

LETTERS

Where's the compassion?

Re: Homeless told to clear RVs from city land (Dec. 20)

What an absolute shock I experienced Thursday morning when reading the front page article of The Spec. The couple live in a trailer (previously a tent). The gentleman has to travel to the hospital three times a week for dialysis.

The city is evicting them because they have to prepare to dump snow on the property. Is there no (other) place in this whole city that snow can be dumped? I can't imagine the city's thinking (or lack thereof)! This action indicates that snow is more important than people.

How many articles in The Spec does it take to make the city hall people really realize that there is a homeless crisis in Hamilton and to take positive action in alleviating the situation? Is there no compassion within those walls?!

Sister Carole Anne Guay, Hamilton

Act now on homelessness

A homeless couple has been given notice to remove their RV from municipally owned land. Why doesn't the city take the bull by the horns and create a safe, controlled area for unhoused individuals? This isn't rocket science. It's been suggested before. A variety of city-owned properties could be carefully fenced in with washroom facilities, medical assistance and guidance for those requiring additional support.

This housing crises has been going on (at least) since 2020. Why is the city still "considering various remedies?" They should take control of the situation and disallow the hodgepodge of tents in public parks and city streets. The homeless should be encouraged to reside, temporarily, in the safety of these city-controlled encampments. The city could assist the environment and health of these individuals by collecting garbage to avoid rodent infestation. But now is the time for the city to act, not six months down the road.

Jacquie Reid, Hamilton

There's little to be merry about

Hamilton council says no to a vacant home tax. No to temporarily housing our over 1,000 homeless citizens. No to tiny homes initiated and funded by citizens. Yes to empty prime space in downtown's City Centre with all utilities being left empty. Yes to massive tax hikes that are unsustainable. Yes to outrageous water hikes. Yes to a 45-storey tower at our waterfront. Happy holidays from a thoughtless, self-serving and sad city hall. There are a few councillors who care, but they are few and far between.

Robin Magder, Dundas

Access to 24-7 shelter needed

We are a group of health-care providers who work with people in Hamilton who are unhoused or precariously housed through the Shelter Health Network.

Our patients are some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities. Many have endured lifetimes of trauma and live with severe physical and mental health issues. We have seen the damage that can result from living outside through a Canadian winter: limbs amputated due to frostbite; severe burns from fires built in an effort to stay warm; deaths from hypothermia. Every day we see the despair of those who will be facing the cold outside this winter and we fear for their safety.

Although expanded from past years, the current Winter Response Strategy does not keep pace with the increasing numbers of people living outside. Additional shelter beds are already at capacity. There is no indoor warming space overnight for men.

Solutions for couples or those who are service restricted from shelters are lacking. The warming bus lacks washrooms or space to lie down, so this respite is limited. We urge the City of Hamilton to provide 24-hour access to a warm space for every Hamiltonian who lacks shelter and to continue to expand access to shelter beds.

We see the depth of compassion that many people have shown their unhoused neighbours and we urge all Hamiltonians to reflect on the deadly harms that may ensue if people continue to be left outside in the cold.

Sent on behalf of 33 health-care providers who work with the Shelter Health Network

No pagans, please

Re: A Hamilton pagan retail crawl: Yule be glad we did (Dec. 20)

The Spectator seems to have stooped to an all-time low. During this Christmas season, which celebrates the birth of Jesus, you have chosen to pay a lot of attention focused on paganism.

What does paganism have to do with Christ and Christmas? There is enough darkness in this world we live in. Why do you feel it necessary to promote it? The entire article is offensive and in very poor taste.

Linda Maloney, Dundas



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THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

A front-yard nativity scene on display in an antiquated wagon. Writing about the nature of goodness and the first Christmas, Thomas Froese notes that the core of the Christmas narrative has a certain earthiness, which gives it remarkable staying power worldwide.

Some thoughts on Christmas



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

I recently watched a debate involving a couple of academics, two cerebral rock stars who talked at length about life, including the nature of goodness.

The secular humanist explained that goodness doesn't depend on God or supernatural agents. "But if they're around, they can step up and show where we're wrong."

No, said the other. To even think about the concept of goodness, it has to be already written on the human heart, if not the fabric of the universe. There's a relationship between good and God, whether we acknowledge it or not.

They talked briefly, only, about Jesus. Which, I think, is like talking about light without talking much about the sun.

But in our time of incivility, there's an appetite for peaceful debate. Almost a million people have seen this one online. Both men spoke with a spirit of humility. They agreed to dialogue more. We needn't fear it.

Which brings us to Christmas and that supernatural "stepping up," the story of how the Christ child was born in the most mysterious way.

Two thoughts.

First, the Christmas narrative changes the focus from human goodness (and we have goodness) to human reckoning (because we have darkness too). Nobody likes reckoning. We already have enough to fear: like yesterday's screw-ups, or today's storms, or tomorrow's unknowns.

Certainly the first Christmas was full of fears. So the phrase "Don't be afraid," comes repeatedly in the account of what happened in Palestine's Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

When Mary was told of her role birthing the child? "Don't be afraid." When shepherds saw the strange angelic host in the night sky? "Don't be afraid." When Joseph was warned to run with his family from the enraged King Herod hell-bent on killing young Jesus? "Don't be afraid."

