, and to carry out your calling with excellence.

The Bible says trust the lord with all your heart and don't depend on your own understanding, remember the lord in all you do and he will give you success. Let's pray please. Heavenly father I give you praise, honour and glory for your greatness, your power and love. And on behalf of all of us who are here this evening I give you thanks. We give thanks for your abundant blessings, we give thanks for our health, we give you thanks for sending Jesus Christ to this earth, to pay the penalty for our sins and for giving us a way to heaven some day through Jesus Christ, whose birth we are about to celebrate. Thank you for the ability to be involved in useful work, and for the honour of bearing these great responsibilities.

Dear lord I thank you so much for these men and women who have answered the call to lead us here in North Huron. I pray abundant blessings on them personally, and on their families, and on our community. I pray that you will keep these men and women in good health so they can lead us in the future that you have for us. And you have instructed us in your holy word to obey, and pray for the governing authorities, since you have ordained those authorities to promote peace and order and justice. Therefore I pray for our reeve, the various levels of town officials, and in particular for this assembled council. I thank you that you would grant them, I asked them that you would grant them wisdom to govern amid the conflicting issues and interests of our times. A sense of the welfare and true needs of our people. A keen thirst for justice and righteousness. Confidence in what is good and fitting. The ability to work together even when there is honest disagreement. And for personal peace in their lives, and joy in their task. I pray for protection on them that they would sense your presence as they begin their responsibilities. We pray for their success as leaders. And we pray for the various communities of North Huron, that you would keep us in peace, and in prosperity. In the name of Jesus Christ, the strong son of God, I pray. Amen."

B.21: North Middlesex

Population 6,307

Inaugural meeting, November 30, 2022.²⁹⁵

Chaplain Mark Isaac:

"Let's pray. We're reminded today lord, that you're a good father. And with this in mind, we pray for and lift up our leadership, this municipality. For your blessing and your gracious intervention, an appreciation of their service and responsibilities, we come before you with their needs in reverence as well as seeking for peace among our nation. Thank you, for the previous council. I pray that you would bless each of them who have served the people of this municipality so faithfully. Today, so many of our cities and towns in this nation and around the world are at a crossroads. And therefore I seek your blessing and favour upon our mayor Brian Ropp, our deputy mayor Paul Hodgins, our counsellors Adrian Cornellisen, Gord Moir, John Koegh, Chuck Daigle, I pray that you would bless each of them. I ask that you would give them a renewed vigour to address the needs of this community. We pray also for our newly elected councillors, Sarah Nirta and Bill Irwin. May our elected council engage with the citizens of this community. May you help them as they form strategies to move forward, to build a stronger economic base. I pray that as a collective, these council members and all the employees of this municipality would move forward in positive participation together in our community. Thank you for your good and gracious favour, which you bestow willingly. As we pray and intercede at this time in our history, we look to you as our lord and saviour and redeemer. May each of our council members contribute gladly, and be blessed for all they do. Bless them as they continue to meet and I pray that you would protect each member and their families. In Jesus name we pray and gladly bless you lord with praise and honour. Amen."

B.22: North Stormont

Population: 6,307

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.²⁹⁶

Unknown:

"I also have to announce that for unfortunate circumstances, Reverend Gaudet can not be here to perform the traditional prayer ceremony."

²⁹⁵ Municipality of North Middlesex. (2022 November 30). *NM Council Meeting November 30, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdfr8UyHEX>.

²⁹⁶ The transcript for this municipality was collected by volunteers prior to the writing of this report. After it was collected, the recording was deleted and is no longer available; and see Township of North Stormont. (15 November 2022). *Township of North Stormont Agenda, Regular Meeting*. Available at <https://northstormont.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=331>.

B.23: Oakville

Population: 213,759

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022..²⁹⁷

Vida Rosen:

"Good evening. It is an honour to be here tonight. I'm representing the Interfaith Council of Halton. And together with some of my uh, coworkers and um, executive committee members of the council. We extend a warm congratulations and best wishes to the new council and to the returning ones. I look forward to working together in bringing about peace and harmony and a better Oakville. The invocation selected tonight is from the Baha'i writings, on the topic of peace. O my God. O my God. Verily I invoke thee, and supplicate before thy threshold. Asking thee that all thy mercies, may descend upon these souls. Specialize upon them for thy favour, and thy truth. O lord, unite and bind together their souls. And exhilarate their spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O God, make these faces radiant, through the light of Thy oneness.

Strengthen the loins of Thy servants, in the service of thy kingdom. O lord, thou possessor of infinite mercy. O Lord of forgiveness and pardon. Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings and cause us to turn to the kingdom of thy clemency. Invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at thy shrine, and submissive before the glory of thine evidences. O lord, make us as waves of one sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of thy love. O lord, dilate the breast through the signs of thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars, shining from the same height of glory. As perfect fruits growing upon thine tree of life. Verily, thou art the almighty, the self---subsisting, the giver, the forgiving, the pardoner, the omniscient, the one creator. Thank you."

B.24: Parry Sound

Population: 6,879

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022..²⁹⁸

Reverend Monica Moore:

"I'm very honored to be here with you tonight um and I just wish you all of the best in the years to come in your service on our behalf you know there's been a few times in my life where I've considered running for office and then I thought gee I get in enough trouble in the church I don't know if I could do what you do I think that it's very brave um to go into public office these days maybe it always has been but I think especially coming out of a pandemic really your creating

²⁹⁷ The transcript for this municipality was collected by volunteers prior to the writing of this report. After it was collected, the recording was deleted and is no longer available; and see Town of Oakville. (2022 November 21). *Town of Oakville, Council Minutes*. Available at <https://pub-oakville.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=50269>.

²⁹⁸ Parry Sound. (2022 November 15). *Parry Sound Council Meeting - November 15, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAzYH5k6z7I>.

things out of nothing in some ways and hopefully all of your years of experience and and skills will serve us all well in the years to come um and so um for this uh I would like on if I may be so bold on behalf of my fellow citizens to thank you for offering yourselves for service to the town and I'd like to offer a kind of a blessing or good words for you as you go.

So I invite you to rise if you would and the rest of you if you can join your hearts and your minds together with me and maybe we'll we'll all rise too and you may want to close your eyes you may want to keep them open and open yourself but if we can just all join together in some good words for our newly elected ones. Holy one as these public servants set to their work May the virtues of fairness honesty cooperation and Order be joined with the spiritual values of humility compassion reconciliation and joy and may they always serve every one of your people with equity and especially remembering the largely voiceless ones who reside at the margins and so as they begin bless them all in their work. Amen.”

B.25.1: Pembroke: Inaugural

Population: 14,364

Inaugural meeting, November 29, 2022.²⁹⁹

Deacon Adrien Chaput:

“Good evening everyone, and what an honour and a privilege to be here with Mayor Andre and councillors, and all of you this evening, as we celebrate this special night in our city. We come together to thank God for the many blessings that we have received. At this time, we would open our hearts and minds and allow Him to speak to us in His holy word, in the Gospel of Saint John, 15, verses 16 to 17.

Jesus says to His disciples and us: ‘You did not choose me, no, I chose you. I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that whatever you ask in my Father's name, He will give you.’ Tonight we come with hearts deeply thankful for all the gifts that God has given us, and we are reassured tonight that God has chosen us, called us by name, to love and serve His people, as we witness here tonight our new mayor and council members.

As we join here this evening, we acknowledge that all of us come from many places, from many backgrounds, from many paths. Yet tonight we come here inspired by one single mission: to serve the people of our city, the heart of the valley, the place we all call home. As we welcome our newly elected Mayor Ron Gervais and the new city council members as they assume their new responsibilities to lead our city, may they always be empowered to be great leaders with the utmost integrity, dedication, courage, and humility. May they receive from us great support in our community, and may they be supported by our prayers and their dedication to serve, as Christ taught us to serve. May they be inspired with courage, wisdom, and compassion for the people,

²⁹⁹ TheCityofPembroke [sic]. (2022 November 29b). *November 29, 2022 - City of Pembroke: Inaugural Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9ugY95HsaE>.

and may they stand in solidarity, so that our beautiful city may become a beacon, a shining light to other cities, as an example for all to follow.

Let us pray together this evening. Blessed are you, O Lord our God. Yours, O God, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty, the splendour, for everything in Heaven and Earth is Yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom. You are exalted, head over all. Wealth and honour come from You. You are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power, to exalt and to give strength to all.

O Lord, as we come together on this solemn occasion to inaugurate once again a new council, teach us afresh that power, wisdom, and salvation come from your holy hand. We pray, O Lord, for our new mayor, Ron Gervais, to whom You have entrusted leadership of this council. At this time we pray that You would help him and the council members of our city, that we may grow closer together as a family and seek the larger vision of Your will for our city. Help them to bring reconciliation between all people, healing to political wounds, that we may truly become one city under You, our God.

Give our new mayor and council members, and all who advise them, calmness in the face of storms, encouragement in the face of frustration, and humility in the face of success. Give them the wisdom to know and to do what is right, and the courage to say no to all that is contrary to Your statutes of holy law. Lord, we pray for their families, that they may sense Your presence and know Your love. Lead them as they journey through new doors of opportunity to serve others.

Now, O Lord, we dedicate this council's inaugural ceremony to You. May this be the beginning of a new dawn for the City of Pembroke. As we humble ourselves before You, and in all of You alone is our Lord, our Saviour, and Redeemer, we pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God's blessings."

Pastor Kevin Wilson:

"I'd like to thank you for this privilege to be here this evening to give this closing prayer. Leadership is not easy, and I so appreciate the fact that you have chosen to take up this role for our city. I always tell people that leading would be easy if it wasn't for people. And so I want you to understand and know that you will have our prayers.

As I was thinking of being here tonight, I was brought to a passage of scripture in First Kings. It was Solomon, who was beginning his reign as king, following his father's footsteps, David. And the scriptures tell us at Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.' And Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, but I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or

number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" And the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. And that's what I pray for you, that you would have wisdom and knowledge as you lead our city over these next four years.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I do thank you. I thank you for our mayor and for our councillors, and for their willingness to serve this city, and I pray for your blessings upon them. I pray for your hand to direct them. I pray that you would give them wisdom, knowledge, and guidance, Lord, as they make decisions. May we as a people be there to support them and to pray for them, God. May your hand be upon them. In the name of the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit, we pray this in your name. Amen.

