

the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Spring 2015

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We Have a Plan

By Janelle Vandergrift

On February 3, 2015, the *Dignity for All Campaign* released its long-awaited “National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada.” This represents a big piece of work, conducted over the past five years through a series of six policy summits on key issues related to poverty. The plan was well received by faith groups, community organizations, and individuals across the country.

On the day of the release, the campaign held a breakfast on Parliament Hill, co-hosted by the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus. Community partners, reporters, and Members of Parliament and Senators from all major parties attended the event.

“We need to make the right call on poverty,” CPJ’s Executive Director Joe Gunn told the event attendees. “We need a plan. It needs to be a legislated plan that can be monitored and there can be accountability through the House of Commons.”

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In Review



CPJ on the Hill

The *Dignity for All Campaign* was joined by 17 MPs and Senators from all major parties at the launch of our National Anti-Poverty Plan on February 3. CPJ staff also met separately with Liberal MP **Rodger Cuzner** and NDP MPs **Irene Mathysen** (pictured below), **Jinny Sims**, and **Rathika Sitsabaiesan** to present the plan to them.



Refugee Policy

CPJ welcomed a recent announcement from the federal government that Canada will bring in 10,000 Syrian refugees. CPJ, along with many other organizations, first called for this in June 2014. In our response to Citizenship and Immigration Minister **Chris Alexander**, we asked the government to move forward in consultation with private sponsoring groups. Read our letter at www.cpj.ca/syrian-refugee-letter.

Late last year, the federal government passed Bill C-43. This bill allows provinces and territories to restrict refugee access to social assistance. CPJ reach-

ed out to the premiers of each province and territory to ask if they intend to use these provisions. Read about their responses at www.cpj.ca/C-43-responses.

Climate Action

During December's COP20 Climate Conference in Lima, Peru, CPJ organized a multi-faith "Light for Lima" vigil on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, one of many around the world. Soon afterwards, CPJ's **Joe Gunn** and **Karri Munn-Venn** joined *Fast for the Climate*. From now until the COP21 meetings in Paris this December, one person will be fasting each day for action on climate change.



CPJ also supported *Global Divestment Days* on February 13 and 14. This campaign encourages organizations and individuals to divest from fossil fuel companies. CPJ does not currently have any investments in fossil fuel companies. The investment policy approved by our Board of Directors will prevent us from doing so in the future.

CPJ on the Road

Kathryn Teeluck represented CPJ at the Canadian Council for Refugees consultations in **Gatineau, QC**. She attended workshops on faith and refugees.

Joe Gunn attended the 70th Anniversary Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) in **Toronto**. CPJ is actively involved in the CCC's Commission on Justice and Peace and its subcommittees on the environment and poverty.

Summer Internship Opportunity

Join CPJ in Ottawa this summer as our Outreach Assistant! This paid, full-time internship runs for six weeks and is open to any student returning to post-secondary education in the Fall. The application deadline is **April 19, 2015**. More information is available at cpj.ca/careers.

Letters to the Editor

300,000 in New York

In "2015: A Big Year for the Climate," Joe Gunn mentions that 300,000 people marched through the city of New York.

Judging from the tone of the article, the 300,000 who attended, probably most if not all, used a horse and buggy to travel to New York?

E. Koolma

Etobicoke, ON

Global Climate Change Policies

I am very supportive of policies that work towards cleaner air and more efficient engines that burn cleaner fuels. I also support other energy sources for creating electricity, like wind and solar energy. However, we haven't paid nearly enough attention to a very practical form of transportation for distances of two miles or less. I dare you to survey how many of those attending this policy event [COP 20] in Peru, especially those of Canadian and American origins, actually practice what we promote by riding their bicycles when they travel within a two mile radius.

