



HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE TASKFORCE - INITIAL REPORT

Reporting Period: September to December 2022

Task Force Members

Name	Task Force Role	Representative From
Jeff Concepcion	Co-Chair	SCCEFC MMT
Aaron Li	Co-Chair	Homelessness Subject Matter Expert
Sam Zhao	Member	SCCEFC Custodian
Nora Tam	Member	SCCEFC Staff
Cedric Wong	Member	Serve Local Team
Glenna Lee	Member	SCCEFC MOT
Roger Wang	Member	SCCEFC MMOT
KK Cheung	Member	SCCEFC CMOT
Ryan Leung	Member	Parish Nurse



INTRODUCTION

The intention of this report is to provide an initial outline and summary of the purpose, discussions, and recommendations of the SCCEFC Homelessness Response Taskforce as of January 2023. During the reporting period of September 2022 – December 2022, 4 meetings were held. This report should be viewed in conjunction with the appendix and accompanying documents including the workflow chart and contact list. Subsequent findings and recommendations may be captured in future documentation and reporting.

BACKGROUND

Over the past few years, members of the SCCEFC community (including staff and congregants) have had a spectrum of exchanges with individuals and groups of people in the surrounding community who appear to be experiencing homelessness - as well as some who appear to have additional challenges with addictions, & mental health. As a Church community, we are confronted with the dilemma of how to care for these people on the margins while ensuring an environment of safety for all in our community.

PURPOSE OF THE TASKFORCE

Formed in September of 2022, the Task Force was tasked with researching, advising, and recommending policies, and actions to support SCCEFC's response to the increasing interactions between congregation members and people experiencing homelessness in the surrounding community. Our goal is to collectively form a response at a church-wide level to ensure consistency, continuity, and an overall unified approach to interacting with vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

As a primer for the Task Force Members, the Task Force reviewed the current landscape of homelessness. This landscape discussion was lead by Task Force Co-Chair, Aaron Li, who is a former employee of the Calgary Homeless Foundation. The discussion provided a high-level view of homelessness in general, and the challenge the community currently faces. A summary is provided below:

Homelessness is a complex issue that defies a single, simple solution. Those who are poor and without housing are among the most vulnerable among us. Being unhoused often exacerbates underlying issues including trauma, mental health challenges, and addiction issues. Combined, these issues are complex on societal, systemic, and individual levels.

According to the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#), homelessness is “the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it.”

It is important to note that this definition does not fully encompass every experience of homelessness. There are different groups of people who are affected differently, and every individual's experience is unique. Homelessness is not strictly an issue of housing instability. These differences are important when considering methods of addressing homelessness, as one strategy does not apply for every community.

Homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, and includes:



- Unsheltered: absolutely homeless (streets, park, vacant buildings) or not fit for habitation (cars, garages, tent)
- Emergency Sheltered: Overnight shelters, Domestic Violence Shelters, Disaster Shelter
- Provisionally Accommodated: temporary accommodation or lacks security of tenure (Hospital/Jail)
- At Risk of Homelessness: not homeless, but imminent risk of homelessness or does not meet public health and safety standards (sudden unemployment, eviction, violence at home)

Over the past few years, we have seen how the pandemic has caused significant disruption in the lives of most people around the world. Economically people lost jobs, businesses shut down operations, government responses were disorganized causing undue stress and uneven responses, health care systems were in disarray preventing people from accessing services, and long periods of isolation caused significant mental health challenges.

As one can imagine, all the above have impacted vulnerable people to an even greater degree, as the effects of the pandemic have intensified the pre-existing challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness (such as lack of opportunity, deteriorating mental health, further isolation, lack of access to services, continued addictions, etc.) and ultimately causing the existing social welfare systems to be severely strained. Combined with the democratization of opioids and other illicit substances, this has led to increasing interactions and tensions between vulnerable people and those in the surrounding communities, including businesses, and churches.

In 2018, it was determined that approximately 3000 people experienced homelessness on any given night in Calgary ([CHF PiT](#)). While the data for the number of people experiencing homelessness has not been updated since 2018, anecdotally from input provided by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, today it is acknowledged that major cities such as Calgary are grappling with an unprecedented increase in the complexity of those experiencing homelessness, let alone numbers of people – thus there are no easy solutions to the challenges at hand.

WHAT WE HEARD (FINDINGS)

Over the course of the meetings, the Task Force surfaced various issues, experiences, and areas that required attention in regard to SCCEFC's current situation. Some of those are highlighted below:

- *Example 1.* Persons experiencing homelessness wish to use the bathroom and/or charge their phones
- *Example 2.* Prior to church worship and/or event - clean-up of garbage, unsanitary conditions and possibly drug paraphernalia etc.
- *Example 3.* Lack of church staff during the week (especially during COVID) – which meant staff had to respond to different types of potentially unsafe situations (Note. Most staff are female).
- *Example 4.* Encampments around the exterior of the church property.
- *Example 5.* Persons experiencing homelessness (and either appearing intoxicated or mentally unwell) ask to attend service or event/fellowship.



- *Example 6.* Persons experiencing homelessness wish to solicit money and/or resources, food, and bottles/cans etc.

In each of these occasions and occurrences, no existing policies and procedures were in place for a response. It was up to the attending individual/staff/volunteer to respond according to their own comfort level and experience. In general, as a church and community, from the examples above, we are seeing increasing interactions between people experiencing homelessness and our membership, thus an appropriate response to these common issues is critical to ensure safety and wellbeing for everyone involved.