And I give you my pledge and commitment, as one of the pastors of this city, and I'm sure, along with Deacon Adrian and all of the pastors, that we will pray for you regularly, daily, and weekly. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Thank you."

B.25.2: Pembroke: Regular

Regular Meeting, October 17, 2023.³⁰⁰

"I'd like to call this council meeting to order for October 17th 2023. I'd ask that everyone please take a moment and stand for an opening prayer or reflection before opening this meeting of council. I would ask those who wish, each in your own way, silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings. Thank you"

B.25.3: Pembroke: Regular

Regular Meeting, February 20, 2024.³⁰¹

"I'd like to call this council meeting to order for Tuesday, February 20th. I'd ask that everyone please take a moment to please stand for an opening prayer and/or reflection before opening this meeting of council. I would ask those who wish each in your own way silently join in a prayer of guidance over these proceedings. Thank you."

B.26: Penetanguishene

Population: 10,077

Inaugural meeting, November 23, 2022.³⁰²

Reverend Colonel Doug Clark:

³⁰⁰ TheCityofPembroke [sic]. (2023 October 17). *October 17, 2023 - City of Pembroke: Committee & Council Meetings* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oDLiysgcQ>.

³⁰¹ TheCityofPembroke [sic]. (2024 February 20). *February 20, 2024 - City of Pembroke: Committee & Council Meetings* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMxyX8Fyjaw>.

³⁰² Town of Penetanguishene. (2022 November 23). *Inaugural Meeting - Council November 23, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvxNaLpC6t4>.

Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans says, "Let every soul be subject under the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the Creator. Powers that be are ordained of God." The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Let us pray. Almighty God, and Lord of all power and mercy. We, your humble people, beseech thee to send forth upon thy servants who bear office in this town of Penetanguishene, a spirit of charity and justice. That they may walk prudently before thee, in truth and righteousness, with a steadfast purpose. To faithfully and impartially serve thee, and the people of this community, in their various and sundry offices with peace, order, and good government. We offer supplication for our newly elected mayor and councillors, their respective spouse and families, that charity within a peace-filled harmony be ever present in their lives, and within their households. We pray for the staff and employees of this town of Penetanguishene. That they would be encouraged and respected in their duties and requirements. In such a manner that your guiding and guarding presence be known and felt amongst them in daily life.

And we beseech thee, O Lord, to prosper and bless the people and citizenry of this community we call Penetanguishene, and the surrounding area. Endue within us a sense of cooperation, lawful abidance, and a healthful and happy existence that prevails in our daily lives. That we may continue to prosper in all our doings, for the greater good. And we shall be careful to give unto you, O Lord, all honour, glory and praise. As we are ever bold to say, 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 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.

I would ask that the mayor and council please stand to receive a blessing. The peace of God which passeth all understanding. Keep your hearts and minds and the knowledge and love of God and of his son, Jesus Christ. And the blessing of God almighty. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen, and amen. One last note: I am available for you any time.

B.27: Pickering

Population: 99,186

*Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.*³⁰³

Pastor Mel Finlay:

Please join me and stand for the invocation. Your Worship, Council Members, honoured guests, and all the rest of us who are here this evening. It's my privilege to pray for the proceedings tonight, but also to pray for those who have been elected.

³⁰³ City of Pickering. (2022 November 21). *Inaugural Meeting of Pickering City Council* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj57WDHnjnw>.

Before I do that, I just want to say a couple of words, and that is that for those of you who are newly elected, you've been in an in-between state between the now and the not yet. The now after you were elected, the not yet before you were sworn in; in a few moments, the not yet becomes. The now and your lives change dramatically from this point on your responsibility is not only to those who voted for you; your responsibility is to those within your ward and, more broadly for those of you who are regional councillors, to the people of the region as well.

And while your accountability remains to your own word, you become responsible for all of us who live in Pickering, the City of Pickering, surrounding area, and the whole region. And so you're taking on an incredible responsibility that most of us, and probably most of you, are not well equipped to take on. And that's the reason for having the prayer this evening. So I will ask you to be seated, and I will pray for you.

O God, creator and sustainer. We pray for your incredible power for your blessing on those who are presented this evening as incumbents and as those who are newly taking over their responsibilities. For Mayor David, sorry, for Mayor Kevin Ash, for Regional Councilor Maureen Brenner, for Regional Councilor Linda Cook, for Regional Councilor David Pickles, for Councilor Lisa Robinson, for Councilor Mara Nagy, for Councilor Shaheen Bhatt, As they assume their responsibilities for the development, health, well-being, and protection of our city and the Region of Durham, Region of York, Region of Durham, I'm sorry [sic]. We thank them for their willingness to serve on our behalf. May they learn to work together effectively in making decisions that impact all residents. We ask that you give them the wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discernment, courage, patience, endurance, and grace beyond human capability that they will need during their term of office. Father, we pray particularly that you grant to them the wisdom to know what is right and the courage to do it.

In their deliberations, may they give due consideration to many points of view, seek wise counsel as appropriate, and keep in mind the needs of the whole city and of the region. In their decisions, may they act with integrity, without fear or favour or seeking personal gain. In their disagreements, may they not be disagreeable, but strive to reach a position that all of them can live with. And may they, and we, always remember that we all are stewards of this city and region and all that it offers, 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 work, their travel, their family and personal relationships, and so that when their service to the city and the region is completed, they and their families will still be healthy and strong. We pray for the staff who serve council. May they be faithful in their service, wise in their advice, knowledgeable and skilled in what they do. And we pray for all of us. 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 of the region. And may those of us who know the power of prayer pray for them frequently. O God, may your blessing be upon all of us. In your name we pray. Amen.

B.28: Rideau Lakes

Population: 10,883

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.³⁰⁴

Pastor Robert Crump:

[Not audible] Authorities of all authority comes from God in those positions of employees to complete their life if anyone who was always accused for God has Institute and they will be punished for the authorities you aren't straight here in people who are human rights but if those who have been wrong would you like to visit a fear of the police it's right and they will honor you employees are gone through thank you good to do more before they have the power to punish they are God's service said for the great purpose but also keep a clear conscience pay your taxes for the same reason for government workers need to be paid and they are serving God for what they do give it to everybody what you all think new services.

For those who collect them and give respect to honors to those who are in authority we representative there Are appreciation for our marriage our counselors and people that are in positions with authority in our account and this passage that I read voted but I know a lot of Christians in our Township were praying but why we put he wanted in this conditions and we thank you towards you for being willing to keep this rule sometimes it can be a very famous for it and sometimes when you make a decision a lot of people are disagreeing a lot of people are really create communities very emotional very difficult but you just we thank you for being able to do this thank you for stepping into this role and if you enjoy this video. I'm going to pray over our councillors that I'm there and over our fellowship. Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord Jesus for all that you are. We thank you Jesus these people are making for us Township we thank you Jesus for this committee to this sacrifice we pray Jesus that your blessing me upon each one of them as they take these wolves who create Jesus for a energy protection around our Township we pray God for every Christian to drive through our Township and Winship and pray Lord God to be a sense of presidency we pray God for America we pray God for immunity and ourselves we pray Lord Jesus to be able to be able to work together and further this this Township for your purpose is your blessing we thank you God for all that you want to thank God for all that you have all that you want to do all that you're going to do and we pray God again with blessing upon this place be in every square inch of our Township. In Jesus' holy and precious name. Amen

B.29: Selwyn

Population: 18,653

Inaugural meeting, November 22, 2022.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Rideau Lakes. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSFUiJb0> (accessed June 9, 2026).

³⁰⁵ SelwynTownship [sic]. (2022 November 22). *Special Meeting - Inaugural Meeting - November 22, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHtUVOt-6pl>.

Reverend Cathy Gradante:

Let us pray Holy One known by many names and beyond all names Spirit of Life who calls us to live and work together in harmony We Gather here this afternoon to recognize those people whom our community has chosen to be leaders guides and vision keepers we pray that in their work together they would be ready to serve all the people of Sullivan Township without bias or discrimination we ask it that your blessing rest upon each one called to serve this community in which you live and work and play grant them the courage to make decisions based on a firm belief and vision of what is best for the community in the present and into the future help them remember that they may have different points of view and still listen to each other with respect that all are working for the good of our communities and then when the decision has been made may they be able to share the decision to work towards its implementation to let go of the debate and move on to the next challenge gracious God you call us to love our neighbor as ourselves and so we ask that your wisdom and compassion rest upon this Council that they will lead with courage and caring and may they be reminded that in the midst of their work for our community taking time for rest and renewal with family and friends helps to build balance between home and work May these people we recognize this afternoon have the vision the strength and the will to help lead Selwyn Township with hope and promise into the future and may we who have chosen them be willing to work together with them to grow this Township into a place where life in all its fullness is possible for all who live and work here this we pray in the name of all that we hold sacred and holy amen thank you Reverend

B.30: Smiths Falls

Population: 9,254

*Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.*³⁰⁶

Jill Turnbull:

“Holy One known by many names and beyond all names Spirit of Life Spirit of Love Spirit of community Spirit of Justice we ask your blessing on the people who have been called to lead the community in which we live and work and play help them as Leaders to not ask first how do we fix this but what do we need to learn how might we need to change and to whom do we need to listen remind them because we all forget from time to time especially in the noisiness of what passes for political debate today that they are not only leaders but also servants and that is there that it is their responsibility and ours to serve the common good of all give mayor Sean Panko and counselors Jay Brennan Jennifer Miller Peter McKenna Chris McGuire Stephen Robinson and Don Quinn capable assistance through the administration and staff serving Smith Falls May each one gladly contribute in any way whether humble or significant we pray for Unity of purpose so that good strategies and plans may be implemented quickly Bless The Smiths

³⁰⁶ Corporation of the Town of Smiths Falls. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting of Council November 15, 2022-2026* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-H3GblQm4E>.

Falls Council as they meet and provide for and protect each member and their families in these days."

B.31: Southgate

Population: 8,716

*Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.*³⁰⁷

Brenda Calder:

"Well, congratulations and thank you for this invitation to share a few words of reflection and offer a time of prayer together. It's an exciting time, a new beginning, and an opportunity to renew commitments, our accountability first of all to God, however we understand God, first and foremost, and then accountability to each other and to those we serve. When we are in a right relationship with God, we're in a much better relationship with each other, so it's important to maintain this relationship and know that we are accountable to God before we're accountable to anyone else.

We know that serving the public is not a cakewalk. There are difficult decisions to make, a lot of discernment. And so, in the book of Isaiah, God tells us: "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."

So I encourage you to spend time in prayer, so that you can have this relationship before you have relationship with others, and prayer is important in good times as well as in difficult ones. Why pray? Henri Nouwen is a world-renowned spiritual leader, and he writes of why to pray. The answer, he says, is because God is greater than my mind and my heart, and what is really happening in the house of prayer is not measurable in terms of human success and failure. What I must do first of all is to be faithful. If I believe that the first commandment is to love God with my whole heart, mind, and soul, then I should at least be able to spend time with no one else but God.

So we're called to go forward, to first put our faith in God, to trust God. And I see trust in that boat, where Jesus said to Peter, "Trust me, come on out and step into the water." It's a lot about trust, and where we put our trust. In the book of Philippians, the Apostle Paul writes: "Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done." One final thing: "Fix your thoughts on what is true and honourable and right and pure and lovely," and thank Him for all He has done, and the peace of God will be with you. He concludes with, "For I can do everything through Christ, who strengthens me."

³⁰⁷ Township of Southgate. (2022 November 21). *November 21, 2022 - Inaugural Council Meeting 2022-2026 Term of Council* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bZbUruR-M>.

I invite you to pray with me. Let us pray. Dear God, we give You thanks for Your loving presence in the lives of each person here. You know all about us, even the number of hairs on our heads, so that we can trust that You also know what is in our hearts and mind, and what is best for us. Lord, we pray to be in a right relationship with You above all else, so that we can then be open to Your strength and guidance in all things. Lord, we pray for Your protection for this new council, for their families, administration, and staff, for their physical and spiritual protection. We pray for Your presence, Lord, not just in private but also in public, as we are tonight, to bring and be mindful of Your presence into all of our communities. We pray for peace in our relationships, first with You, then to each other and to those we serve. We pray for Your provision to meet our needs and those of this township, as decisions are made and actions taken to meet the needs of all citizens in Southgate, knowing that all things come from Your hands. We pray for understanding, open-mindedness, for progress and efficiency, for all persons working well together, giving of our best for the welfare of those we serve. All this we ask in Your precious name. Amen.”

B.32: St. Thomas

Population: 42,840

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.³⁰⁸

Pastor Jeremy Best:

“Mr. Mayor, it's my privilege and pleasure to be with you tonight to share a few brief words and as I do, I want to take you back to a story, an old story from Scripture in the Old Testament about a queen named Esther.

During the time of exile, when the Jewish people had been captured from first in the Kingdom of Babylon and then the Kingdom of Persia and were in slavery to the Kingdom of Persia, as it takes place around 486 to 464 BC, there was a king named Xerxes I over Persia. The story tells us that the king conducted a nationwide search for a new queen after finding displeasure in his current queen. He had his servants bring to him women from all corners of the kingdom, and one in particular. He discovered Esther, a young Jewish woman who had been amongst the slaves captured in Jerusalem when the city was ransacked by the Persians. She was being raised by her uncle, a man named Mordecai, as well as her parents had been killed in that capture. She was taken to the capital and taken through a year-long process that eventually led to her being chosen as the new queen.

During that time, as Esther was being prepared to become queen, her uncle Mordecai discovered a plot being raised up by one of the king's men named Haman. The plot was to put the Jewish people to death. And Esther chapter three, verses eight and nine say this: Then Haman said to the king, there's a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed amongst the

³⁰⁸ City of St. Thomas. (2022 November 21a). *November 21, 2022 Inaugural St. Thomas City Council Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwJ3exBswqs>.

peoples in all your provinces, all your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they don't know how to keep the king's laws. So it is not the king's profit to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed. Haman's plot was to have all the Jewish people in the Kingdom of Persia murdered. The king agreed, giving Haman his signet ring so that an official letter could be sent through all the provinces. But that to happen, that letter stated that 12 months from that day, all the Jewish people were to be killed. What neither the king nor his servants nor Haman was aware of was that Queen Esther herself was a Jew. Mordecai found out about the plot and was eventually able to get word to Esther.

Esther, being in the king's court, wasn't obviously publicly available. But Mordecai would go daily to the courts to stand by the gates and plead for an audience with her, and eventually they would get word for her and spoke to her, pleading with her to do something to save her people. And Esther, even Esther as queen, could not simply go and talk to the king. She could only go on his invitation, only at his command; to do anything else would be to put her life at risk. And even where she'd be given an audience with the king, she certainly couldn't tell him how to run his affairs, and she certainly could not make a request for how the country should be led. But Mordecai played with her, and he talked with her. He sent her this famous verse in Esther chapter four, verse 14, who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

Those words and what Esther would do after are still commemorated by the Jewish people to this day, the feast of Purim, because Esther would indeed go and request an audience with the king and Esther would indeed save for the freedom and the saving of her people, which was granted her by the king. It's an odd story, but it pointed out at the first meeting of council. Well, those words for such a time as this have stuck out to me since our mayor invited me to come and speak.

I've called St. Thomas home for nearly 15 years now. Moved here, Sarnia's home, and my wife and I came here by way of Hamilton after serving in a church there for five years. And when we moved here, it was spring of 2008, just as a recession would begin to take its full grip. In those early years, Ford, Sterling, Timken, and others would all close and our city began to feel a bit of a ghost town. The vibe around here, as you might say, was low. For several years, the city felt as if it was on life support, but things slowly began to change, didn't they? New jobs began to arrive slowly at first, and that pace picked up, and new people began to arrive. And at first it trickled you to hear stories from people from London moving down to St. Thomas and eventually those stories became talking about people from Waterloo and Kitchener and then the GTA and how was building one from, you know, I'd see my own neighborhood, Norchard Park, one or two homes being built at a time to all set entire streets going up in the span of several months. What first became a trickle has become a stream, and it's now been a flood.

Our city is changing rapidly, and us at our church and faith and St. Thomas have been saying to our people. I've been the lead pastor of faith now for just a few months, as a youth pastor there for the past 14 years. But we've been saying to our people, we've been praying with our people, is that we believe that God has called us to this city for such a time as this, that the city is

changing rapidly beneath our feet, that he's placed us in the position) he has, with the resources we have, to do a work and to take care of people in a new way. And I believe firmly that God has placed this council in this city, in this chamber for such a time as this. The challenges our city faces are many of the opportunities are also great as well. I believe firmly that you are here for such a time as this and that God is going to do something amazing in and through you in the city. We are excited about what lies ahead."

B.33: Strathroy-Caradoc

Population: 23,871

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.³⁰⁹

Pastor Peter Hoytema:

[opening missing] "...Honesty, integrity, that you work well together as a team of leaders, that you build on the tradition that has been provided for you, and that you also remember the vulnerable among us. I stand before you as a minister and represent the one who is himself present in the least of these. And in all of the economic disparity that we are continuing to see around us, it's so important that we remember those for whom rising inflation, food and gasoline costs, and home ownership and rental costs are becoming increasingly challenging, if not impossible. So as you serve this community, I would just ask that you remember to serve, most importantly, the least of these among us. So again, thank you for inviting me to be here. I look forward to seeing how your leadership bears fruit and how this great community that I've been a part of for more than a dozen years will continue to flourish and experience growth and all of the good things that I know the Lord will use you to help make reality. So thank you so much.

B.34: Temiskaming Shores

Population: 9,634

Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.³¹⁰

Pastor Nick Kostyc:

"Thank you, Mr. Mayor and members of council, for this opportunity. What a great honour and privilege. Allow me to bless you in this season, in this term. May the Lord bless you. May he keep you. May he turn his face towards you and smile upon you. May he grant you all knowledge

³⁰⁹ Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc. (2022, November 21). *Inaugural Meeting of the 7th Council of the Corporation of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-strathroy-caradoc.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=6ce5b1a8-4a36-4415-9960-7c5a577b5d86&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English>.

³¹⁰ City of Temiskaming Shores. (2022 November 21). *The Corporation of the City of Temiskaming Shores Inaugural Meeting of Council*. Available at <https://www.temiskamingshores.ca/media/401l3v43/2022-11-21-inaugural-meeting-package.pdf>.

and wisdom as you lead in this time. Most of all, will he guard your hearts, your minds, your families, and most of all, grant you peace. Amen.”

B.35: Wainfleet

Population: 6,887

Inaugural meeting, November 22, 2022.³¹¹

Pastor Brian Lofthouse:

“Heavenly Father, tonight we recognize and support our leadership team: some great individuals, Mayor Brian, councillors Joan, Terry, John and Sherry. And might I say to all those who support their roles behind the scenes. Thank you, Father, for calling leaders to lead. I simply pray that, the next term of service, that we would seek your wisdom, your vision and blessing to be with them and upon them each. May they embrace the Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, who declared Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; when there is hatred where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith or where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand. To be loved as to love, for it is giving that we receive; it is in pardoning; that we are pardoned; and it is dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”

B.36: Warwick

Population: 3,641

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.³¹²

Reverend Christine O'Reilly

“Thank you, and good evening. It's nice to see some familiar faces. And just as a word of background, um, I served as minister at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church here in Watford for 25 years, had Thetford as well, and I'm just continuing on in Fedford. I have so many great memories and relationships still with people in this community, spent many hours in the ball diamond, and I had a lot of fun, and I feel very honoured to be asked to come back to be with you today. So thank you for that. Uh, so yes, thank you for the privilege of being here, and thank you for you, the council, the public, and also your staff who are here as well.

I want to thank you for being willing to serve on Council, and I want to thank those who also ran for Council and were not voted in at this time. I do wish you well in the years ahead, and I think especially in these years ahead, because these are times that, as you know, are filled with so much uncertainty and anxiety and Division. And yet, in my experience, there's always this sort of

³¹¹ Township of Wainfleet. (2022 November 22). *Township of Wainfleet Council Meeting - November 22, 2022 (Inaugural)* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDYwUMCAciA>.

³¹² Warwick Township. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Council Meeting - November 15, 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLloR7jGhB0>.

humble, stubborn hope within the human heart, mind, and soul to keep looking for better ways and better days ahead.

So I address you today as people who have been chosen for leadership in the township of Warwick, and Leadership is something I think we are in desperate need of throughout our society in these days. Leadership that is simply not about winning an election, but seeking to serve. Leadership is not easy. As much as I lead in a very different context than you do, I still lead, and I know personally that leadership is hard. Leadership is hard in the best of times, let alone in times of anxiety and uncertainty and Division.

Leadership means making some hard decisions. Leadership means not being able to make everybody happy. Leadership means being willing to listen when you would much rather be talking and setting people straight, and more often than you might want to. Leadership is also being humble enough to say, you know, I could be wrong.

The leader I admire named Gordon McDonald, a fellow Pastor who's now well into his 80s, once said, but the world needs now is not smarter, more intelligent people. What the world needs now is deeper people. And I think he's right on, because deeper people make good leaders. Deeper people who make good leaders are people who don't just react, but who reflect and respond. Deeper people who make good leaders are people who are eager to learn. Deeper people who make good leaders know that they don't know and are willing to find out. And deeper people who make good leaders are humble. Deeper people who make good leaders are compassionate. And deeper people who make good leaders value character above Conquest and the common good above personal reward.

As you work with one another this term, as you face one another around this table, and as you sometimes face off against each other, and as you deal with the public, I think all of us do well to remember to see the person, not just the politics, the problem, or the preference. Everyone on Council and every member of the public is indeed carrying something, some hard thing, some heavy thing, and is fighting some battle you may know nothing about.

As I tell the youth groups at our church all the time, I have two rules for you: be respectful and be kind. And I think those aren't bad rules, even when your youth is in the rear view mirror of your life.

This year, we lost someone who I've always considered to be a really good leader, and that's Queen Elizabeth II. Her death hit me harder than I would have imagined, and I am sure that that is because of other things happening in my life, but also because of my heritage. I'm a child of immigrant parents who came from Northern Ireland shortly before I was born. My father served as a member of the Royal Horse guards, the Blues. The queen was important in our family. We watched the queen every Christmas Day, the tradition that I still follow to this day. And certainly, I was aware of and shared and respected the Queen's deep Christian faith. But I also respected how she grew and learned along her life and her long reign. She changed. I doubt we will see the

likes of her again. She, who at the tender age of 21, was thrust into leadership and pledged her whole life to service, a promise she kept so faithfully and well.

At her funeral, Archbishop Justin Welby said these words which stayed with me. He said, the pattern for many leaders is to be exalted in life and then forgotten after death. People of loving service are rare in any Walk of Life. Leaders of loving service are still rarer. But in all cases, those who serve will be loved and remembered when those who cling to power and privilege are long forgotten.

Deeper people who make good leaders are servants. In your role as council members, and in mine as a pastor and as a citizen, we are all to be all about service. That's the Legacy that, whether we are royalty or not, is the best one to leave behind.

While it is not my place in these politically correct days to pray for you in this context, please know that it is a regular practice in my personal life. Because, as I tell people all the time, what I believe is what I believe. It's not just about my job. It is a regular practice in my personal life and in the congregation I serve, and I have members in Sedford who come from Watford and Warwick Township to pray regularly and specifically for those who lead us in all levels of government, and that includes you.

So please be assured of my prayers for you to continue, and please be assured of my thanks for your service and for my willingness to serve as I can, and that we all share a common desire for the flourishing of our communities, for the people that we live with, and the community and the people that we love so much. Thank you”

B.37: Wasaga Beach

Population: 24,862

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.³¹³

Reverend Graham Gaessler:

“Let us pray. Father God, thank you for the gift of living in such an amazing community and region. And I thank you for these seven people who have committed themselves to serve this town. They carry their own personal burdens, and joys, hopes and dreams, fears and doubts about what the next four years will hold for them in their role. Give them wisdom, peace and a sense of your leadership for the blessing and flourishing of all the citizens of Wasaga Beach. I pray also for the town staff; this transition of leadership is a transition for them. Lord Jesus, would you pour out your grace and peace upon our Municipal staff. We thank you for their service. May the next four years be ones they look back upon as fruitful productive and filled with a sense of value and of being valued Holy Spirit you are the true counselor you bring us the wisdom and words of Jesus into our minds our hearts and our community I ask that you help us

³¹³ Town of Wasaga Beach. (2022 November 15). *Special Council - Inaugural - 15 Nov 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr3OpG88fjw>.

as a community treat one another as people made in your image each person with dignity and infinite worth. Amen. May you, as council, receive peace at all times and in every area of life from the Lord of peace. May you be filled with joy as you serve, and may you be blessed as you bless this community, and I pray that these four years would go well for you as counsel because that will be a blessing to our community. Thank you for your service.”

B.38: Waterloo (Regional Municipality)

Population: 587,165

Inaugural meeting, November 23, 2022.³¹⁴

Dr. Darren Thomas:

“This is an overwhelming responsibility, but it is a shared responsibility, and it is one we can carry because we are strengthened by the power that comes from beyond all we know, and gives life to this world. Our creator has installed with each of our hearts a profound capacity to love. Love this world, love our fellow creatures, love every person we meet and love ourselves. It is that capacity that I pray you may uncover within your hearts and hold onto throughout all the work you do for this region. So I offer you a simple instruction from an early Christian letter by St. James. Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness, born of wisdom, wisdom that is pure, peaceful, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace to close. I paraphrase our Ukrainian prayer to the Holy Spirit. Comforter spirit of truth or present and all things. Giver of life, come well within us and grant us your peace. Thank you, and may you all be blessed in all the work you do.”

B.39: Welland

Population: 55,750

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.³¹⁵

Reverend Father Raymond Fenech Gonzi:

“We pray. God our Father, lord of heaven and earth, may inspire this council to lead and serve with compassion in meeting the needs of the people they serve. We pray for all those that are elected to govern that God’s justice be in their heart and guide their decision-making for the common good rather than for personal gain. For elected and appointed officials, may God work through their efforts and their hearts for them to create a more just society. To foster a spirit of understanding and forgiveness to overcome divisions among all people. For all of the political

³¹⁴ Region of Waterloo. (2022 November 23). *Inaugural Meeting of Regional Council* [Video]. Available at <https://pub-regionofwaterloo.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISISStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=905bfe7c-612e-4d80-8e04-45090549284b>.

³¹⁵ Welland. (2022 November 15). *Welland City Council Inaugural Meeting* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnyC83j2Mtc>.

power, may God render them strength in working to protect the dignity and life of every person, woman, or child and no matter how old or how young, no matter what race or creed, for our local and elected leaders. May God guide them and lead them with integrity, especially for the powerless and vulnerable and for the poor and the suffering. For those entrusted with fiscal responsibility, and for all who look after the budget, may god give them the wisdom to be good stewards and the strength to work with honesty. As we stand together here to celebrate the 2022 newly elected council, let us continue to make decisions that are worthy of all of our fellow citizens. Let us work tirelessly to build a city defined by respect, honour, inclusiveness, responsibility, and kindness to all. May God bless our mayor and the councillors of the city of Welland. Amen.”

B.40: West Lincoln

Population: 15,454

*Inaugural meeting, November 21, 2022.*³¹⁶

Pastor Peter Tuininga:

“May they be unified in vision and purpose, and may we as a people always be honourable for the offices in which they serve. May we always see in us a willingness to give them support. And maybe recognize that their lives will not be measured by the titles that they carry and by the lives they transformed and the people that they help. May their leadership in West Lincoln become a shining example for all to follow and receive the blessing from our God. May the strength of God uphold you. May the wisdom of God guide you. May the hand of God protect you, and may the word of God direct you.”

B.41: West Perth

Population: 9,038

*Inaugural Meeting, November 16, 2022.*³¹⁷

Chaplain William Ney:

“Ladies and Gentlemen. It is not a mere perfunctory rite that we are about to enter upon in a few moments. It is a very sober and meaningful activity. It is an activity upon which we enter because those who live in the Municipality of West Perth and who did their civic duty and voted, have decided that each of you should be entrusted with a sacred trust. Every person who enters into service in their community has been entrusted, in our Democracy, with a sacred duty to serve as best he or she knows how, those who voted them into office. You have all been elected

³¹⁶ Township of West Lincoln. (2022 November 21). *2022 West Lincoln - Council Inaugural* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVnlluO1fCM>.

³¹⁷ Municipality of West Perth. (2022 November 16). *Swearing-In Ceremony - Special Council minutes*. <https://westperth.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=427>; see also this transcript for this municipality was collected by volunteers prior to the writing of this report. After it was collected, the recording was deleted and is no longer available.

to lead our Municipality forward in the coming years...to provide services and build roads and bridges, utilizing the funds that those who elected you will now provide through their taxes. You will not always be congratulated or applauded for your decisions and sometimes, because of the thoughtless world we now live in, you will be derided, and disagreed with, and shouted at, and maybe even made fun of. Winston Churchill once said: "Politics are almost as exciting as war and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once, but in politics —many times." And then he said: "Democracy is not based on violence or terrorism, but on reason, on fair play, on freedom, on respecting the rights of other people." If you follow Sir Winston's advice, then your term of office will be characterized by winsome, carefully crafted words and well thought-out decisions. And you will continue this Council's legacy of wise decisions made for the welfare of the people you serve. Once again Churchill's thoughts come to you: He said: "All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope....for, success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts? May God bless you and grant all of you the courage to continue as you lead the Municipality of West Perth into an exciting future."

B.42: Whitewater Region

Population: 7,225

Inaugural meeting, November 16, 2022.³¹⁸

Pastor Mike Cosco:

"Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, I thank you so much for such an amazing place to live in. I thank you for all the communities. We thank you for all the great people, Lord God and the blessings that we have and the nature that surrounds us, Lord. I thank you that you love everyone in the white water region, and you want to bless everyone, Lord Jesus. And your desires that we would live together in peace and understanding. Thank you, Lord. And I thank you, Lord, that you provided this amazing team to lead us into the future, and Lord, I just pray a blessing over them. Lord Jesus, I just speak over Mayor Nicholson, the deputy mayor and all the councillors who serve. I speak a blessing of health; I speak a blessing of strength; I speak a blessing of wisdom as they serve to continue to make the Whitewater region such a great place to live in. In the name of Jesus, I just speak a blessing over the township of Whitewater region, and those who lead it, in Jesus' name, amen."

B.43: Woodstock

Population: 46,705

Inaugural meeting, November 15, 2022.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Whitewater Region Official. (2022 November 16). *Whitewater Region, Inaugural Council Meeting - 16 November 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM_gnfp_yjQ&t=604s.

³¹⁹ City of Woodstock. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Meeting of Woodstock City Council Nov 15th 2022* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BdS20zpH-o>.

Pastor Jeff Price:

"You know I was wrestling through what do you say at something like this and the scripture verse that is so popular if you've grown up around church or you have a grandparent that's been to church you may have seen this written somewhere inscribed on some uh doily or something but it's Jeremiah 29:11 It says for I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord plans to prosper you and not to harm you plans to give you hope.

A future I was thinking about those last two words as we're talking tonight about a hope and a future we live in a season of time where hope seems very low. People are disgruntled, they're frustrated; they're hurting. They're intimidated, and I think it's exciting to know that in this room we get to create a hope we get to show. I pray and speak courage over you that you would be courageous leaders that would stand and do what is right. It may not be the most popular at times, but you wouldn't be a courageous leader that would fight for the future that our city needs. I'm also speaking of the word and praying for protection over all of you. The reality is, as we step out and we do great things and make bold. Advance what is supposed to happen in our city. I pray for protection not just for you as individuals, but I know you all have families, and there's a cost to being a leader; there's a cost to serving a city, and I pray that your kids and grandkids would be protected and watched over. I'm praying for wisdom that you would walk in wisdom over the next four years. You are going to be bombarded with real issues, serious issues, major things that you have to think through and wrestle through, and set the course and the pace for our city. I'm praying that you will walk in wisdom, beyond just feelings and emotions and hype and and pulls the Jew would operate with deep divine wisdom. I'm praying for unity because reality is, unity is hard to come by. But unity creates movements that change the world doesn't mean that we all have to agree on everything. That's impossible. But that we can operate as a unified Council and a unified team that will be able to make an amazing difference in impact.

And lastly, I'm praying for prosperity for our city, that we could be a prosperous City. That we would see opportunities and jump on them, that our city will continue to see greatness and that the amazing plans and future that I believe are established. We'll be able to walk in, so I want to say a quick prayer in my closing. God, I thank you for this moment, and I thank you for this leadership team, this Council and our mayor. And Lord, I know that your word declares that you have a plan where you're going to prosper us. You've got a plan of Hope and a plan for a future. And I ask in your mighty name that those things will become a reality, God. I speak courage, protection, wisdom, unity and prosperity over every leader in this room, and I pray that we would see your hand at work in your name. Amen."

APPENDIX C: TABLES

C.1: Comprehensive Inaugural Prayer Data

Ontario Municipalities with Prayer in their 2022 Inaugural Council Meeting, Including Name, Affiliation, Religion, and Gender of the Person Delivering Prayer.

Municipality	Prayer Delivered By	Affiliation	Religion	Gender
Arran-Elderslie	Rev. Craig Bartlett	Tara United Church	Christian (O) ³²⁰	M
Aylmer	Chap. Major Rick Shirran	Royal Canadian Legion Branch 81	Christian (O)	M
Bluewater	Rev. Nadine Schroeder-Kranz	St. Peter's Lutheran Church	Christian (O)	F
Brampton	Pundit Tripathi	Unknown	Hindu	M
	Pandit Shukla	Unknown	Hindu	M
	Shaykh Faisal	Islamic Forum of Canada	Muslim	M
	Daljit Sekon	Sri Guru Singh Sabha Malton	Sikh	M
	Pas. Jamie Holtom	North Bramalea United Church	Christian (O)	M
Brighton	Rev. Wanda Stride	Trinity-St. Andrew's United Church	Christian (O)	F
Callander	Pas. John Inthof	Callander Bay Church	Christian (O)	M
Dysart et al	Pas. Bev Hicks	Northland Faith Church	Christian (O)	F
East Ferris	Deacon Tim Foster	Paroisse St Thomas D'Aquin Parish	Catholic	M
East Zorra-Tavistock	Pas. Mike Wasyluk	Innerkip Presbyterian Church	Christian (O)	M
Erin	Rev. Deacon Irene Walback	All Saints Anglican Church	Christian (O)	F
Essa	Rev. Jonathan Tait	Synod of Central, Northeastern Ontario and Bermuda	Christian (O)	M

³²⁰ Christian (O) is used to represent other Christian denominations.

Haldimand County	Pas. Wesley DeVries	Sweets Corners Christian Church	Christian (O)	M
Hamilton (Township)	Sandra Bell-Buttars, Certified Celebrant	Unknown	Unknown	F
Hanover	Pas. Lyndsay McGregor	Hanover Missionary Church	Christian (O)	F
Havelock-Belmont-Methuen	Pas. Dave Russel	Unknown	Christian (O)	M
Huron East	Sherrie Oliver	Marriage Officiant	Unknown	F
Innisfil	Rev. Howard Courtney	Innisfil Community Church	Christian (O)	M
	Rabbi Zevi Kaplan	Chabad Innisfil	Jewish	M
Kitchener	Swami Chaitanya Jyoti Ji Maharaj	Bramarishi Mission of Canada	Hindu	F
	Fr. Myroslaw Tataryn	Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Transfiguration	Catholic	M
	Fr. Toby Collins ³²¹	St. Mary's Parish	Catholic	M
Lambton Shores	Rev. Dr. Christine O'Reilly	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian (O)	F
Lanark Highlands	Rev. Shelley Roberts	Palgrave United Church	Christian (O)	F
Laurentian Valley	Rev. Robert Gulliver	First Evangelical Missionary Church	Christian (O)	M
Madawaska Valley	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	N/A
Magnetawan	Rev. Sylvia Poetschke	Trinity United Church	Christian (O)	F
Markham	Rev. Basil Coward	Victoria Square United Church	Christian (O)	M
Midland	Fr. Michael Knox	Martyrs' Shrine	Catholic	M

³²¹ Though Fr. Toby Collins gave remarks under a portion of the meeting titled "Reflection," our research team determined his remarks were a prayer consistent with methods used in our previous reports.

Minden Hills	Rev. Canon Joan Cavanaugh-Clark	Parish of Minden	Catholic	F
Mississippi Mills	Rev. Mary Royal-Duczek	Almonte United Church	Christian (O)	F
Newmarket	Imam Mohammed Sohaib	Newmarket Islamic Centre	Muslim	M
	Rabbi Mendy Grossbaum	Chabad Newmarket	Jewish	M
	Rev. Linda Wheler	Trinity United Church	Christian (O)	F
Niagara Falls	Rev. Isaac Flagg	Southminster United Church	Christian (O)	M
Niagara on the Lake	Rev. William Roberts	St. Mark's Church	Christian (O)	M
North Glengarry	Fr. Jonathan Blake	St Finnan's Cathedral	Catholic	M
	Père (Fr.) Didier Kaba	Sacred Heart Catholic Church	Catholic	M
North Huron	Pas. Jason Gilbert	Hutton Heights Community Church	Christian (O)	M
North Middlesex	Chap. Mark Isaac	Unknown	Christian (O)	M
North Stormont ³²²	Rev. Gaudet	Unknown	Christian (O)	N/A
Oakville	Vida Rosen	Interfaith Council of Halton	Baha'i	F
Parry Sound	Rev. Monica Moore	St. James United Church	Christian (O)	F
Pembroke	Deacon Adrien Chaput	St. Columbkille's Cathedral Parish	Catholic	M
	Pas. Kevin Wilson	Wesley Community Church	Christian (O)	M
Penetanguishene	Rev. Colonel Doug Clark	Unknown	Christian (O)	M
Petrolia	Pas. Tim Brown	New Life Assembly Petrolia	Christian (O)	M

³²² Due to unknown circumstances, Reverend Gaudet was included on North Stormont's swearing-in ceremony agenda but did not attend. Our research team classified this instance as "prayer" because Rev. Gaudet's inclusion on the agenda indicates an intention to incorporate religious practice. The absence of the religious representative appears to have resulted from an external circumstance rather than a decision to uphold the duty of neutrality.

Pickering	Pas. Mel Finlay	Nation At Prayer	Christian (O)	M
Rideau Lakes	Pas. Robert Crump	Bethel Pentecostal Tabernacle	Christian (O)	M
Selwyn	Rev. Cathy Gradante	Bridgenorth United Church	Christian (O)	F
Smiths Falls	Jill Turnbull	Westminster Presbyterian Church	Christian (O)	F
Southgate	Brenda Calder	The Presbyterian Church in Canada	Christian (O)	F
Southwold	Rev. Dianne Macpherson	Colborne Street United Church	Christian (O)	F
St. Clair	Jon Fitter	Church on the River	Christian (O)	M
St. Thomas	Pas. Jeremy Best	Faith St. Thomas Church	Christian (O)	M
Stirling-Rawdon	Rev. Cheryl McMurray	St. Paul's United Church	Christian (O)	F
Strathroy-Caradoc	Pas. Peter Hoytema	Christian Reformed Church	Christian (O)	M
Tay	Fr. Michael Knox	Martyrs' Shrine	Catholic	M
Tecumseh	Fr. Rob Renaud	Good Shepherd Parish	Catholic	M
	Pad. Chris Gevaert	Tecumseh Fire and Rescue	Christian (O)	M
Temiskaming Shores	Pas. Nick Kostyc	Temiskaming Pentecostal Church	Christian (O)	M
Uxbridge	Councillor and Minister Gordon Shreeve	Zephyr Missionary Church	Christian (O)	M
Wainfleet	Pas. Brian Lofthouse	Port Colborne Brethren in Christ Church	Christian (O)	M
Warwick	Rev. Christine O'Reilly	Knox Presbyterian Church	Christian (O)	F
Wasaga Beach	Rev. Graham Gaessler	Faith Missionary Church	Christian (O)	M
Waterloo (Regional Municipality)	Fr. Myroslaw Tataryn	Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Transfiguration	Catholic	M

Welland	Rev. Father Raymond Fenech Gonzi	St. Mary Catholic Church	Catholic	M
West Lincoln	Pas. Peter Tuininga	Christian Reformed Church	Christian (O)	M
West Perth	Chap. William Ney	West Perth Fire Department	Christian (O)	M
Whitewater Region	Pas. Mike Cosco	Cobden Pentecostal Church	Christian (O)	M
Woodstock	Pas. Jeff Price	Movement Church	Christian (O)	M

Total: 62 Municipalities

Abbreviations used:

Fr: Father Rev: Reverend Dn: Deacon Maj: Major Pas: Pastor
 Pad: Padre Pr: Priest Chap: Chaplain

C.2: Moment(s) of Silence, Regular Meeting Data

Ontario municipalities with moments of silence (or variations) in regular council meetings (first meeting after Oct 15, 2023 and/or first meeting after Feb 6, 2024), including the description listed in agenda.

Municipality	Description in Agenda/Minutes
Adelaide-Metcalfe	Silent Reflection
Alnwick/Haldimand*	Moment of Silence
Asphodel-Norwood	Moment of Silent Reflection
Aylmer	Moment of Reflection and Respect
Bancroft	Moment of Silence
Belleville	Moment of Reflection
Brock	Moment of Silence
Chatsworth*	Moment of Reflection
Clarence-Rockland*	Moment of Reflection
Clarington	Moment of Reflection
Cornwall	Moment of Personal Reflection
Douro-Dummer*	Moment of Silent Reflection

Emo*	Moment of Reflection
Essex (County)	Moment of Reflection
Faraday	Moment of Silence
Georgina	Moment of Meditation
Greater Sudbury	Moment of Silent Reflection
Guelph*	Silent Reflection
Haldimand County	Moment of Reflection
Hearst	Moment of Silence
Kawartha Lakes	Moment of Silent Reflection
Kingsville	Moment of Reflection
Kirkland Lake*	Moment of Silence
Lakeshore	Moment of Reflection
Lanark*	Moment of Silent Meditation
LaSalle	Moment of Silent Reflection
Meaford	Moment of Reflection
Midland	Moment of Silent Reflection
Milton	Moment of Reflection
Mississippi Mills	Moment of Meditation
Montague	Moment of Silence
New Tecumseth	Moment of Silent Reflection
North Algona Wilberforce	Moment of Reflection
North Dumfries	Moment of Reflection
Orillia	Moment of Silence
Ottawa	Moment of Reflection
Perth (County)	Moment of Reflection
Perth East	Moment of Reflection
Perth South*	Moment of Reflection
Petawawa	Moment of Silent Reflection
Peterborough	Thirty Seconds of Reflection

Pickering	Moment of Reflection
Port Hope*	Moment of Silent Reflection
Puslinch	Moment of Reflection
Rainy River*	Moment of Silence and Salute to the King
Renfrew (County)	Moment of Silent Reflection
Russell*	Moment of Silent Reflexion [sic]
Sarnia	Moment of Silent Reflection
Scugog	Moment of Silence
Selwyn	Moment of Silent Reflection
Severn	Moment of Reflection
Shuniah	Moment of Silence
St. Joseph*	Moment of Silent Reflection
Stratford	Moment of Silent Reflection
Tay*	Moment of Reflection
Tecumseh*	Moment of Silence
The Blue Mountains	Moment of Reflection
Thunder Bay	One Minute of Silence
Tillsonburg	Moment of Silence
Tiny*	Moment of Reflection
Tyendinaga*	Moment of Silent Reflection
Waterloo*	Moment of Reflection
Wellesley*	Moment of Reflection
West Grey*	Moment of Reflection
Woolwich	Moment of Silence

*Indicates which municipalities did not have accompanying recordings for chosen sample dates.

Total: 65

C.3: Change of Prayer Practices in Ontario Municipalities 2014–2022

Ontario municipalities with prayer in 2014, 2018 and/or 2022 inaugural council meetings, and their responses to letters regarding their 2018 and/or 2022 inaugural prayer practices.

Due to the complex nature of this table, colour coding is used to ease the process of tracking each municipality's change (or lack of change) to come into compliance with *Saguenay*. Red denotes the presence of prayers in an inaugural meeting. Orange denotes the inclusion of a moment of silence. Where no prayer was read or a secular practice included, the cell is green. Ambiguous situations are marked in blue. And for those meetings where data were unavailable, the cell is grey.

Municipality	2014	2018	Response	2022	Response
Amaranth	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Arran-Elderslie	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	Contacted
Asphodel-Norwood	Unknown	Prayer	None	Moment of Silence	N/A
Aylmer	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
Barrie	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Belleville	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Bluewater	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Bracebridge	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Prayer	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Brampton	Prayer	Moment of Silence	N/A	Prayer	None
Brant County	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular ³²³	N/A
Brighton	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Brock	Unknown	Prayer	None	Moment of Silence	N/A
Brockton	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Burlington	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Caledon	Unknown	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Callander	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	None
Cambridge	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Central Elgin	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Central Frontenac	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

³²³ Brant County also sang 'God Save the King' at their 2022 inaugural meeting.

Centre Hastings	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Centre Wellington	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Chapleau	Prayer	Prayer	None	Unknown	N/A
Chatham-Kent	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Clearview	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Cobalt	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Collingwood	Prayer	Prayer	Denied	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Cramahe	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Dawn-Euphemia	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Dryden	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Dutton/Dunwich	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Dysart et al	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
East Ferris	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
East Gwillimbury	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
East Zorra-Tavistock	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Ambiguous ³²⁴
Elizabethtown-Kitley	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Enniskillen	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Erin	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	None
Essa	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Fort Erie	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Fort Frances	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Georgian Bluffs	Unknown	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Georgina	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Goderich	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Grand Valley	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Greater Madawaska	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Grey Highlands	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

³²⁴ East Zorra-Tavistock claimed that though a local Pastor prayed at their meeting and appeared on the Agenda, that the municipality did not authorize the community member to share a prayer with council.

Grimsby	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Haldimand County	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Haliburton	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Hamilton	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Hamilton (Township)	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer ³²⁵	N/A
Hanover	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Hastings Highlands	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Havelock-Belmont-Methuen	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	None
Highlands East	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Howick	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Huntsville	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Huron East	Unknown	Prayer	Ambiguous ³²⁶	Ambiguous ³²⁷	N/A
Huron-Kinloss	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Ignace	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Innisfil	No Prayer/Secular	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	None
Kawartha Lakes	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Kenora	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³²⁸	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Kincardine	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
King	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Kingston	Unknown	Moment of Silence	N/A	Ambiguous ³²⁹	N/A
Kitchener	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Lake of Bays	Prayer	Prayer	Denied	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

³²⁵ Hamilton (Township) hosted an invocation read by a certified celebrant at their 2022 inaugural meeting. No recording was available to verify secular content.

³²⁶ Phelps Bondaroff et. al. (2022), p.149.

³²⁷ Huron East hosted a "Keynote Speaker", a certified celebrant, at their 2022 inaugural meeting. No recording was available to verify secular content.

³²⁸ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022), pp.149-150.

³²⁹ Kingston's clerk asked those in attendance to bow their heads for a moment of reflection, see below.

Lambton (County)	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁰	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Lambton Shores	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³¹	Prayer	None
Lanark Highlands	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
LaSalle	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Laurentian Valley	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Leamington	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Leeds and Grenville	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Leeds and the Thousand Islands	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Lennox and Addington	Prayer	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Loyalist	Prayer	Prayer	None	Moment of Silence	N/A
Madawaska Valley	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Magnetawan	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	None
Malahide	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Markham	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Meaford	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³²	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Melancthon	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Middlesex Centre	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Midland	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Denied
Minden Hills	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Minto	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Mississauga	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Mississippi Mills	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Muskoka	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	N/A

³³⁰ Phelps Bondaroff et al. (2022) , p.151.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p.152.

³³² *Ibid.*, p.152.

Muskoka Lakes	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
New Tecumseth	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Newmarket	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Niagara Falls	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Niagara-on-the-Lake	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Denied
Norfolk County	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
North Bay	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
North Dumfries	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³³	Moment of Silence	N/A
North Glengarry	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Ambiguous
North Huron	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
North Middlesex	Unknown	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	Contacted
North Perth	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
North Stormont	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Norwich	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Oakville	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
Orillia	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁴	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Otonabee-South Monaghan	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Parry Sound	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Argumentative
Pelham	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Pembroke	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Penetanguishene	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
Petawawa	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Petrolia	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Pickering	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Denied
Point Edward	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Prescott	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

³³³ *Ibid.*, pp.152-153.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.153.

Prince Edward County	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Quinte West	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Ramara	Unknown	Prayer	Denied	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Red Lake	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Richmond Hill	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Rideau Lakes	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
Russell	No Prayer/Secular	Prayer	Argumentative	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Saugeen Shores	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Sault Ste. Marie	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Selwyn	Prayer	Prayer	Denied	Prayer	None
Shelburne	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁵	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Simcoe (County)	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁶	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Smiths Falls	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	Contacted
South Bruce	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
South Dundas	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
South Glengarry	Unknown	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
South River	Unknown	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Southgate	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Southwest Middlesex	Unknown	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁷	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Southwold	No Prayer/Secular	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	None
Springwater	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
St. Catharines	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
St. Clair	Prayer	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	Changed
St. Marys	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
St. Thomas	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.156.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.156-157.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.157-158.

Stirling-Rawdon	Unknown	Unknown	N/A	Prayer	None
Stratford	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Strathroy-Caradoc	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Tay	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Tay Valley	No Prayer/Secular	Prayer	Denied	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Tecumseh	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Temiskaming Shores	Prayer	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	None
Thames Centre	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
The Nation	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁸	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Thorold	No Prayer/Secular	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Thunder Bay	Prayer	Prayer	Changed	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Timmins	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Tiny	Prayer	Prayer	None	Moment of Silence	N/A
Uxbridge	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Wainfleet	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Warwick	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Wasaga Beach	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
Waterloo (City)	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Waterloo (Regional Municipality)	No Prayer/Secular	No Prayer/Secular	N/A	Prayer	Contacted
Wawa	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Welland	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	None
West Lincoln	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Acknowledged
West Perth	Unknown	Prayer	None	Prayer	Changed
Whitchurch-Stouffville	Prayer	Prayer	Ambiguous ³³⁹	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.161.

Whitewater Region	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Denied
Wilmot	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
Woodstock	Prayer	Prayer	None	Prayer	Contacted
Woolwich	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A
York (Regional Municipality)	Prayer	Prayer	None	No Prayer/Secular	N/A

Total: 172

C.4: Inaugural Prayer Linguistic Analysis

Table of religious elements mentioned in Ontario municipalities with prayer in 2022 inaugural council meetings.