Speaking of fear, Jesus didn't later anger the religious elite or occupying Romans because he simply told people to be good, or nice, to each other. That's not why his friends deserted him, or why he was executed horribly on a cross.

No, Jesus — and there is compelling evidence to trust the ancient accounts — healed the lame, gave the blind sight and showed astonishing love and compassion in various ways, while also teaching often about forgiveness and reckoning, that is reconciliation with God.

Of course, not everyone is inter-

ested. A suitor can be rebuffed. A suitor often is. We need not listen to many poems or sad love songs to know. Even so, "Don't be afraid. I'm on your side." This, peace and goodwill from the God of Christmas.

Second thought. Most of us will be forgotten soon enough after our time ends on this spinning ball in space. Even the adored rock stars. (My daughters would now nod to Taylor Swift, Time's Person of the Year, thank you.)

But the core of Christmas has a certain earthiness. Along with its historic veracity, this earthiness has given the narrative a remarkable staying power worldwide.

This isn't to defend every action of anyone running around carrying Christ's name during the past 2,000 years. I happen to agree with Woody Allen's quip that "If Jesus came back and saw what's being done in his name, he'd never stop throwing up."

Even so, if God did come in human flesh to our dirty little ball of a planet, he played by Earth's rules. I mean, born in an animal pen? Come on. Some half-blind cow could have stepped on him. And choosing a common, impoverished family in ancient Israel, a nation under tyranny?

The truth is that any of us are journeying as imperfect people. Life's road is often hard. And through the year, indeed through our lives, there are always voices clamouring for attention. Always one rock star or another.

So we should look honestly. And listen. Then when we get quiet (the holidays can be the worst time to try) and we can hear a reliable declaration worth something. Like that deeper peace.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM

New year, but old thinking at city hall

GRAHAM CRAWFORD

Dealing with a crisis often requires creative problem solving. After all, the root causes of a crisis may well be the result of doing things the same way they've always been done.

Adhering to tradition can lull us into avoiding innovation. It's not difficult to understand why. Following known patterns is easier than inventing new ones.

Take the Mayor's New Year's Levee as a simple, but telling, example. It's unclear how many Hamiltonians received the holiday card from Mayor Andrea Horwath where her name appears no fewer than five times. So much for "Team Council" and all the enthusiastic collaboration she keeps claiming she's fostered, of which there seems to be little evidence.

The card invites recipients to one of three Mayor's New Year's Levees over a three-day period. Hey, if we can afford to pay for one, why not pay for three?

The mayor of Halifax, Mike Savage, thought differently.

Like most cities in Canada, Halifax is facing a homelessness crisis which led Savage to cancel his New Year's Levee, saying, "Every night I think as I go to bed — is somebody gonna... freeze to death."

He sought council approval to do the \$8,500 cost of the levee to a local health-care centre.

Horwath didn't do that.

Some might say donating the tens of thousands the glossy invitation and the food, beverages and staff time it costs to host the levees is peanuts. Not worth commenting on. I don't agree. I think all gestures matter, especially during a crisis.

Here's a New Year's wish for a bigger gesture the mayor could make that would require some creative problem solving. Just last week, the owner of the now shuttered Hamilton City Centre said because of the economic climate, his development is now years away from starting.

The building he owns has 550,000 square feet, about 90,000 square feet of which once housed 500 City of Hamilton employees for a number of years. New elevators were installed when city staff moved in years ago.

The place is vast. It's also now empty. With no plans for development any time soon.

If you follow known patterns, you accept that this empty space is just that — empty and unavailable. But you could think of it as space that has a number of important features. It's in good condition, has working heat, hydro, elevators, washrooms, running water, access to nearby downtown services, including transit, the library, health care, etc.

In other words, it's a perfect spot for a temporary shelter and possibly related services like a warm-

ing centre.

By way of example, the online full retail price for a foldable cot with mattress top is less than \$100. Bedding and pillows add to that cost. Perhaps the city has surplus furniture in storage that could be used in the shelter, or in a warming centre on one of the floors.

The mayor could contact the developer, perhaps offering to cover all costs, including utilities and insurance, for use of the building with a commitment to be out within 60 days of the developer filing a demolition request. I'm sure the developer might see the benefit of helping the city during a crisis, especially when it comes time to seek city approvals when his development moves ahead.

I don't know if this is a viable option. I am confident, however, that she's talked with staff about the details of the three New Year's Levees.

And therein lies our problem, Hamilton.

The mayor continues to do the obvious when a crisis situation calls for the unexpected. This is but one example. There are others. Horwath needs to start pushing new methods and stop simply adhering to old ones. Rather than posting meaningless photo ops, I'd like to see a photo of her pursuing an innovative deal with a willing developer helping people in real need.

Instead, we end the new year with old thinking.

Please Mayor Horwath, try harder. We expect and need more. So much more.

GRAHAM CRAWFORD IS A RETIRED INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, PAST HAMILTON CITIZEN OF THE YEAR, AND RECIPIENT OF THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL.