Delegation Name: Rev David Driedger
Statement to Executive Policy Committee of the City of Winnipeg
December 11, 2020

Greetings, my name is Rev David Driedger I am a minister at First Mennonite Church and member of an ecumencial group working in support and solidarity on questions of peace and justice in our communities. One of our shared convictions is that ethical or moral action always begins by paying attention to what matters most. The most valuable resource we have as individuals is how we offer our time and attention. But we recognize that as individuals our time and attention is limited and too often we are made to feel responsible for addressing some of the most pressing realities of those who struggle and suffer in our city. This is overwhelming for many of us because we have decided to give much of our time and attention to violence and unnecessary suffering.

We've grown tired and angry at various levels of government that promote individual charity in response to some of the grinding realities many face in our city. This approach to individual charity is common and has become a way of absolving elected officials from responsibility, placing blame and guilt on those with little power for material change. The stated vision of the City of Winnipeg is, "To be a vibrant and healthy city which places its highest priority on quality of life." So I am here to ask you simply does this budget place the quality of life for its residents as its highest priority? To seek quality of life for all always means focusing on those with least access to the quality we can afford. Does subsidizing and catering to wealthy developers matter most while so many are experiencing deteriorating housing and negligent landlords? Does increased investment in an organization more trained at administering lethal force than providing compassionate care matter most? Does investment in structures that harm the environment matter most?

The city budget is complex and technical but it is also moral. It is an ordering of values and a statement of priorities to the broader community. Your budget reveals to us whose interests you will put our shared resources to work. We ask that you consider carefully what you are communicating to your constituency through it.

On behalf of those who helped me draft this statement I am here to say that we reject this city's current financial commitment to policing that draws inordinate resources away from supports that can help alleviate the desperate conditions that so many Winnipeggers are forced to endure; a form of policing that has not increased the peace of our city but has instead unnecessarily harassed, abused and killed many of its citizens. We call for increased funding and support for all those who are underpaid or volunteer working to support the very same people the Winnipeg Police Service is willing to criminalize and punish.
We reject a budget that prioritizes single driver infrastructure at the cost of broad and accessible public transit and active transportation.
Particularly in light of COVID-19 restrictions, we worry over the lack of housing, public spaces and washrooms, safe injection sites and other basic supports for many of our neighbours in this

city; and we lament the scant resources allocated to these realities. These are the bare minimum of what our city can do to care for its citizens.

We understand that there are many practical matters and pressing obligations in establishing a responsible budget but we maintain that moral leadership always begins with what matters most and we are tired of those with the most money and influence getting priority while the quality of life of so many are left to the limited resources of individuals. So we urge you to give your attention to and prioritize those facing the most critical challenges and struggles in our city.

We have observed that a crisis tends to expose and highlight existing injustices and inequalities. This has been the case here in Winnipeg with those most vulnerable being exposed to even greater threats of harm during this pandemic. Crisis is also a time of opportunity. We encourage you to consider courageous leadership at this time and begin a new direction for Winnipeg by showing clear signs of greater investment in what matters most.
Thank-you.