

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Spring 2019

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## Christians are Called to Advocate for “The Most Vulnerable”

**T**he Church has long been a defender of those who we consider to be the most vulnerable members of society. We take from scripture that these are the oppressed and persecuted, the poor and the weak, the widows and the orphans, the prisoners and the foreigners. We are meant to provide for those who fit within these categories so that we may serve God by caring for people, “This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no

wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place” (Jeremiah 22:3).

When we look at the global migration crisis, this call to serve becomes evident in practice. Churches have played a big role in Canada’s refugee resettlement process. They are frequently Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), thus occupying an integral role in the private sponsorship of refugees and providing an immediate community for newcomers.

The United Nations estimates that

there are approximately 25.4 million refugees currently scattered across the globe. These individuals have been displaced due to root causes such as war, gender-based violence and persecution, based on factors like political affiliation, ethnicity, religion and more.

The Bible explicitly demands that we provide specific care to refugees, “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you

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# In Review

## Staff Changes

CPJ is pleased to welcome **Willard Metzger** as our new Executive Director. Willard began work on January 31, 2019 and is thrilled to join the CPJ family.

Willard's past work includes many years as an ordained pastor at Mennonite Church Canada, work as the director of church relations at World Vision Canada, and service as the Executive Director of Mennonite Church Canada. Willard has also been on the Executive of the Canadian Council of Churches.

## CPJ In the Community

In early November, CPJ's **Darlene O'Leary** and **Joe Gunn** spoke at events in Ottawa honoring the social justice legacy of Dorothy Day. Later in the month, CPJ and the **Green Economy Network** held a panel discussion on climate change solutions and a just transition to clean energy. The panel included NDP **MP Alexandre Boulerice**, Green Party Leader **MP Elizabeth May**, and Liberal **MP William Amos**, and was moderated by **Hassan Yussuff**, President of the **Canadian Labour Congress**.



From January 7 - March 18, CPJ's **Joe Gunn** taught a 10-week course at the Ottawa School of Theology & Spirituality examining the 10 stories of justice efforts among faith communities in CPJ's newest book *Journeys to Justice*. Joe also travelled to Alberta in January to launch *Journeys to Justice* at events in Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton, where he was joined by former intern **Miriam Mahaffy**, and Board Members **Wayne Groot** and **Harold Roscher**.

In late January, CPJ's **Darlene O'Leary** spoke at a panel event at the Capitalize

conference in Ottawa on the importance of justice and advocacy. CPJ also welcomed the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada **Daniel Cho**, along with his wife Esther, for a conversation on the importance of social justice in the Church today.

In mid-February, CPJ's **Serisha Iyar** and **Deb Mebude** spoke at the Mennonite Central Committee's student seminar in Ottawa on the state of refugee policy in Canada. CPJ's **Darlene O'Leary** joined **Canada Without Poverty** for the first in a series of webinars on Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy. **Karri Munn-Venn** and **Deb Mebude** attended a climate communications workshop in Ottawa.



In early March, CPJ's **Karri Munn-Venn** spoke at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church's Ash Wednesday service, and at First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto on the importance of taking action on ecological justice. CPJ's Give It Up for the Earth Campaign was launched on Ash Wednesday (March 6) and will run until April 18.

## CPJ On the Hill

In November and December, CPJ attended the House of Commons' All Party Anti-Poverty Caucus (APAPC) meetings on the topics of child poverty and poverty among newcomers in Canada. In December, CPJ's joint travel loan petition was presented in the House of Commons by NDP **MP Jenny Kwan**. The petition, was created alongside partners at the **Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue**, **Mennonite Central Committee**, **World Renew**, and the **United Church of Canada**.

CPJ's **Willard Metzger** met with Liberal **MP John McKay** on his first day as Executive Director. Along with **Darlene O'Leary**, he also attended the APAPC in February. Darlene O'Leary, together with partners at **Canada Without Poverty** and **Campaign 2000**, met with the HUMA committee (Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities) to discuss strong targets for the upcoming legislation of Canada's Poverty Reduction Bill.



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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** includes *the Catalyst*:  
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were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34). Often, it seems we follow through. However, with growing anti-refugee rhetoric persistent across the West, ensuring that we care for the most vulnerable through effective measures is increasingly important. We must recognize that systemic inequities and growing negative public opinion pertaining to refugees in Canada continue to exist. As a result, we ought to commit to extending our vision of servanthood and make public efforts to stand up for the rights of refugees.

The position of Christians in Canada is one of immense privilege and political legitimacy. We must use this privilege as a catalyst for advocacy.

In order to accurately advocate for the needs of others, we must first understand who it is we have been called to serve and how their experiences have been shaped. There must be a recognition that vulnerability is created through systems of power that aim to oppress and marginalize. These systems include the patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity.

### Intersectional Advocacy

To better understand how these systems affect specific individuals and groups, we can use a concept like intersectional analysis as a tool. Intersectional analysis at its core, is the process by which we determine and recognize the different ways people are impacted by systems of power because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic class and other means of identification. By taking an intersectional approach to advocacy, we can also better detect where blind spots exist and work to recognize our own privilege and then adjust our behavior and efforts accordingly.

Particularly for refugees, we need to examine how these societal systems interact with the added marginalization that comes with immigration status. For women and girls, this means understanding that they may flee their country of origin due to persecution in the form of gender-based or sexual violence. From here, we can note that the resulting trauma requires specialized healthcare, and that in resettlement countries, including Canada, gender-based violence also exists.

To truly adhere to an intersectional approach, it is imperative to identify where further pieces of an individual's identity may also impact their experience with discrimination. Race, in particular, plays a distinct role. Being a woman-identifying

refugee who is also a person of colour comes with added ostracization. More difficulties can arise if an individual has limited proficiency in English or French. When combined, these aspects of identity illustrate how people can be disproportionately disadvantaged.

This is where well-informed advocacy becomes critical, and Christians have both the opportunity and duty to fight for the rights of refugees.



### Highlighting Inequities When Conducting Research

In April 2017, CPJ released *A Half Welcome*. This report highlighted some of the top concerns SAHs had regarding private sponsorship. The findings indicated that general wait times, wait times for non-Syrians, allocation limits, and travel loans were some of the most pressing issues in resettlement. Conducting an intersectional analysis of this report illustrates that these findings suggest clear issues of inequity. Concerns raised regarding the differentiating wait times between Syrian applications and other applications demonstrates a hierarchy of prioritization – an issue of inequity based on political circumstances that lead to a seemingly two-tier system of who's in and who's out, without necessarily meaning to. Advocacy in this case, called on government to commit to providing adequate resources to partner organizations for better management of application processing.

Similarly, in 2018 CPJ's report *Reclaiming Protection* also highlighted systemic inequities with the opportunity for members to engage with advocacy. The report called for an end to the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA). Included were highlights of specific policy changes made in the United States. One change disqualified gender-based violence as a reason for female-identifying persons to claim asylum. Under an intersectional analysis, this clearly demonstrates that the United States is not a safe place for people seeking refuge based on gender persecution and discrim-

ination. Accompanying this research was a letter template to Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen, and later to Bill Blair, the Minister of Border Security, calling on each of them to recognize the violation of refugee rights in the United States and rescind the STCA. Advocacy requires continued education and analysis that leads to concrete action. Engaging with government by sending a letter to a Minister to enact change on policy issues is an effective way to demonstrate active care for those we have been called to serve.

### Being Better Advocates

So, how do we improve our efforts to advocate for the needs of the most vulnerable? Well, to start, we can be supportive of the work already being done and use it to our advantage. Participating in advocacy initiatives and developing new strategies of engagement are both equally important. The call to serve is not a new notion; it is what is required of us as followers of Christ, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed... For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me'" (Matthew 25: 41-43).

In the end, what all of this really means is that Christians are called to be allies. To do so, we need to become better advocates. We must recognize and fight against the inequities that exist daily in the lives of others, especially when it does not directly affect us. It is imperative that we take up our privilege – whether it be our able-bodies, wealth, or another position of power – and use it in the call for justice. Ensuring that we take an intersectional approach to these challenges is critical for us to witness tangible change. As a result, we can better support those whom we have been called to serve.

Serisha's report, *The Most Vulnerable*, will outline an intersectional approach to refugee policy-making and advocacy efforts. The report will be re-released on April 4, 2019, Refugee Rights Day.



Serisha Iyar is CPJ's public justice intern on refugee rights



# 10 Years of Pursuing *Dignity for All*

It's hard to believe, but 2019 marks the 10-year anniversary of *Dignity for All*, the campaign for a poverty-free Canada, a campaign co-led by CPJ and Canada Without Poverty (CWP).

*Dignity for All* started out with a vision of ending poverty in Canada and a conviction that it was possible through a strong, comprehensive national anti-poverty plan. At the campaign's core was the belief that all people should live with dignity and that poverty violates this dignity. Over the years, this message has clearly resonated with people across the country, with campaign endorsements from over 12,000 individuals, including MPs and Senators, and almost 750 organizations to date.

## The Early Days

"*Dignity for All* was built on the shared belief that every human being deserves to live with dignity, free from poverty and in a situation of social and economic security. We launched the campaign in Calgary with presentations in English, French, Blackfoot and Mandarin, highlighting the reality that people from across the country must work together to address poverty in Canada. By coming together under a single banner, we hoped to present a unified, multi-sectoral voice on the imperative of federal action on poverty. In that, we have succeeded," said Karri Munn-Venn, CPJ's Senior Policy Analyst.

In its early years, the campaign gathered together people working on poverty eradication to develop a model of what an effective national anti-poverty plan would look like. Through a series of summits on six policy areas with policy analysts, academics, community service providers, experts in poverty-related fields, faith community members, and people with lived experience of poverty, the *Dignity for All* model national anti-poverty plan was formed.

"The creation of the *Dignity for All*

model plan was an incredible achievement – not just for our movement, but for Canada. For five years, it has been the guiding human rights-based policy document on poverty in Canada, informed by the expertise and lived experience of people from coast-to-coast, and we know it has been integral to the creation of the country's first national poverty plan," said CWP's Michèle Biss.

## Celebrating Successes

*Dignity for All* was instrumental in initiating the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus, a Parliamentary caucus that explores poverty issues, bringing together civil society organizations and Parliamentarians in a non-partisan forum. The caucus was co-chaired for many years by now retired Senator Art Eggleton and MP Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet, providing forums to discuss policy solutions and the impacts of poverty on marginalized communities.

"The All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus has been a way for people who know poverty firsthand and policymakers at the highest level of Canadian government to meet on equal footing. Making space in public policy dialogue for those with a lived experience of poverty is critical to ending poverty," said CWP Deputy Director, Harriett McLachlan.

*Dignity for All* launched its flagship advocacy event, *Chew on This!*, in 2013 with a small group of organizers who wanted to mark October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, by calling for a national anti-poverty plan. From these humble beginnings, the annual postcard and outreach campaign has grown each year, reaching a record number of over 100 groups – with participation in every province and territory – in 2018.

After years of collaboration and advocacy, we have started to see significant movement.

In August 2018, the federal government launched *Opportunity for All*, Canada's first

national poverty reduction strategy. *Dignity for All* has celebrated this achievement as one our campaign helped to make happen, thanks to dedicated supporters across the country! And following our 2018 *Chew on This!* call for immediate legislation of the federal PRS, Minister Duclos tabled Bill C-87, *An Act respecting the reduction of poverty*, in November 2018.

## Looking Ahead

While these are huge achievements, our work continues.

In 2019, the *Dignity for All* campaign is joining partners to push to strengthen legislation for the PRS, through recommendations outlined in our open letter to Minister Duclos. Also, this year we are looking ahead to the coming federal election with hopes of making poverty eradication a campaign priority.

In reflecting on a decade of *Dignity for All*, we're inspired by the work and dedication of so many people in Canada who want to see an end to poverty, and it's clear that this dedication has made a real difference. Moving forward, we know the power of this commitment will lead to even better things. We can achieve dignity for all!



Darlene O'Leary is CPJ's socio-economic policy analyst



Laura Neidhart is the development and communications coordinator at Canada Without Poverty





# Making the Big Shift and Getting to Zero

**W**e don't have much time. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s November report, we have just over a decade to take drastic action and keep global temperatures below a 1.5 C increase. To do so, we are going to need to mobilize society and our governments. In a timely intervention, activist and writer Tony Clarke has published a new book, *Getting to Zero: Canada Confronts Global Warming*.

Clarke combines scientific research with action and takes us through a path to zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, while creating jobs and opportunities that address historic inequalities. The book is a result of Clarke's well-known activism through the Green Economy Network (GEN), an alliance of trade unions, faith-based organizations and environmental movements that has pushed for massive public investments in retrofitting buildings, public transportation and renewables energies, creating millions of jobs and lowering emissions in Canada. In a concise format, *Getting to Zero* engages the reader through a revision of the climate plans put forward by the Canadian government since the election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and points towards the missing ambition required to get Canada on a sustainable path.

The "big shift" put forward by Clarke and campaigned through the GEN platform, involves investing over 5 per cent of the annual federal budget (just over \$80 billion over five years) into energy efficiency, public transportation and renewable energies. The funding is there, but it is a matter of making it a political priority. The role of public investments is key.

The International Monetary Fund has estimated that the Canadian government provides direct and indirect subsidies to the

fossil fuel industry for a whopping \$46 billion annually. This includes the cost of adaptation and mitigation to the climate effects of the fossil fuel industry, as well as the cost of cleaning-up, which often falls on the public. When pundits ask "how would we pay for such a transformation?", the answer is in re-directing the massive amounts of subsidies away from fossil fuels.

The shift would significantly cut emissions, putting Canada on a path to zero,

**"Investing in the green economy would guarantee a just transition for workers in the sectors that we'll need to phase out and involve the communities that have been on the frontlines of the climate fight, especially Indigenous peoples."**

while creating a million climate jobs over five years. Investing in the green economy would also guarantee a just transition for workers in the sectors that we'll need to phase out and involve the communities that have been on the frontlines of the climate fight, especially Indigenous peoples.

## **Bringing the debate to the federal election**

Clarke and the GEN network are bringing their proposals to the federal arena by engaging with Members of Parliament and constituents around the country. By putting together roundtables in major locations, the initiative brings together unions, faith-based groups, environmental organizations, student unions and community groups in challenging the status quo on climate and making the need for ambitious action a central

pillar of the federal election. These roundtables will be organized around the country, bringing together the GEN platform constructed in previous discussions into the electoral debates that will take place throughout the year.

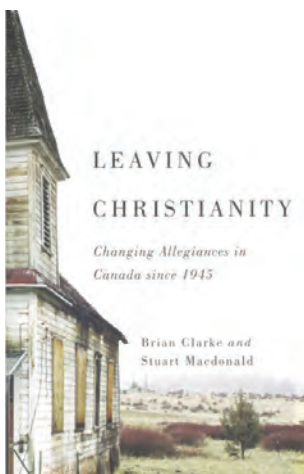
The goal of the campaign is to move beyond the polarizing debate around the "carbon tax" that has conditioned how we view action on climate change. A useful tool, carbon pricing has proven insufficient to significantly alter the behaviour of the fossil fuel industry and to move society into a low-carbon path. Moving beyond that debate and engaging on a larger plan – one that actually stops the expansion of fossil fuel production while addressing socio-economic inequalities – is the core of the strategy being followed by GEN and inspired in the work of Tony Clarke.

Similar debates are taking place in the United States with the proposal of the Green New Deal. This shows that there is momentum to push for ambitious climate policy that engages society by presenting a plan of action. This plan must put working class communities at the centre, create jobs, promote public services and challenge inequalities. As Tony Clarke's latest book shows, now is the time to be bold; we have no other option.

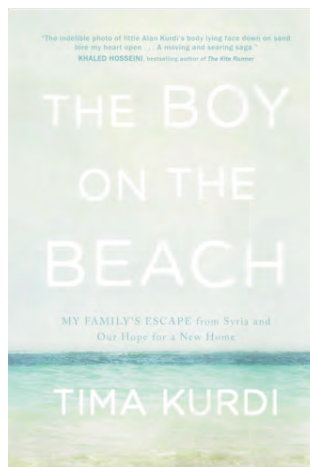
Tony Clarke's new book, *Getting to Zero: Canada Confronts Global Warming*, is available now.

Bruno Dobrusin is campaign coordinator at the Green Economy Network





**Leaving Christianity:  
Changing Allegiances in  
Canada since 1945**  
By Brian Clarke and Stuart  
MacDonald McGill-Queen's  
University Press, 2017



**The Boy on the Beach**  
By Tima Kurdi  
Simon & Schuster, 2018

“Canada is no longer a Christian society and its culture has become de-Christianized.”

According to these two Protestant professors at the Toronto School of Theology, the collapse of the vitality of Christian religion in Canada is “very recent.” This fact has serious ramifications for all Canadians, whether religious or not.

Through an abundance of demographic detail, using census data for each Christian denomination, the authors show that: i) Canada’s mainstream Protestant churches are in decline, and ii) while some other Protestant churches are growing, not all are, and that growth has slowed; iii) The number of Catholics in Canada is now stagnant (in spite of immigration); but iv) the number of Canadians with no religion is “exploding” (to over 25 per cent in 2011). “The religious story of the last decades” in Canada is the growth in members of world religions other than Christianity, while religious “nones” are now the second largest category (after Roman Catholics.)

Some may ask, so what?

*Leaving Christianity* explains that belonging to a church community is strongly associated with volunteering and charitable giving. Church-goers vote more often than non-attenders. And participation in church activities has long been a launching pad for various forms of further civic engagement – faith communities have been key developers of what academics call “social capital.” So, when church membership declines, alternative forms of societal participation falter, and then we all lose – as the bonds knitting Canadian society together are weakened.

*The Boy on the Beach* is an intimate retelling of a family’s tragedy, one that woke up the world to the Syrian refugee crisis. Author and Syrian-Canadian Tima Kurdi brings to life the story of her nephew Alan Kurdi, the two-year-old boy whose poignant photo spurred many to demand action throughout the international community. When her nephew Alan washed up on a Turkish beach, the world mourned alongside the Kurdi family. Yet in the flurry to report on the event, details were lost, at times misconstrued, as media attempted to piece together the story of “the boy on the beach.”

In this book, Tima offers clarity, context, and, perhaps most importantly, the emotion that accompanied the tragic events captured in that September 2015 image. Tima gives readers a behind-the-scenes portrait into the lives her family had once known: a Syria full of harmony, love, and simple joys. She explores how Alan’s fate was not the fault of the Turkish government, nor that of the Canadian Immigration department that refused her attempts to resettle her relatives, but on a larger scale the fault of us all.

Through this story, one sees that the Kurdi family is not unlike others from Syria, or indeed any family throughout the world. Their hopes are like ours and have remained the same since before the tragedy: they want peace.

Understandably, Tima and Alan’s father Abdullah wrestle with deep regret; despair at the too-late response from the international community, and a sense that the refugee crisis is far too massive for any one individual to address. Still, with this important work, Tima sets an example for hope beyond despair, appealing to each of us to take action and stand up for refugees in Canada and beyond.

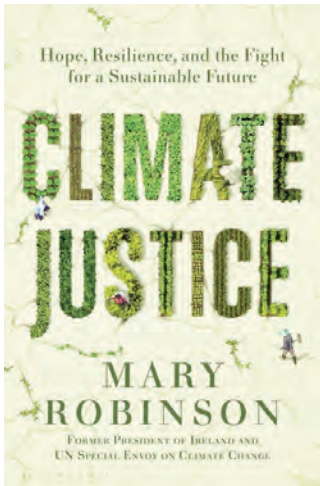


Review by Joe Gunn

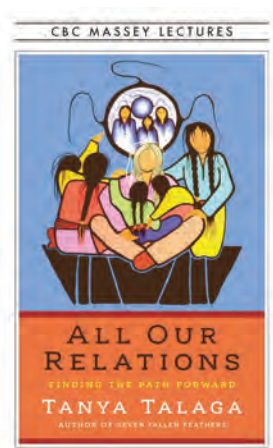


Review by Deborah Mebude





**Climate Justice: Hope Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future**  
By Mary Robinson  
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018



**All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward**  
By Tanya Talaga  
House of Anansi Press, 2018

I'm a sucker for a good story and Mary Robinson tells them in spades.

*Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future* is a captivating collection of personal accounts compiled by the Former President of Ireland and UN Special Envoy on Climate Change. Though relatively new to the fight for climate justice, Mary Robinson is committed to advancing change. Sharing the stories of those most affected, she says, is “the only way to convince people about the reality of climate change.”

Early in the book, Robinson cites the birth of her first grandson in 2003 as a catalyzing moment. The way she maps the need for climate action against her teenage grandson's lifespan is made all the more poignant for me since my own first son was also born in 2003.