Community Consultation

During the final meeting, the Task Force invited Adam Bedford, Chaplin for the Salvation Army Calgary to come and attend to review Task Force work/findings and provide his recommendation on SCCEFC's current situation. As Adam has spent many years as both a pastor of a local church, and as an advocate for people living on the margins, his consultation was sought after given his experience.

During this session, Adam further supported the current landscape summary captured above noting that he is seeing a significant increase in the complexity of people accessing resources at the Salvation Army. Adam further recommends that SCCEFC continue to remain the "church", to care for the spiritual needs of congregants, and to re-direct people who may approach SCCEFC and are experiencing challenges, to access mainstream services that have experience and expertise in the complexities and challenges that individuals experiencing homelessness face.

Essentially, SCCEFC, like most other churches are not currently equipped to support the complex issues that we see in the community today. By providing services/supports to individuals experiencing homelessness, we may unintentionally cause further harm in their journeys. This, however, does not preclude our responsibility as members of the body of Christ and of citizens of Calgary to this population, thus Adam recommended that SCCEFC have a holistic approach to this situation with both short and long-term thinking of how to approach. Perhaps further training for staff/Pastors, volunteers, or other initiatives to help boost our capacity to serve.

RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Given the findings above, the Task Force came up with a variety of approaches, solutions and recommendations for SCCEFC to adopt. A summary of these can be found below:

1. Utilization of a phone/resource list:
 - a. Task Force members developed, reviewed, and revised a phone/resource list that would be utilized in the event a situation was to arise with someone experiencing homelessness. This phone list contains the phone numbers of various community resources that may be contacted by staff and volunteers as the need occurs.
 - b. A copy of the Phone list can be found in **Appendix 1** below.
2. Utilization of workflow chart
 - a. Given the examples provided under the "What we Heard Section", Task Force members developed and reviewed a workflow chart that would help guide the interactions between



SCCEFC and those experiencing homelessness. This chart would be a foundational guide for use by staff and volunteers and utilized in the event a situation was to arise.

- b. A copy of the workflow chart can be found in **Appendix 2** below.
3. Training & distribution of materials regarding homelessness such as phone/resource list, workflow chart, and policies to staff, volunteers, and leaders (MOT, MMT, Deacons, etc.) for dissemination
4. Increase the volunteer base for welcome/hosting team to include more male members to enhance safety
5. Create basic needs kits that can be provided to vulnerable people in need, which ensures we provide a minimum level of care, but may not create dependency. This may include:
 - a. bottled water
 - b. granola bar
 - c. socks & gloves (during winter months)
6. Door Locking Procedures
 - a. Lock church doors and post a host to monitor each door during sermons and events
 - b. During fellowship or other meetings, ensure leaders are trained on workflow and to ensure doors are locked.
7. Bathroom Access/Use Policies
 - a. Task Force has recommended that the bathrooms be restricted to attending members of SCCEFC only, and not for public access use. Training on this knowledge should be provided and signage should added to reinforce this.
 - b. See **Appendix 3** for a copy of the draft Bathroom Access sign.
8. General Visitor response procedure
 - a. Should any visitors (vulnerable people) enter the church seeking services, seat them in well-lit, central, and public areas within the church (lobby for example) thus individuals can be monitored, disruption is not caused, and assistance can be provided if necessary. Pull out a chair and welcome them to sit down while resources are contacted (if applicable).
 - b. Always ensure that at least 2 individuals are aware of situations regarding vulnerable people
9. Create a “safe walk” program to encourage church members to always accompany each other to their vehicles, especially at night, and have resources available to help escort them if they feel unsafe.
10. Track Incidents in incident reports for data collection and learning purposes - review as necessary annually.
 - a. Incident report should be easy to use and available online for anybody to fill in. Possible to use Google Forms for data entry and tracking - located on SCCEFC website.



11. Invitation of resources such as Adam from the Salvation Army to speak to the current issues and appropriate response
12. Implementation of findings into policies & procedures (or enhancing current ones) for the church as outlined above, including:
 - a. working alone policies
 - b. door locking
 - c. bathroom use policies
 - d. Consistent and strict boundaries regarding supports provided to vulnerable people
 - e. The above-mentioned resource/workflow guide
13. Long-term - Alignment between sermons & ministry to bring attention to this population via volunteer service, donations, charitable giving, etc.
 - a. Partner with a local social service organization such as Salvation Army, Mustard Seed, etc. to create exposure to these issues for congregants and to ensure an outlet for service for members looking to take a more hands-on approach and to support this population in ways that SCCEFC could not directly.
 - b. Remind SCCEFC of our role as ambassadors of Christ and how we must support our fellow community members and neighbours, but do so in meaningful, safe, and productive ways



APPENDIX 1: PHONE/RESOURCE LIST

Engaging Unhoused People Quick Reference

Community resources to contact in situations where SCCEFC does not have resources to support:

DOAP TEAM | 403-998-7388

The Downtown Outreach Addiction Partnership (DOAP), is a program of the Calgary Alpha House Society, which is an emergency shelter serving vulnerable people. This team is dedicated to reaching out to vulnerable people across our city, provide outreach services, transport, and connecting people to the right resources. If in doubt, give this team a call, and they would be happy to assist.

Needle Response Team | 403-796-5334

The Needle Response team is a program of the Calgary Alpha House Society and can be contacted in the instances that needle and needle debris is found and is a potential danger to the public.

Distress Centre | 4030-266-HELP (4357)

DCC provides 24 hour crisis support, professional counselling, youth peer support and referrals to other resources. If anybody is in distress and need professional help, please contact them.

211 Alberta | 211 | ab.211.ca

Contact **211** to access an entire network of community, social, health and government services. Your call, text or chat will be answered by a professional 211 Community Resource Specialist who is trained to assess your need and refer you to the most appropriate service or services. 211 is available across Alberta and is offered in over 170 languages over the phone.

Suicide Prevention Hotline | 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

If anybody is hurting, and in need of support regarding suicide ideation, this is the team to call.

Police Non-Emergency | 403-266-1234

In instances where Police response or advice is required, and is a non-emergency, please contact the non-emergency line to request support. If an emergency, please contact 911.

Health Link | 811

For any non emergency medical or health related question, please contact 811. As the main health resource line of Alberta Health Services they provide health advice to all Albertans.

*This list is intended to provide a high-level overview of available resources and is not exhaustive. Please contact 211 Alberta for additional resources.

ALPHAHOUSE **DOAP TEAM**
403-998-7388

WHEN SHOULD I CALL?



If an unhoused individual is sleeping in the doorway of your business or residence

If someone is overdosing (please call 911)



An individual is having a poor mental health moment where DOAP support might be beneficial

If someone is bleeding heavily and requires medical attention (please call 911)



An individual or group are readying themselves to use substances in a public space

An independently housed individual needs a ride home from the hospital after receiving treatment



An unhoused individual in a vulnerable state (likely intoxicated) is in need of transportation

An individual with access to alternative resources wants a ride to a business or residence



PLEASE NOTE: that the DOAP Team is NOT law enforcement and is never able to *forcibly remove* individuals from any space they might be occupying.

In situations where refusal to move or threatening behaviour is occurring, please contact police. In all emergency situations, please call 911.



APPENDIX 2: ENGAGING UNHOUSED PEOPLE SITUATIONAL WORKFLOW

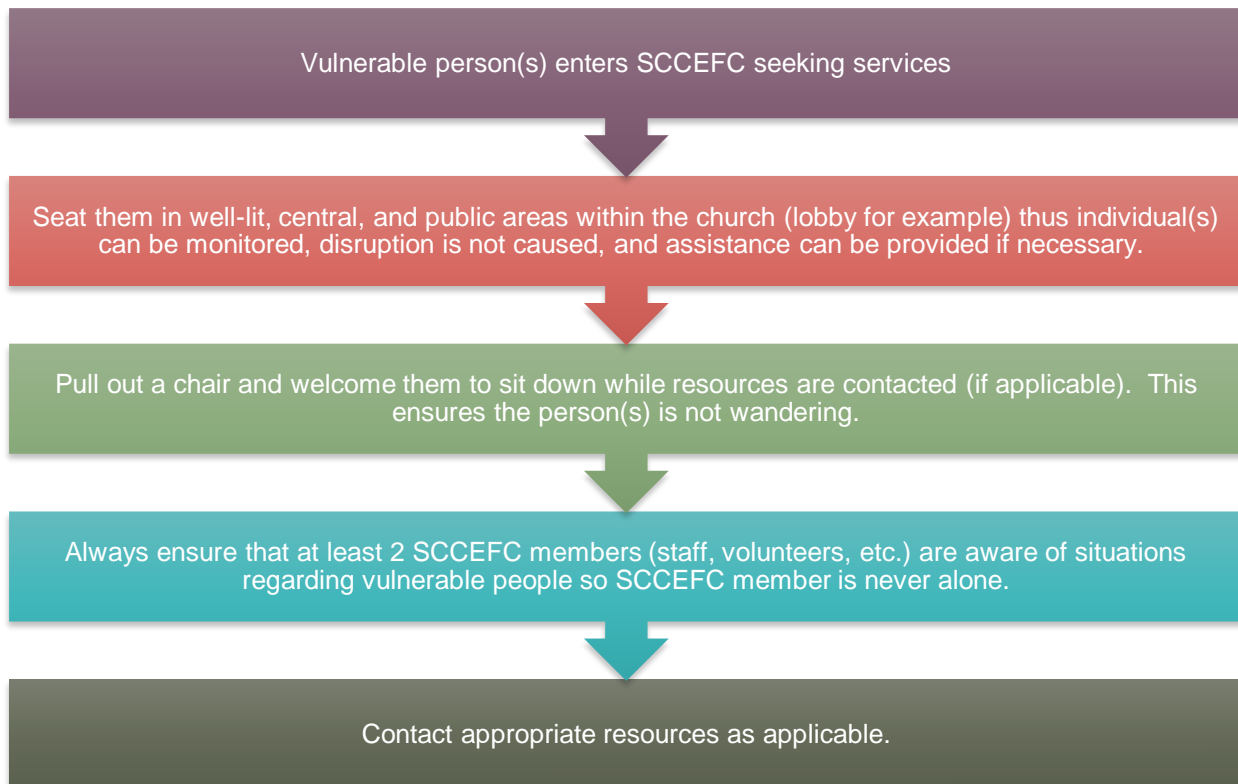
Engaging Unhoused People Situational Workflow

Given SCCEFC's location, there may be situations where people experiencing homelessness (also referred to as an "unhoused" person) may engage SCCEFC Staff, volunteers, and congregants. To ensure safety for all parties, use your best judgement, keeping in mind our role as ambassadors to God's kingdom, and utilize this workflow guide as a reference. A variety of situations are presented for example and best practice purposes, but with the common theme of ensuring SCCEFC is a safe space for all.