Municipality	Jesus Christ/ Christ	Deity : Any Variation	Religious Text	Lord's Prayer	Bible Quote	Lord Guiding Council	Amen
Arran-Elderslie	N	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
Aylmer	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Bluewater	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Brampton	Y	Y	Y	N	N	A	N
Brighton	N	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
Callander	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Chapleau	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dysart et al	Y	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
East Ferris	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
East Zorra-Tavistock	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Erin	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Essa	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Haldimand County	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Hamilton (Township)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hanover	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y

Havelock-Belmont-Methuen	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Horton	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Huron East	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Innisfil	Y	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
Kitchener	N	Y	Y	N	N	A	N
Lambton Shores	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Lanark Highlands	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Laurentian Valley	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Madawaska Valley	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Magnetawan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Markham	N	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
Midland	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Minden Hills	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mississippi Mills	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Newmarket	Y	Y	Y	N	N	A	Y
Niagara Falls	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Niagara-on-the-Lake	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
North Glengarry	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
North Huron	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
North Middlesex	Y	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
North Stormont	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oakville	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Parry Sound	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Pembroke	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Penetanguishene	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Petrolia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pickering	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Rideau Lakes	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Selwyn	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y

Smiths Falls	N	Y	N	N	N	A	N
Southgate	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Southwold	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
St. Clair	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
St. Thomas	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
Stirling-Rawdon	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strathroy-Caradoc	N	Y	N	N	N	A	N
Tay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tecumseh	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Temiskaming Shores	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Uxbridge	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Warwick	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Wainfleet	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Wasaga Beach	Y	Y	N	N	N	A	Y
Waterloo (Regional)	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Wawa	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Welland	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
West Lincoln	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
West Perth	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Whitewater Region	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Woodstock	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y

C.5: National Anthem(s), Regular Meeting Data

Ontario municipalities with the National Anthem in regular council meetings, (first meeting after October 15, 2023, or first meeting after February 6, 2024).

Amherstburg	Hamilton	Moonbeam	Russell
Barrie	Hanover	New Tecumseth	Sarnia
Brantford	Kapuskasing	Niagara Falls	Shelburne
Burlington	Kawartha Lakes	Niagara-on-the-Lake	South Glengarry

Central Elgin	Kingsville	North Glengarry	South Huron
Central Frontenac	Kitchener	North Perth	Springwater
Chatham-Kent	Lanark	Oakville	Stratford
Chatsworth	Lanark Highlands	Orangeville	Tecumseh
Cornwall	LaSalle	Orillia	Timmins
Essex (County)	Leamington	Oshawa	Wainfleet
Essex (Town)	Leeds and Grenville	Ottawa	Welland
Gananoque	Leeds and the Thousand Islands	Pelham	Wellington
Greater Madawaska	Lincoln	Peterborough	Wellington North
Grey	Loyalist	Port Colborne	West Lincoln
Grey Highlands	Madawaska Valley	Quinte West	Whitewater Region
Grimsby	Mapleton	Renfrew (County)	Windsor
Guelph	Milton	Renfrew (Town)	
Halton Hills	Mississippi Mills	Richmond Hill	

Total: 70

C.6: Indigenous Content, Inaugural Meeting Data

Ontario municipalities with Indigenous content in their 2022 inaugural council meeting.

Ajax	French River	Melancthon	Shelburne
Algonquin Highlands	Frontenac Islands	Middlesex Centre	Simcoe (County)
Alnwick/Haldimand	Gananoque	Midland	Sioux Lookout
Amaranth	Georgian Bay	Milton	Smiths Falls
Amherstburg	Georgian Bluffs	Minden Hills	Smooth Rock Falls
Arnprior	Georgina	Mississauga	South Algonquin
Asphodel-Norwood	Gravenhurst	Mississippi Mills	South Bruce
Aurora	Greater Madawaska	Mono	South Frontenac
Bancroft	Greater Sudbury	Mulmer	Southgate
Barrie	Greenstone	Muskoka	St. Catharines
Black River-Matheson	Grimsby	Neebing	St. Thomas
Bonnechere Valley	Haldimand County	Newmarket	St. Charles
Bracebridge	Haliburton	Niagara (Regional Municipality)	Stratford
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Halton Hills	Niagara Falls	Tay Valley
Brampton	Hamilton	Niagara-on-the-Lake	Tecumseh
Brantford	Hamilton (Township)	North Bay	Temiskaming Shores
Brighton	Hanover	North Dumfries	The Blue Mountains
Brock	Hastings Highlands	North Grenville	Thorold
Brockton	Hawkesbury	North Huron	Thunder Bay
Burlington	Hearst	North Kawartha	Timmins
Caledon	Highlands East	North Perth	Tiny
Central Elgin	Huntsville	Northumberland	Toronto
Central Frontenac	Innisfil	Orangeville	Trent Hills
Centre Wellington	Kapuskasing	Oro-Medonte	Trent Lakes
Chatham-Kent	Kawartha Lakes	Oshawa	Tweed

Chatsworth	Kenora	Otonabee-South Monaghan	Tyendinaga
Clarington	Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards	Parry Sound	Warwick
Clearview	Kincardine	Pelham	Warwick
Cobourg	Kingsville	Pembroke	Wasaga Beach
Cochrane	Kirkland Lake	Perth	Waterloo
Collingwood	Kitchener	Petawawa	Waterloo (Regional Municipality)
Cornwall	Lake of Bays	Petrolia	Wawa
Cramahe	Lakeshore	Pickering	Welland
Douro-Dummer	LaSalle	Prince Edward County	Wellesley
Dryden	Leamington	Quinte West	Wellington
Dufferin (County)	Leeds and Grenville	Red Lake	West Lincoln
Durham (Regional Municipality)	Lennox and Addington	Renfrew (County)	West Nipissing
Dysart et al	Lincoln	Renfrew (Town)	Whitby
East Gwillimbury	London	Russell	Whitchurch-Stouffville
Erin	Loyalist	Sarnia	Whitewater Region
Espanola	Madawaska Valley	Saugeen Shores	Wilmot
Essex (County)	Manitouwadge	Sault Ste. Marie	Windsor
Essex (Town)	Markham	Scugog	Woodstock
Fort Erie	McKellar	Selwyn	Woolwich
Fort Frances	Meaford	Severn	York (Regional Municipality)

Total: 179

C.7: Indigenous Content, Regular Meeting Data

Ontario municipalities with Indigenous content in regular council meetings (First meeting following October 15, 2023 and February 6, 2024).

Ajax	Essex (County)	McKellar	Renfrew (Town)
Algonquin Highlands	Essex (Town)	McNab/Braeside	Richmond Hill
Alnwick/Haldimand	Faraday	Meaford	Rideau Lakes
Amaranth	Fort Erie	Melancthon	Russell
Amherstburg	Fort Frances	Middlesex Centre	Sables-Spanish Rivers
Armour	French River	Midland	Sarnia
Arnprior	Frontenac Islands	Milton	Saugeen Shores
Asphodel-Norwood	Gananoque	Minden Hills	Sault Ste. Marie
Assiginack	Georgian Bay	Mississauga	Scugog
Augusta	Georgian Bluffs	Mono	Selwyn
Aurora	Georgina	Montague	Severn
Bancroft	Goderich	Moonbeam	Shelburne
Barrie	Greater Madawaska	Moosonee	Shuniah
Belleville	Greenstone	Mulmur	Smiths Falls
Black River-Matheson	Grey	Muskoka	Smooth Rock Falls
Blandford-Blenheim	Grimsby	Muskoka Lakes	South Algonquin
Blind River	Guelph	Neebing	South Bruce
Bonnechere Valley	Haldimand County	New Tecumseth	South Huron
Bracebridge	Haliburton	Newmarket	Southgate
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Halton (Regional Municipality)	Niagara (Regional Municipality)	St. Catharines
Brant	Halton Hills	Niagara Falls	St. Clair
Brantford	Hamilton	Niagara-on-the-Lake	St. Marys
Brighton	Hamilton (Township)	Nipigon	St.-Charles
Brock	Hanover	North Algona Wilberforce	Stratford
Brockton	Hastings Highlands	North Dumfries	Strathroy-Caradoc

Brockville	Havelock-Belmont-Methuen	North Grenville	Tecumseh
Brudenell, Lyndoch and Raglan	Hawkesbury	North Huron	Temiskaming Shores
Burlington	Highlands East	North Kawartha	Terrace Bay
Caledon	Horton	North Perth	The Blue Mountains
Cambridge	Huntsville	Northumberland	Thorold
Carleton Place	Huron East	Orangeville	Tillsonburg
Cavan Monaghan	Huron Shores	Oro-Medonte	Timmins
Central Elgin	Innisfil	Oshawa	Tiny
Central Frontenac	Kapuskasing	Otonabee-South Monaghan	Toronto
Centre Wellington	Kawartha Lakes	Ottawa	Trent Hills
Chapleau	Kenora	Parry Sound	Trent Lakes
Chatham-Kent	Kincardine	Peel (Regional Municipality)	Tweed
Chisholm	Kingsville	Pelham	Tyendinaga
Clarence-Rockland	Kirkland Lake	Pembroke	Uxbridge
Clarington	Kitchener	Penetanguishene	Vaughan
Clearview	Lake of Bays	Perth	Wainfleet
Cobourg	Lakeshore	Perth (County)	Warwick
Collingwood	Lambton (County)	Petawawa	Wasaga Beach
Cornwall	Lanark	Peterborough	Waterloo
Cramahe	LaSalle	Petrolia	Waterloo (Regional Municipality)
Douro-Dummer	Leamington	Pickering	Wellesley
Drummond/North Elmsley	Leeds and Grenville	Point Edward	West Lincoln
Dryden	Lincoln	Port Colborne	West Nipissing
Dufferin	London	Port Hope	Whitchurch-Stouffville

Durham (Regional Municipality)	Loyalist	Powassan	Whitewater Region
Dutton/Dunwich	Lucan Biddulph	Prescott	Wilmot
Dysart et al	Macdonald, Meredith and Aberdeen Additional (Echo Bay)	Prescott and Russell (United Counties)	Windsor
East Gwillimbury	Madawaska Valley	Prince	Woolwich
Elizabethtown-Kitley	Manitouwadge	Prince Edward County	York (Regional Municipality)
Englehart	Markham	Quinte West	
Espanola	Marmora and Lake	Renfrew (County)	

Total: 222

APPENDIX D: INDIGENOUS CONTENT TRANSCRIPTS

D.1: Ajax

Population: 587,165

Inaugural Meeting, November 28, 2022³⁴⁰

Elder Kim Wheatley:

"So when we smudge, we take that smoke, we draw it over our head so we think all the good things, and we go over our eyes so we see only good things, we draw it over our ears so we hear only good things, and we draw it over our mouths, so we speak only good things. I need this when I'm driving my car in heavy traffic, and I always encourage people to put some over your heart, because heart speak is the most powerful relationship builder and connector that we will have in our whole lives. In our conflicts, when we have compassion, they can help change the kind of world that you live in, not only right now, but for those that have come along after us, in the same way those that came before us did for us.

So I'm going to let this smudge now, and I'm going to offer a prayer and a nudging reminder. I think my lighter needs a vacation.

I was given tobacco to speak, and what we do is we acknowledge the four directions, and I acknowledge all of Council and the mayor, all of those that are present in terms of staff and administration, and all of you who are here. As we bring our hearts and minds together, we think about the first day of creation. This is your responsibility, council and mayor: to think about all the sands, the soils, the plains, the gravels, the rocks, the stone beings, and the mountains. This is the order of creation that teaches us about strength and resilience. This is the order of creation that holds the earth together. This is the order of creation upon which we place our feet on a daily basis, and it holds us up. We are walking on the bodies of our ancestors. So every day, in a good way, I invite you to do readings and things.

And then I want to draw your hearts and minds to think about the second order of creation, especially the council and the mayor. This would be all of the grasses, the shrubs, the trees, the bushes, the hardwoods, the softwoods, the bears, the hanging fruits, the evergreens, and all the medicines. This order of creation gives us life, so that you know you have life. It allows us to be fully present, to nourish our tummies when we're hungry, to heal our bodies when we are not well, to receive protection from the elements because our bodies are frail, and to provide endless beauty for our senses. So on this day, I invite you to give them greetings and thanks, and I challenge council and the mayor to remember to make space for those beautiful beings as well, because they are your relatives.

³⁴⁰The Town of Ajax. (2022 November 28). *2022-2026 Ajax Council: Inaugural Ceremony* [Video]. Youtube. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQz6UE-C9Rg>.

As we move forward into the third order of creation, I want to acknowledge all the swimmers, the crawlers, the flyers, the two-legged, those that live up in the sky, and those that live beneath the earth. As we think about our elder brothers and sisters, they teach us how to behave in good ways, how to raise our families, how to be a part of a community, how to never take more than we need, how to ensure that there's something left for those that will come after us. They are companions, our food source, and our teachers, so I challenge you, mayor and council, to remember to honour their spaces and their contributions, even in a town environment.

I also want to draw your attention to [audio unclear]. I know, I'm not going to talk about [audio unclear], this is the last one, so this is the one that involves us. We are all part of the human family, in all of our great diversity, and I honour your ancestors, honour you that were able to make it here today. I want to honor all those that wanted to come but were unable to make it for whatever reason, and I want to honor all those that will come along after us, based on the decisions we make today. Moving forward, we affect the future and the kind of world we need for those that come long after us. We may meet them, we may never know their names, but I challenge you, council and mayor, to think about them and what legacy you will need, because at the end of your life [audio unclear], the only thing that remains is your stories.

So I talk about intention, and intent, how it travels ahead of this collection, and what you intend is what you will need. So my encouragement is to intend well, that what's unique fills your heart, contributes to that beautiful relationship, building a legacy of decisions well made, well thought out decisions for the greater good.

As I bring my greetings to a close, I want to offer a song, a celebration song, to honour council, to honour especially the mayor and his beautiful family that are here. I want to honour all of you that made time to be here. I want to honour all administrative staff for running such a beautiful event tonight. It is indeed an honour for me to be here; don't take this lightly. And while I don't represent all First Nations peoples, I do speak the truth as we understand it, to the best of my ability.

And as I sing this song, there are words you think you should have heard from me tonight, think them, say them, feel them, emote them. If there's anything that I've said that's offended you, I apologize; my intent is to help you leave here better than when you came. I intended just to help raise this up to be the best of our potential.

So to sing this song, that's your opportunity, that's your time, and at the end of the song I'm going to make a sound; some of you have seen it before, and you know I always put this challenge out, and it always makes people squirm. But we don't clap in our world — you might have heard me making some sounds over there, it's called a [audio unclear], and it sounds like this.

[Applause]

So at the end of my song, you can collectively make that sound. It's an honouring of our ancestors; it's an honouring of who you are and all who are present for you today, and it's an honouring of those that will come along after us. I am so, so very proud to offer my personal and sincere congratulations to each and every one of you.

I have never heard such heartfelt declarations; that was most inspiring. So congratulations to you, mayor, colleague, thank you, thank you for having me.

This is a song for them and for you.”

D.2: Bracebridge

Population: 587,165

Inaugural meeting, November 23, 2022.³⁴¹

James Simcoe:

“[Speaks Indigenous Language (unverified Anishinaabemowin)]

Well, hello everybody, my name is James Simcoe, and I am here to visit from Chippewas of Rama First Nation. We'll begin this council, and I'm going to smudge; we brought some of our medicine, or sage, so I'm going to use sage. It is an original medicine of the land; it grows everywhere. So with this medicine, we're going to smudge; we're going to clean, we're going to cleanse, feel good, we're going to feel hopeful for the upcoming future, for the hard work council is going to do. And it is going to be beautiful.

So this medicine smells real nice. We're going to smudge over councillors, then our chief of Chippewas First Nation as well. This particular medicine is used for smudging, among other things, but this one in particular is, like I said, we're going to cleanse ourselves. You know, sometimes when you have a bad day, or you have a rough day, or you really had a bad day, cleaning our spirit really helps. We are always thankful for this medicine. So as I come to you it's just like washing. It's just: you do your head, your face, your eyes, ears, nose, mouth, the heart. It's like pushing water onto you.”

³⁴¹ Town of Bracebridge. (2022 November 23). *2022 Bracebridge Council Inaugural Meeting* [Video]. Available at <https://video.isilive.ca/bracebridge/2022-11-23%20Inaugural%20Council%20Meeting.mp4.html>.

D.3: Leamington

Population: 29,680

Inaugural Meeting, November 15, 2022.³⁴²

Brenda Percy:

"The Municipality of Leamington acknowledges that this land is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie Peoples. The Municipality of Leamington values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island; North America who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial."

D.4: Muskoka

Population: 66,674

Inaugural meeting, December 5, 2022.³⁴³

Tina Kilbourne (Land Acknowledgement):

"Good afternoon, I was honoured to be asked to deliver a land acknowledgement today. But first I would like to provide a bit of background info about me and my learning journey, which is an important part of a land acknowledgement and helps those listening understand more about the person speaking and their understanding of and commitment to truth and reconciliation. I have long been interested in Indigenous culture and history, but it wasn't until 2018 that I took a deep dive by reading books written by Indigenous authors - both fiction and non-fiction - reading news articles about current issues and events - from Ontario and across Canada and embracing opportunities to connect with and learn from Indigenous knowledge keepers. I am continually learning about the depth and complexities of Indigenous culture, history and the journey of truth and reconciliation.

I continually see how much more I have yet to learn. At the first Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table meeting in June 2019, members committed to creating a land acknowledgement statement with which to open District Council and Committee meetings. We struck a working group made up of Indigenous and municipal members but instead of creating a single land acknowledgement statement, we created what has become known as the Land Acknowledgement Guidelines and Framework.

³⁴² Municipality of Leamington. (2022 November 15). *Inaugural Council Meeting - November 15, 2022* [Video]. Available at <https://csg001-harmony.sliq.net/00321/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20221115/-1/11161>.

³⁴³ The District Municipality of Muskoka. (2022 December 5). *The Inaugural Meeting of the Nineteenth Council of The District Municipality of Muskoka* [Video]. Available at <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/39418/?preview=39854>.

These guidelines are meant to ensure everyone delivering a Land Acknowledgement does so in a personal, heart-felt and honest way. While the thought of delivering a land acknowledgement can be daunting at first, the guidelines are meant to guide users through the process and educational journey. It is important not to take shortcuts. Land Acknowledgements are one way to model both good leadership and strong advocacy and are now being used across all of Muskoka's municipalities to open Council meetings. The Land Acknowledgement Guidelines and Framework provide background information, tips about delivery and a variety of options and examples to help everyone develop their own personal land acknowledgement. The Guidelines and Framework document is available to District staff, Councillors and other organizations and since being approved by District Council in 2021 has been accessed by a range of partner agencies within Muskoka, and beyond. It is available on the MAILT page on our Engage Muskoka platform or reach out to me and I will happily send you a direct link.

With that: In the spirit of reconciliation, many communities and organizations use Land Acknowledgements to recognize the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories, and to recognize Indigenous Nations as sovereign. In Muskoka, we are on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, which includes the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Nations have also walked on this territory over time. Today, Muskoka is home to three sovereign nations: Wahta Mohawks First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation and the Moon River Métis. The lands that make up what is today known as Muskoka are covered by the Williams Treaty (of 1923), the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and the J. Collins land purchase (of 1785).

We must respect these treaties and ensure all levels of government do too. In closing, I would like to draw upon the Anishnaabeg teaching that honours creator for giving humans seven sacred gifts for guidance, also referred to as the Grandfather's seven gifts. These include love, truth, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty and bravery. May District Council use these gifts to guide their decisions over the next four years so that everyone in Muskoka feels a sense of belonging - and has opportunities to thrive. Creator gave us sovereignty to govern ourselves. We respect and honour the past, present, and future. Thank you and Miigwetch."

Chief Williams-Lovett (Invocation):

"Good afternoon, everyone/Aaniin kina weya: Firstly, thank you for the invitation to say a few words at this afternoon's ceremony. I am very appreciative of the successful partnership that has been established with the District of Muskoka through the Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table, and I am pleased to extend best wishes today to all elected leadership for a very successful term of office. Leadership in any level of Government has had to take on an entirely different perspective in the past few years. We have had to adapt, react, and some days "fake it" to respond to the ever-changing climate of the world around us. None of us were prepared for COVID and the demands it would place on the health of our citizens, the economy, the very fabric of how we conduct business. The world as we knew it is trying to recover, without any reassurance that it will ever be the same again. The one true constant though, is our ability

to believe in a Higher Power. Whether you call it faith, religion, karma, there has never been any shame in asking for help, and we can all do that through the saying of a prayer. I ask you now to bow your heads and, in your own way, agree with me in prayer for assistance for the leadership of Muskoka.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 'First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity' Father God, creator of all, we thank you for the opportunity to gather today to acknowledge the leadership in Muskoka, the chosen Government for the upcoming term. We thank you for the opportunity to be able to pray that you will guide their steps and their decisions. We pray that in all their actions, they will work for the betterment of the area that they serve and for the well-being of the citizens that elected them. We pray wholeheartedly for wisdom, insight, and strength for Muskoka District Council. G'chi-miigwech Zhemnido, Amen."

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