I live in a town of 10,000 people. There is nowhere in the town proper that is too far for me to ride my bike to. If it's true for me, it's true for at least 60 per cent of residents. Many of the congregants of our church live within six blocks of church, but seldom walk the distance. (No one wants the wind to mess up their hair on the way to church.) We all love the convenience of a vehicle even for the shortest runs. So while we pray for big government to make stewardly-wise decisions, what about motivating us to quit the excuses and actually do something ourselves to burn less gas?

Pastor Ken Vanderploeg

Le Mars, Iowa

Submit your letters to Brad Wassink at brad@cpj.ca or 309 Cooper Street, #501, Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5.

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Dignity for All Releases its National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada

CPJ and Canada Without Poverty launched *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada* in 2009. Since *Dignity for All* began, the campaign has brought together people of faith, community organizations, and persons with lived experiences of poverty to discuss poverty-related issues and potential solutions. Support has been widespread: over 15,000 individuals, 600 organizations, and 130 Members of Parliament and Senators have all signed on, agreeing that Canada needs a national plan to address poverty.



The plan itself brings together key policies that, if implemented, will make a meaningful difference in the lives of low-income Canadians, achieving greater prosperity and security for all. The recommendations made are not exhaustive but represent community consensus on six particular issue areas: income security, housing and homelessness, health, food security, employment, and early childhood education and care. “The plan is rooted in human rights,” Leilani Farha, Executive Director of Canada Without Poverty explains. “It provides the ‘architecture’ to deal with poverty.”

At the Parliament Hill event, Laurette Glasgow, Special Advisor for Government Relations at the Anglican Church of Canada, drew attention to a faith-based perspective on poverty. “We are accountable, both as individuals and as a society, to respond to those in need with compassion,” she said. “A comprehensive anti-poverty plan is the right thing to do, the smart thing to do – and it needs to be done.”

Public justice insists that everyone has a role to play in building a Canada free from poverty. But the federal government, with its particular policy-making, legislative, taxation, and redistributive powers, has the responsibility to provide leadership and promote reform in key areas under its jurisdiction. “We know that there are enough resources. It is really about the redistribution of resources,” said event panelist Katie-Sue Derejko from the Assembly of First Nations. “If Canada wants to be seen as a dignified country, then the country needs to act on this plan.”

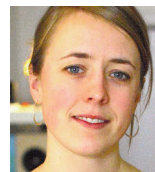
Canada has achieved a measure of success in reducing rates of poverty among seniors, the result of important investments in seniors’ income security programs. Some provinces are also making headway in reducing the incidence and depth of poverty, notably in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec.

Concerted action is needed now on the part of the federal government. It needs to work with others to make meaningful investments in proven strategies to reduce poverty among people in Canada regardless of where they live or the unique circumstances of their lives. “All of our hands need to be on this issue,” said Conservative Senator Don Meredith at the release event.

Indeed, they do. In 2015, a federal election year, every political party platform should include the commitment to develop, and then implement, a national anti-poverty plan.

Read the “National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada” at cpj.ca/FedPlan.

The *Dignity for All Campaign* will be travelling across Canada this year to present workshops and trainings on how to engage with the Anti-Poverty Plan. Contact CPJ to learn more.



Janelle Vandergrift is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.



Citizens for Public Justice

309 Cooper Street, #501
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0G5
tel.: 613-232-0275
toll-free: 1-800-667-8046
email: cpj@cpj.ca
web: www.cpj.ca

Citizens for Public Justice’s mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God’s call for love, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

CPJ annual membership fee

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Cover image: Joe Gunn presents the National Anti-Poverty Plan to MPs and Senators.


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Reconciliation is Sacred Work

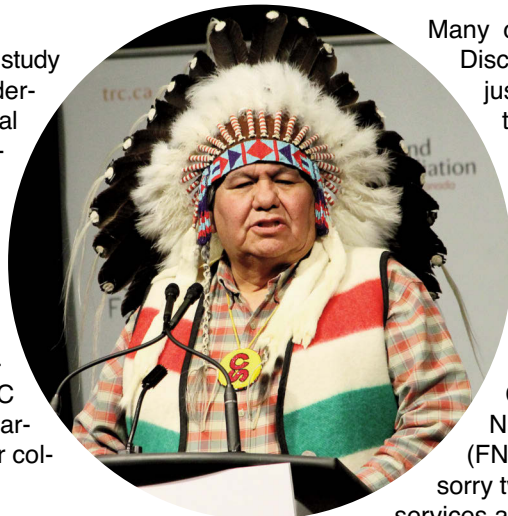
By Mike Hogeterp

For seven generations, church-run boarding schools removed Indigenous children from their families. These schools' expressed intent was to *kill the Indian in the child*. They denied the humanity and dignity of Indigenous people, both in governmental policy and in the attitudes of Canadians.

The results have been the loss of Indigenous language and culture as well as cycles of poverty, addiction, and abuse in many Indigenous communities. Canadians might not know it, but we've been deprived of the good contributions that Indigenous people could have been bringing to our collective lives.

For the last five years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been hearing the stories of survivors of the Indian residential schools system. The truths expressed have been searing, agonizing, and heart-rending. The TRC will present its final report at a closing event from May 31 to June 3 in Ottawa.

The last time a major national study on Indigenous issues was undertaken in Canada – the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) – the great ideas and recommendations were quickly put on a dusty shelf. That was a tragedy for Indigenous people and the integrity of the nation of Canada. Like the RCAP, the terrible and beautiful truths expressed at the TRC are too important to sit in an archive – they must transform our collective lives.



Elder Reg Crochu speaks at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Edmonton.

Justice Murray Sinclair, lead Commissioner of the TRC, has been in the habit of saying, "If you thought the truth was hard, reconciliation will be harder." The point is, if truth really is truth, it implies action and response that will not be easy.

The Right Rev. Mark MacDonald, my friend, mentor, and the National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, speaks of the reconciliation challenge that Sinclair has named. Canada, MacDonald explains, has a deep moral wound. We need to address the deep systemic evils related to colonialism and residential schools in order to enter into reconciliation. This means that neither the Prime Minister's apology nor the final TRC report is the last word. Apology and reconciliation require a turning.

Many Christian communities have been working with Indigenous partners to understand what turning to reconciliation will look like. This includes a great array of learning and advocacy opportunities.

KAIROS is doing stellar work to organize churches for *Time for Reconciliation*, an event to celebrate the TRC and to build momentum for reconciliation.

KAIROS has also done a great service to Canada and the church community in the Blanket Exercise. This great interactive resource teaches Canadian history from Indigenous perspectives. To forge a common future, we need to learn the reality of our shared past.

Canadians might not know it, but we've been deprived of the good contributions that Indigenous people could have been bringing to our collective lives.

In our house, the Christian Reformed Church, we have appreciated the Blanket Exercise and regularly hear the question: *So now what?* *Living the 8th Fire* is our answer. This set of learning circles is built around the CBC series *8th Fire*. It is intended to help Canadians get to know their Indigenous neighbours. Moving beyond stereotypes and hearsay to listening deeply breaks down the barriers between us.

Many church communities are studying the Doctrine of Discovery. This set of Papal Bulls from the 15th century justified colonial expansion by dehumanizing "heathen" non-Europeans. Its doctrine had deep legal implications in the settlement of North America and we are only just beginning to understand the systemic racism that came with it. Discerning the impact of this doctrine and then acting accordingly will be very important as churches struggle with their role in colonialism. Knowing the depths of brokenness in our history is important for healing.

Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS), has said, "Reconciliation means not saying sorry twice." And yet, in a "post-apology era," child welfare services and education in First Nations communities are woefully underfunded. These ongoing injustices are an example of the moral wound that Bishop MacDonald talks about. As we look to an election and the release of the final TRC report, citizens can act for culturally-based equity and justice for Indigenous children. This includes supporting I am a Witness, FNCFCS's child welfare campaign, and Shannen's Dream, which promotes education. It also means discussing these core reconciliation issues with political leaders. Reconciliation means bearing witness for fundamental change.

Knowing our neighbours, knowing the full scope of our history, and bearing witness for justice together will be the work of reconciliation. This hard work, shared with our Indigenous neighbours in the lead and nurtured by the Spirit of Creator God, will be a joyful turning from a broken past. This is sacred work in this important year in the life of this place called Canada.



Mike Hogeterp is the Director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue.

Faith Leaders Defend Syrian Muslim Refugees

By Kathryn Teeluck



Near the end of 2014, reports emerged indicating that the Government of Canada planned to prioritize religious minorities when resettling refugees from Syria. This came amid increasing criticism of the government's failure to meet even its dismal target of resettling 1,300 Syrian refugees by the end of the year.

Canada has traditionally relied on the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to refer cases it has determined to be the most pressing for resettlement. The UNHCR urges countries to be non-discriminatory and to select refugees based on need. This typically includes survivors of torture or sexual violence, women or children at risk, and those with special medical needs.

“No matter what their faith or whether their faith is different than ours, God calls us to extend mercy and care to those who are in need and to those who are persecuted.”

Ida Kaastra Mutoigo
Director, World Renew Canada

Refugee and human rights advocates condemned the government's new approach as discriminatory. When asked for clarification, Costas Menegakis, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, did not deny the reports. In fact, he defended the government's position stating, “We will prioritize persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, those at demonstrated risk, and we will not apologize for that.”

The government regularly denounces refugees who arrive by irregular means as “queue jumpers.” Yet prioritizing religious minorities is the same thing. By choosing which refugees to resettle on the basis of any other characteristic than demonstrated need, the government is, in effect, moving a certain category of refugees to the front of the line.

This is not to say that there are not legitimate refugees who belong to religious minority groups. However, it is a fact that the majority of those forced to flee have been Muslim—the precise group that the federal government would choose to overlook.

It is unclear where the idea for this decision came from. Neither churches, which are largely responsible for privately sponsoring refugees, nor Syrian Christians themselves requested that the government give special treatment to religious minorities. And so, faith communities across Canada responded.

Inter-Faith Statement

In a remarkable display of solidarity, CPJ and the Canadian Council for Refugees brought together 25 Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh leaders. They signed on to a statement declaring their opposition to the selection of Syrian refugees according to religion. The statement noted, “All of

our religions teach the fundamental worth of every human being. A person should never be excluded from refugee protection or resettlement on the basis of his or her religion.”

“There is a standard to assess [refugees for resettlement] based on need for a reason,” said Amira Elghawaby, Human Rights Coordinator for the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and one of the signatories to the statement. As an organization that advocates on behalf of Canadian Muslims, she said, the NCCM felt it was important to voice their concern. But she stressed that “even if it were another minority and not Muslims who would be adversely affected, the NCCM would still have signed the statement” because it is wrong to discriminate against any religion.

Bernie Farber, a founding member of the Jewish Refugee Action Network, also signed on to the statement. When asked why he considered this an important initiative, he responded, “The emphasis should be on the protection and defense of the vulnerable, regardless of religion.” Farber also noted that “this issue is certainly special as it has galvanized all people with a focus on social justice, whether they are from the left or right of the political spectrum.”

Uncertain Future

The government has said little on the subject since it announced in early January that it will accept 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next three years. It is unclear whether the federal government still intends to prioritize religious minorities. It's also not clear if they will exclude other categories of refugees entirely.

In the face of this uncertainty, it is important that faith communities and organizations continue to show the solidarity exemplified by the inter-faith statement. Despite the varied religious backgrounds of its signatories, the fundamental message is clear: discriminating against people of any religion, particularly in a case where individuals are so vulnerable, is unacceptable.

“No matter what their faith or whether their faith is different than ours, God calls us to extend mercy and care to those who are in need and to those who are persecuted,” says Ida Kaastra Mutoigo, Director of World Renew Canada. “What should be our goal as Canadians is to stop the injustices and any further suffering by welcoming refugees whose desire, like ours, is to dwell in safety and religious freedom.”

Read the “Inter-Faith Statement on Syrian Refugees” and see all 25 signatories at cpj.ca/refugee-statement.



Kathryn Teeluck is the Public Justice Intern at CPJ.

Poverty Promises and Income Splitting

By Sara Hildebrand

Last fall, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that his government would implement family income splitting, a promise from the last election campaign. This was just weeks after the Canadian government tabled their unsatisfactory official response to the Millennium Kids' Canada-wide petition.

In June 2014, 40 Canadian youth drove the nine-hour return trek from Toronto to see their petition tabled in the House of Commons. They received a standing ovation from Members of Parliament. Their petition urged the government to keep its promise on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to meet its target of committing 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The MDGs are an unprecedented set of eight global poverty goals, agreed to by every UN member state in 2000. They address extreme poverty, universal education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, the environment, and global partnership. The petition response was signed by Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development. It recounted Canada's leadership role in launching the G8 Muskoka Initiative, spending \$2.85 billion to improve global maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) over five years (2010-2015). It also noted Prime Minister Harper's pledge of \$3.5 billion to improve MNCH over the next five years (2015-2020). Yet the petition response failed to address why there is a shortfall on the 0.7 per cent ODA target.

Canadians haven't forgotten our collective promises to fulfill the MDGs and to end child poverty in Canada by 2000. According to Campaign 2000, one in five children in Canada live in poverty. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Does the government's level of commitment reflect the Canadian public's strong commitment to keep our poverty promises?"

Canada's current development assistance spending is approximately \$5 billion or 0.25 per cent of our GNP. If we add the recently pledged \$3.5 billion over five years, it is only a



Millennium Kids in Hall of Honour, Centre Block with MP Dean Allison, Minister Christian Paradis, and Parliamentary Secretary Lois Brown.

small addition of 0.04 per cent of GNP per year. Data from 2013 shows that only five of 193 UN member states are fulfilling their 0.7 per cent aid promise: Norway, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. The UK recently allocated £11 billion (\$21 billion) per year to international aid.

During the students' visit to Canada's Parliament, Lois Brown, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, likened Canada's budget to

family finances: to find more money we have to take it away from other areas. So here's an idea—*Pay It Forward Income Splitting*.

As a stay-at-home parent, I am grateful for a government that values our profound yet unpaid role in Canadian families. But did anyone ask stay-at-home parents if we want to enjoy income splitting tax savings when there are so many Canadians, especially children and our Aboriginal neighbours, in significant need? I for one don't want to benefit at that cost. It is time to stand shoulder to shoulder and pay it forward to keep our promises.

I appreciate the equity argument for income splitting. It calls for equal tax burdens for two families both with the same total earnings, whether by one breadwinner or the sum of two. However, a deeper understanding of justice requires action on poverty before we implement a policy like income splitting.

The petition response from the Minister noted that the "International Assistance Envelope...will be assessed alongside all other government priorities on a year-by-year basis."

We are, therefore, asking our government to pay forward the projected \$2.4 billion cost of income splitting to fulfill our Canadian and global poverty promises. Specifically, this means \$1.2 billion to increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit to assist all Canadian families living in poverty. It also means \$1.2 billion toward completing the MDGs with an emphasis on goals 4 and 5 (reducing child mortality and improving maternal health).

Let it not be said of our generation that we chose a little more comfort from the income splitting benefit over keeping our promises. Promises to end child poverty in Canada and respond to almost a billion people around the world going to bed hungry.

Let's speak up on income splitting for families. Here's how:

- Go to www.millenniumkids.ca/payitforward for a sample letter to contact your MP, the Minister of International Development, or the Prime Minister.
- Ask all political candidates in your riding whether they will support paying forward the cost of income splitting.



Sara Hildebrand is the founder and volunteer Director of Millennium Kids, which creates opportunities for youth to propel Canada forward to keep our Millennium Development Goals promise.

A Home for Public Justice

By Jim McIntyre

It's no accident that the words ecumenical, economic, and ecological all come from the same Greek root word, *oikos*, meaning "home." For the past half century, CPJ has worked towards promoting a society—or a home—that cares for creation, welcomes the stranger, and offers dignity for all within it. Now, as we enter our sixth decade, we are building on that strong foundation while expanding the work of CPJ.

In 2013, as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, CPJ launched "Building Public Justice Together," an ambitious five-year fundraising campaign. Over the past two years, staff, volunteers, and board members have met with faithful members from across the country to seek their support. The response has been overwhelming and humbling. With three years to go, we are excited about our progress and are looking forward to continued success. The campaign is focused on a series of defined financial goals, all of which will strengthen and expand our ecumenical, economic, and ecological work.

First, we will be building up our core public policy work in poverty elimination and ecological justice. Both of these issues requires dedicated, focused work. Increasing our financial resources in these areas allows us to publish more, give more presentations, and work more effectively with our community partners. And having a strong base in our core work also means CPJ can expand into new areas of public justice, just as we have done on refugee rights.



Interns Ashley Chapman and Nicole Armstrong on Parliament Hill.

Second, to support these efforts, we are establishing a strong communications program. As a research and education organization, this is a key element that enhances our outreach on all levels. CPJ has had a dedicated communications staff person for several years. This allows us to expand our social media presence, promote our work through media, and respond more quickly to developments on the Hill and in the news. By making our work known in new avenues across Canada, CPJ is able to expand our membership and increase our impact among policy leaders.

Third, CPJ is committed to our paid Public Justice Internship Program, and we see value in continuing and growing it. Over the past eight years, this program has given many young people hands-on experience with policy analysis, advocacy, presentations, and writing. In the coming years, we hope to bring on a second full-time intern to help support and expand our work.

CPJ's "Building Public Justice Together" campaign will:

- Expand our public policy work;
- Develop stronger communications;
- Add a second Public Justice Intern; and
- Establish a permanent home for CPJ in Ottawa.

More information is available at cpj.ca/campaign.

Our interns have benefited immensely by gaining real experience and have also brought fresh ideas and energy to our organization.

Finally, to help secure the long-term financial future of CPJ, we are looking to establish a permanent "house of our own," a building for CPJ and our affiliates to call home. CPJ moved to Ottawa eight years ago, and our close proximity to

Parliament Hill has given us quick and vital access to our national policy makers. We would like to establish a solid, physical presence that would speak to the importance of our goals. A permanent home would give CPJ the ability to creatively expand how we do public justice. This particular aspect of our campaign recently received a \$100,000 grant from a family foundation in Alberta. This has given CPJ a major endorsement of our campaign to expand our physical space in Ottawa into an eco-friendly building. This could include learning centres, libraries, community gardens, and a living space for our interns.

As people of faith, we know that core values such as love of neighbour and the pursuit of the common good are too often missing in current political discourse.

Canada is hungry for political dialogue that is more values-based, that is deeper, and that impacts policy more profoundly. As people of faith, we know that core values such as love of neighbour and the pursuit of the common good are too often missing in current political discourse. By establishing our home for public justice in Ottawa, CPJ will be able to give these values a stronger presence in our public life.

Jim McIntyre is the Development Officer at Citizens for Public Justice.



Groundings



Of Pigsties, Stewardship, and the Flourishing of Creation

By Jim Dekker

At a recent meeting of CPJ's Board of Directors, an agenda item proposed changing one word in our mission statement. After a spirited discussion, we voted unanimously to replace "stewardship" with "the flourishing of creation."