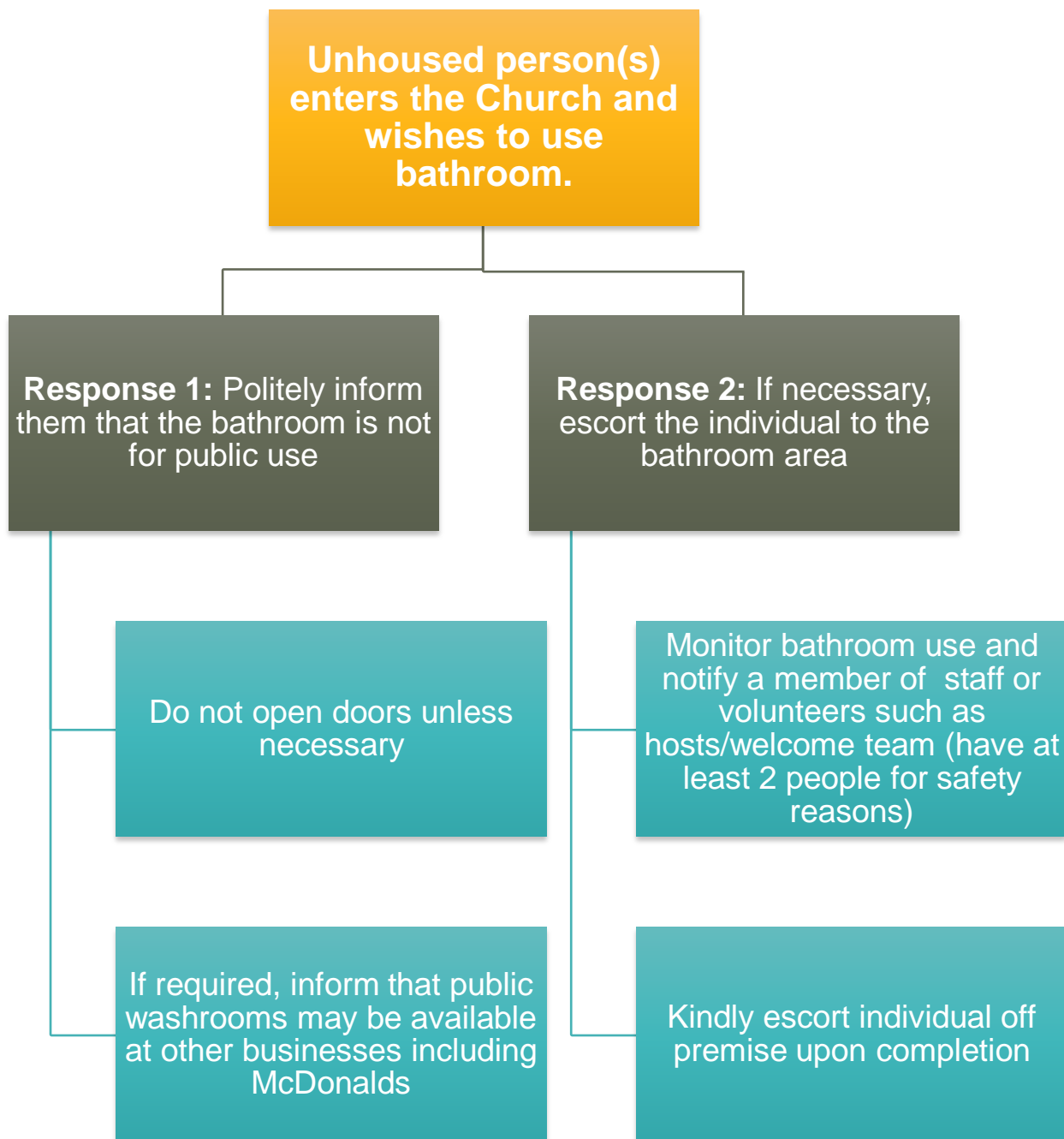
***Note: Boundaries are important, if you do not feel comfortable at any time, it is OK to say NO, or ask for assistance.**

At the time of this guide's development, staff members include: Ryan (Pastoral Nurse), Sam (Church Custodian), Nora (Church Administrative Assistant), and members of the Pastoral team.

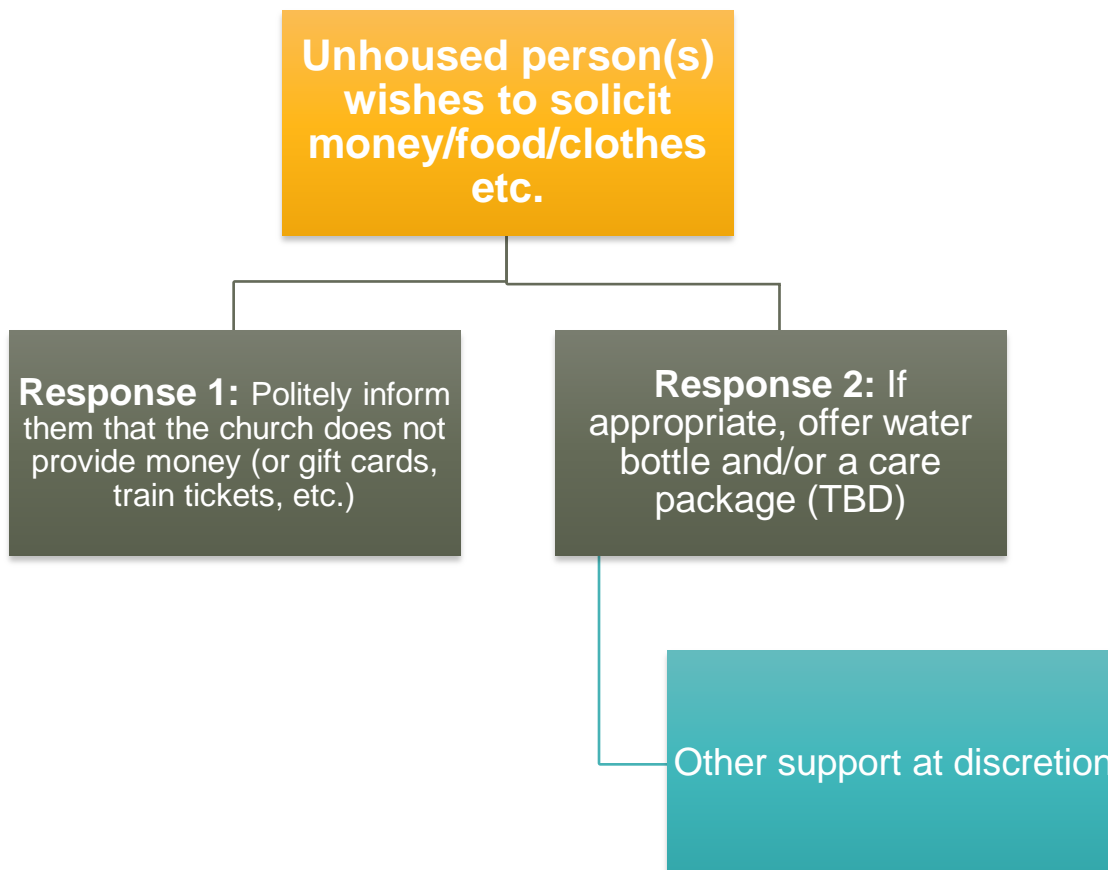
GENERAL VISITOR RESPONSE PROCEDURE:



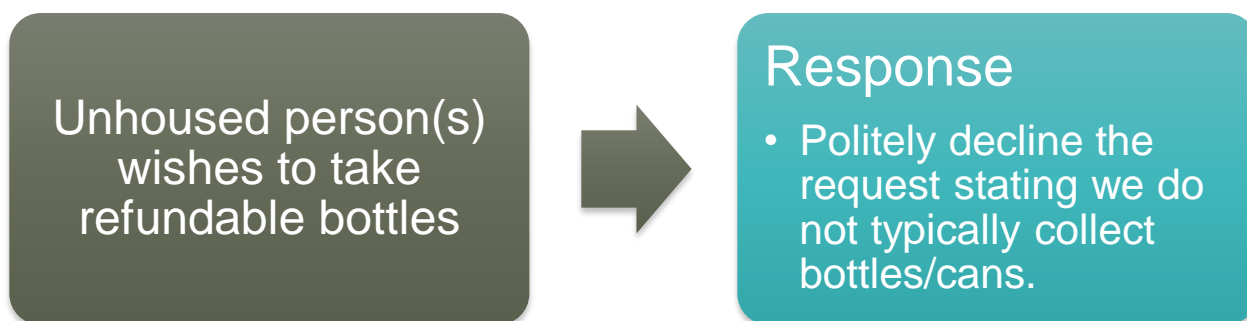
SITUATION 1



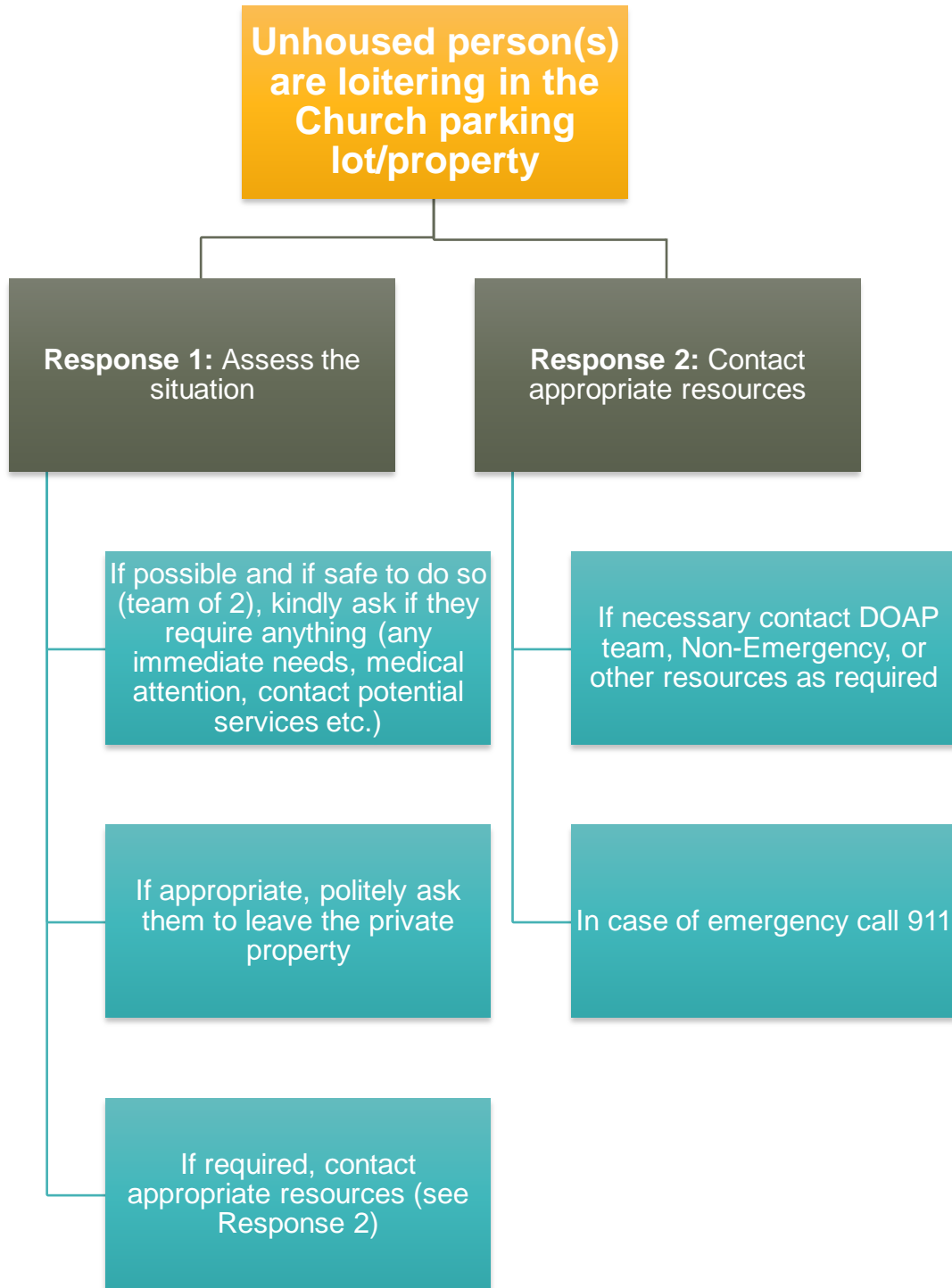
SITUATION 2



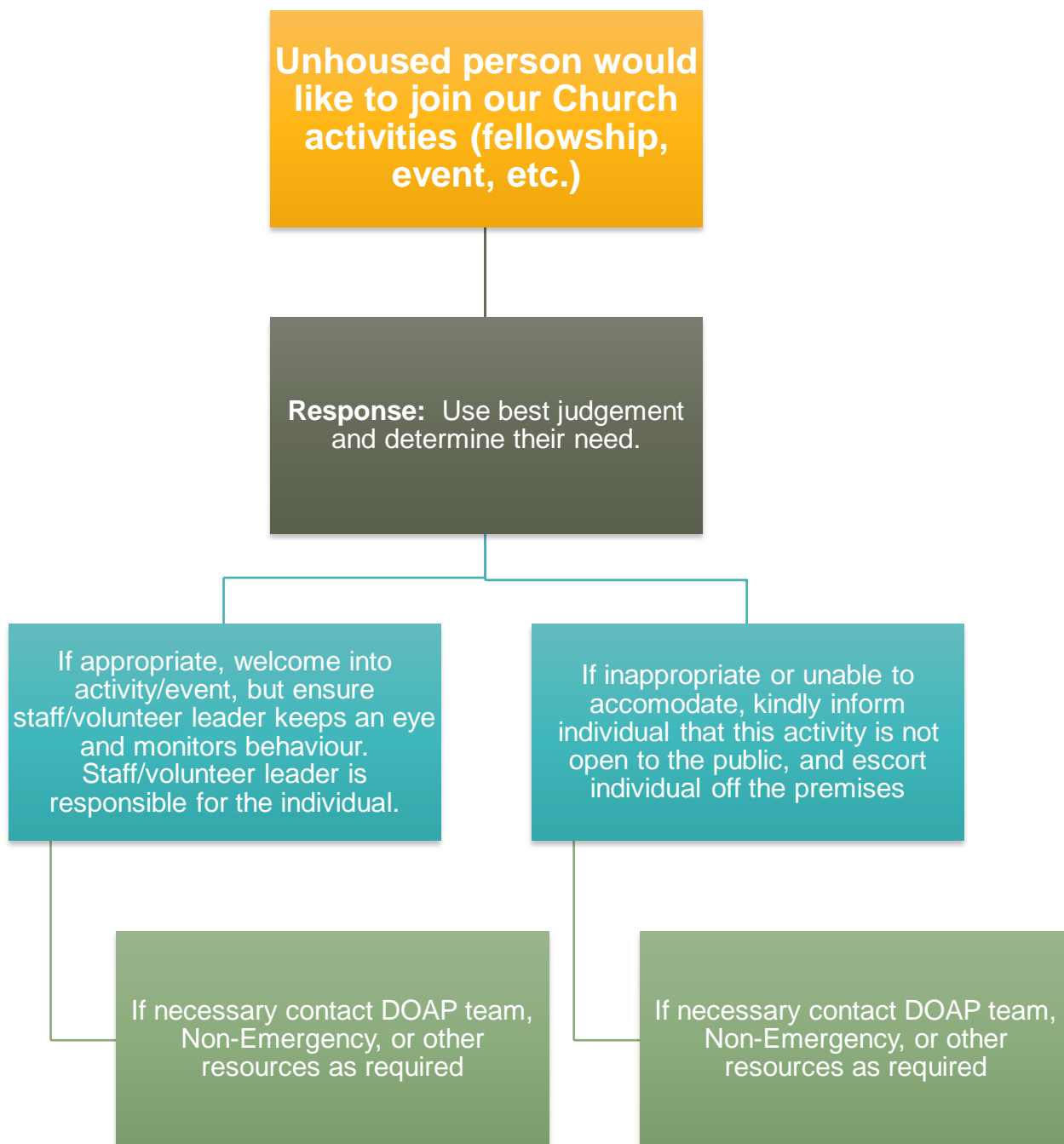
SITUATION 3



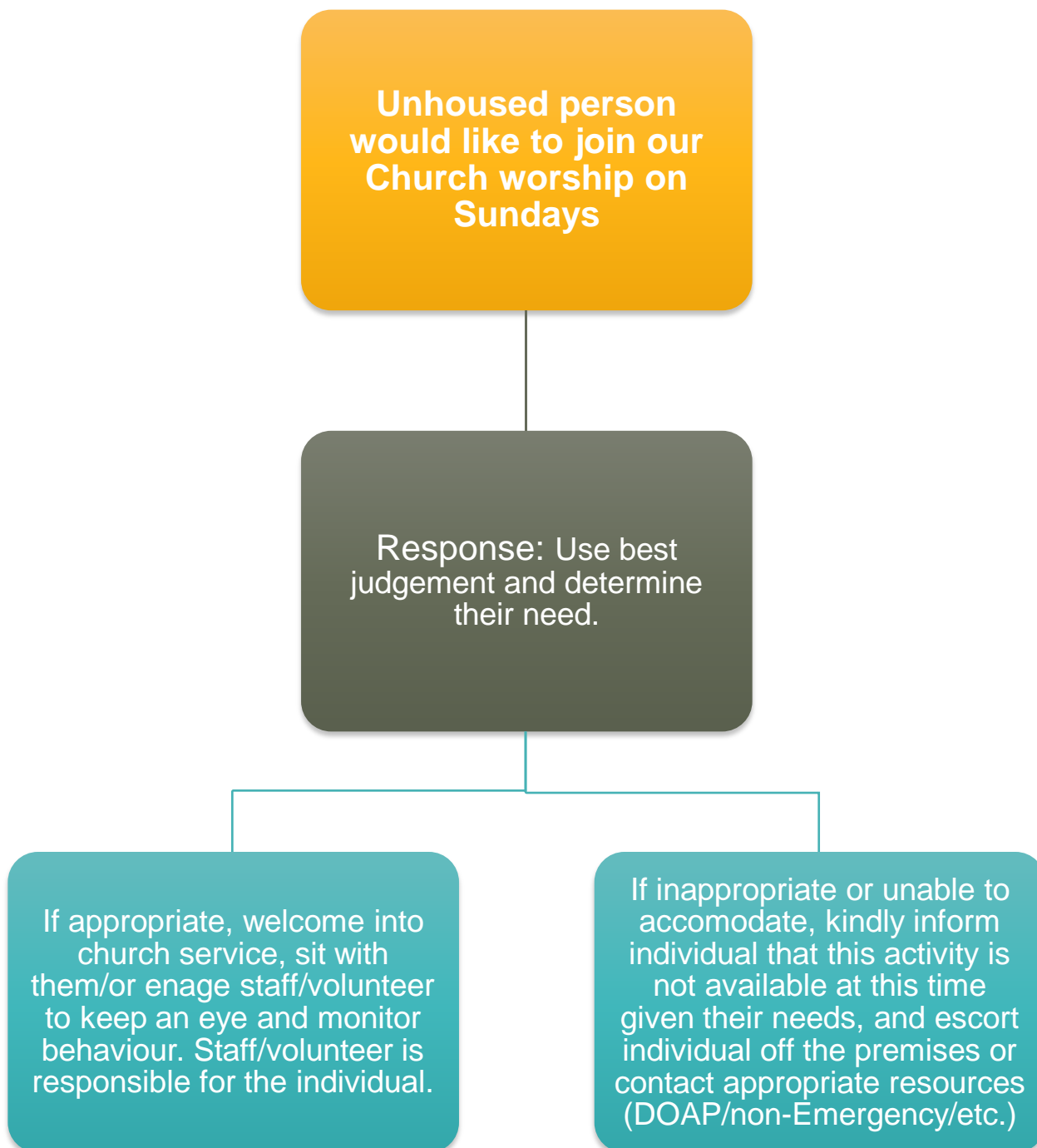
SITUATION 4



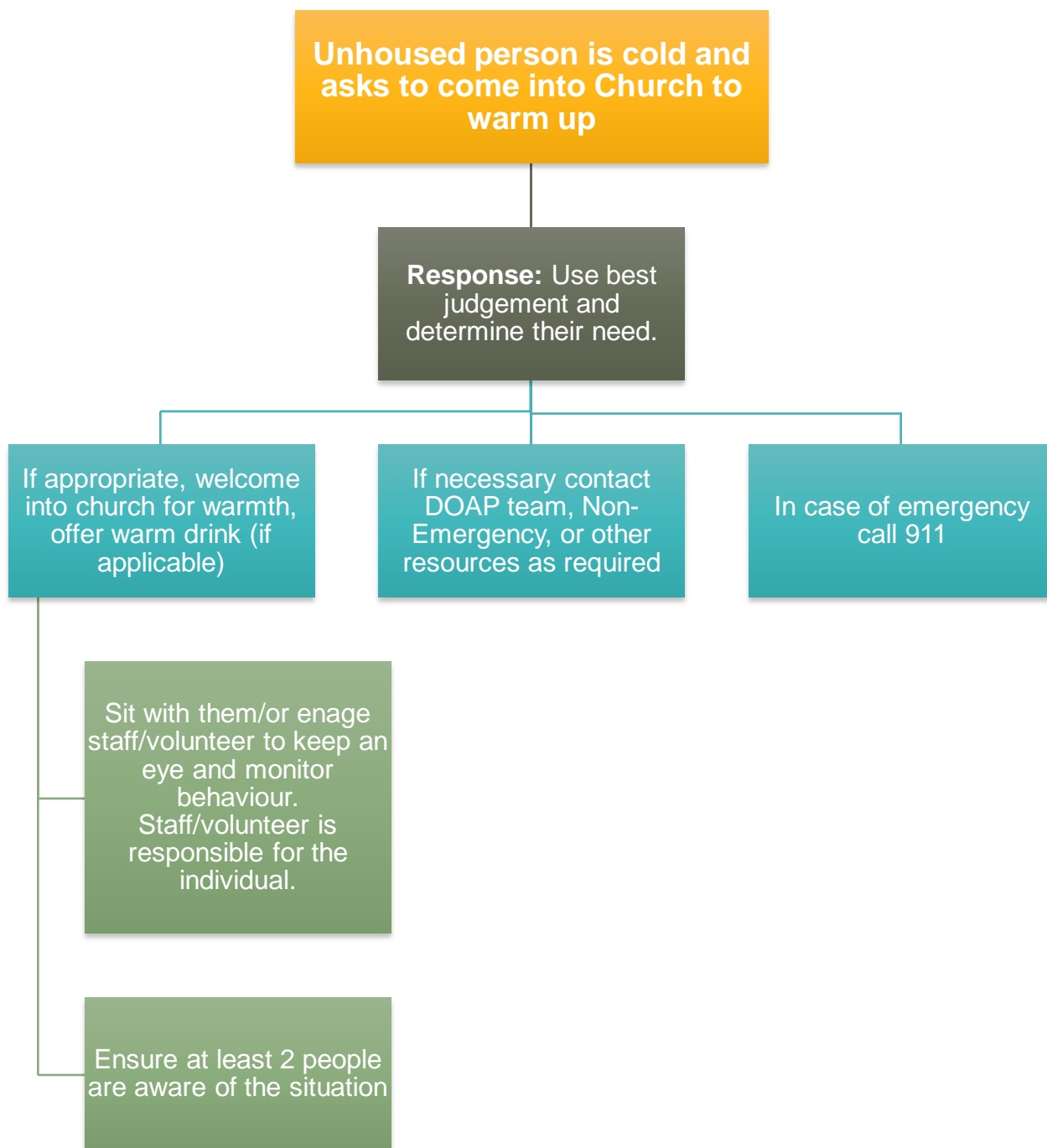
SITUATION 5



SITUATION 6



SITUATION 7



APPENDIX 3: BATHROOM NOTICE SIGN

Proposed signage to be posted at entrance areas to reinforce to members of SCCEFC and the public that bathrooms are not for public use.





APPENDIX 4: TASK FORCE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following Terms of Reference will guide the work of the Task Force:

PURPOSE:

The Task Force will research, advise, and recommend policies, and actions to support SCCEFC's response to the increasing interactions between congregation members and people experiencing homelessness in the surrounding community.

BACKGROUND:

Homelessness is a complex issue that defies a single, simple solution. Those who are poor and without housing are among the most vulnerable among us. Often, being unhoused exacerbates underlying issues including trauma, mental health challenges, and addiction issues. Combined, these issues are complex on societal, systemic, and individual levels.

God calls us to care for those who are vulnerable. To love our neighbour is the second greatest commandment, after loving God. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that our neighbour is anyone who is in need.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the people of Israel and followers of Jesus were commanded to care for the foreigner, the widow and the poor. Another parable tells us that when we serve the vulnerable in our society, we are serving Christ (Matthew 25:34-36).

Government, businesses, churches and neighbourhoods all have a unique responsibility and role to play in meeting needs and finding solutions. People may become poor or homeless for a variety of reasons. There are common risk factors and tragic commonalities, such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, family breakdown, trauma, violence or abuse, unemployment, recent immigration or release from prison, addiction, mental and physical illness.

Over the past few years, members of the SCCEFC community (including staff and congregants) have had a spectrum of exchanges with individuals and groups of people in the surrounding community who appear to be experiencing homelessness - as well as some who appear to have additional challenges with addictions, & mental health. The pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by these vulnerable people, and cities, communities and churches are now faced with managing these increased complexities. Ultimately, we are confronted with the dilemma of how to care for these people on the margins while ensuring an environment of safety for all in our community.

SCOPE:

The scope of the Task Force will be to:

- Identify current issues and challenges related to SCCEFC and those experiencing homelessness in the surrounding community.
- Consult with relevant experts regarding the current situation as well as for possible solutions.
- Develop executable processes and instructions/policies for our staff and ministry teams (i.e. host/welcome teams) to engage with people experiencing homelessness and /at-risk demographic.



- Collect rationale behind the processes for leaderships (i.e. MMT, pastoral staff) to discuss and affirm.
- Develop educational initiatives to help our congregations to understand homelessness today and our church's response.
- Implementation plan and support to all congregations from the resulting work.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Members of the Task Force will be expected to work in good faith and abide by the following guiding principles:

- **Be a witness.** God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.
- **Community Centric.** The Task Force will ensure that the issues, topics, and possible solutions put both SCCEFC and the greater community at the forefront.
- **Do no harm.** Our work and response will prioritize that no harm is done to the SCCEFC community and others in the surrounding community, including those experiencing homelessness.
- **Confidentiality.** Maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality and respecting personal and/or confidential information.
- **Openness.** Creating an open and shared space for listening and learning on the topics being discussed. Approaching issues, topics, and solutions with an open mind, and creating an environment where everyone can contribute.
- **Accountability.** Members will be accountable to meeting the deliverables and deadlines of the Task Force.

TERM

Members of the Task Force will serve until the Task Force has fulfilled its mandate.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Task Force Members:

- Contribute expertise and experience to the work of the Task Force.
- At all times adhere to the guiding principles of the Task Force and applicable SCCEFC policies and procedures.
- Attend all meetings, review information provided by the Task Force, including email correspondence and provide timely feedback and input on components of the project.
- Act as a liaison to stakeholder groups and councils/committees that the members belong to.

Task Force Co-Chairs

- Chair all meetings of the Task Force and ensure adherence to this Terms of Reference, including Guiding Principles.
- Lead the development of the Task Force work plan and be accountable for delivery of work.
- Ensure resources are available to ensure prompt coordination and administration of the Task Force.
- Act as the designated liaison for the Task Force.



TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

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Aaron Li	Co-Chair	Homelessness Subject Matter Expert (Formerly with Calgary Homeless Foundation)
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