A compelling reason for the decision was that "stewardship" has popularly come to mean only use of financial resources. To others, stewardship suggests dominance by human beings over creation. That, though, misreads the sense of "ruling over" in Genesis 1:26 and 28. The context of God's "cultural mandate" in those verses charges humans to be benevolent caretakers of creation. That is what it means to live in God's image. In any case, flourishing is a more vivid word.

Creation will truly flourish when God's human images pray over it and practice stewardship.

Despite the word change, the fertile biblical concept of stewardship remains a core element in CPJ's vision and mission. Thus, the fascinating, somewhat comical, history of the word "steward" is rich and worthy of brief reflection by CPJ's community.

"Steward" derives from two colourful Middle English words, *stig* (or *sti*) and *weard*. A *stig* was a hall, a house, or some kind of abode. A *weard* was a guard or keeper; the word itself an ancestor of today's "warden." So a *stigweard* was someone charged with protection and oversight of something basic and of elemental value for life itself: shelter. (Interestingly, *stig* is also the root word for a filthy place, as in "pigsty." While pigs were and are valuable indeed and should be protected, perhaps some folks in not-so-merry olde England referred to the dwellings of slovenly neighbours as stigs fit only for pigs. But I digress.)

Over time, "steward" accrued a broad connotation as management of any valuable resource. In environmental issues, stewardship came also to embrace the deeply rooted and widely held principle of devoted care for, indeed, *flourishing* of creation.

Creation includes creatures vertebrate or spineless; single-celled or many-limbed; fish and fowl; people and pets; the "cattle on a thousand hills" and "the rivers and the rocks and rills"; lakes and seas; fossil fuels and fossils themselves; metals precious, semi-precious, or common; the stars that shine and the planets and moons that reflect starlight in galaxies and worlds far beyond the range of any state-of-the-art telescope. This call to stewardship is rooted in the Hebrew Scripture of Genesis 2:15, "the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden *to work it and take care of it.*"

"Work it and take care of it." The meanings of those lovely, pre-fall words were the biblical prescription the Creator wrote for 20/20 human vision of creation care embraced by CPJ and many other organizations and people still today. Their principles and mandates do not all grow from Judeo-Christian roots, but they often intertwine in common efforts to sustain the planet and God's universe.

The Hebrew word translated "work" is *abad*. The same word is rendered "serve" in other contexts. Thus, someone who works a garden or land as God's servant will keep it in good shape, preserving its nutrients and enriching it. God's people are to serve God's handiwork of creation.

Of course, there are other ways to work God's garden, hardly serving it. Some work the land by strip mining, clearcutting, and cultivating it to virtual death, before moving on to agrarian or industrial villainy elsewhere. Thus the Amazon rainforest continues to disappear. This is also why cotton and tobacco were kings for relatively short times in the United States.

Then there's the phrase "take care," an adequate but bland translation of the sonorous Hebrew root *shomer*. The use of the word in the Hebrew Scriptures, though, is anything but bland. In other places, Exodus 20:6 for example, a form of *shomer* describes those who "keep my [*i.e.*, Yahweh's] commandments" and receive mercy. Adding another layer to its many connotations, *shomer* is also the word used to "observe the Sabbath," to guard it, to keep it holy, as in Exodus 31:13, 14.

All this joins pleasingly, forming a spiritual and ethical imperative of stewardship of creation. One that is not defined by our exploitation over creation, but rather our role as caretakers. Creation will truly flourish when God's human images pray over it and practice stewardship. It will be an offering of thanks, restored and preserved until we can hand it back to Christ on his return to the new heavens and new earth, the garden in the holy city of Revelation 21 and 22, the place where Eden's Tree of Life will once again feed the cosmos with its "leaves for the healing of the nations."

Jim Dekker is a semi-retired pastor of the Christian Reformed Church. He represents Southwestern Ontario on Citizens for Public Justice's Board of Directors and lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