She goes on to weave a compelling climate change narrative through the stories of individuals and communities from every continent. She includes some of her own stories as a delegate of global climate talks and the special guest of world leaders. Together, these accounts offer an informative wide-angle view.

Unfortunately, the narrative crumbles some when Robinson shares the story of Canadian coal miner, Ken Smith. Without any reference to the Canadian political landscape, Mr. Smith's story is devoid of context and problematically incomplete. Despite the personality and power of the book, I'm left wondering what key pieces of information are missing in the other chapters.

Still, *Climate Justice* is a worthy read, particularly for those interested in better understanding how the realities of our warming planet are unfolding on the frontlines of the climate crisis.



Review by Karri Munn Venn

Acclaimed author of *Seven Fallen Feathers*, Tanya Talaga's newest work, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward* is a product of the CBC's Massey Lectures Series. Through this important piece, Talaga provides critical insight into the increased levels of youth suicide across Indigenous communities. She illustrates the necessary contextualization of Canada's colonial legacy and the resulting harms it has caused. Her thoughtful analysis of the genocidal policies that have damaged Indigenous communities in Canada, highlights how they have been systematically developed over time to ensure continuity. She presents a unique lens of comparative history that showcases both the struggle and survival of Indigenous communities across the world.

Drawing examples from countries like Australia, Brazil and Norway, Talaga reveals to the audience the global injustices that have been done to Indigenous peoples. The trends of education, religion, and foster care being used as tools for genocide and continued oppression demonstrate the horrifying target that has been placed specifically on Indigenous children.

Talaga's work serves as an important wake-up call for settlers who do not know the complex history of Indigenous persecution despite benefiting from the destruction it has caused. Her work also exemplifies that the resilience of Indigenous peoples continues to push forward in the face of extreme adversity.

Talaga features the tireless efforts of community leaders such as, Cindy Blackstock, Senator Murray Sinclair and MP Romeo Saganash, among many more, who bring light to the darkness that has been forced upon them. As Talaga's work notes, “We Were Always Here” and “We Are Not Going Anywhere.”



Review by Serisha Iyar



## Finding My Voice

**A**t the beginning of a new relationship it can take awhile to find your voice. Others can be playfully nattering back and forth, but until you have some shared experiences it can be tough to join the conversation.

As the new executive director for CPJ that has been a bit of my reality. Staff and the rest of the CPJ family have welcomed me wonderfully, but we are still in the midst of creating common experiences together. Shared laughter creates comradery. Comradery feeds common commitment.

important function. It will not only strengthen the voice of CPJ but will also strengthen the voice of the concerns we share. We will help to amplify the voice of climate justice so that the earth need not try to get our attention with the language of destroying wind and soaring temperatures. We will lend our solidarity with refugees and immigrants so that the gifts they long to share will be welcomed and honoured. We will speak out against the forces that sustain poverty so that no one needs to choose between paying for food or paying for ade-

quate housing. These are important dialogues for a healthy society that can be celebrated by all.

to see which way the wind is blowing, they discern instead the movement of the Spirit. CPJ has an important role to play in our Canadian society. We need to have an eye on the Canadian government to help assure that the policies developed represent the best of public justice. We also need to have an eye on the Canadian population to help educate and influence people to ask their elected representatives for just policies. It is as the general public becomes united in their demands that public justice begins to have a stronger voice. This is the aim of CPJ!

The context that I'm coming from is one of faith-in-action. My involvement in Canadian church circles – first as an ordained Mennonite pastor, then as the director of church relations at World Vision Canada, and most recently as executive director at Mennonite Church Canada – has developed my understanding that our lives, as people of faith, ought to impact the world around us. I am thrilled to join the CPJ team because I am excited to lend my voice to the important platforms of climate justice, refugee rights and the eradication of poverty. As I find my voice, I am eager to see how CPJ can help more and more people in Canada find their voices on the important concerns we all share.

I am quite certain that as we strengthen our corporate voice as informed and active citizens, the earth will smile, and God will be glorified.



I am excited about continued conversations with staff. I am also looking forward to interacting with our CPJ members. This will be a critical process in helping me find my voice, because it is in these interactions that I can have confidence in representing our common CPJ voice with Members of Parliament and their staff.

Growing the CPJ membership will be an

adequate housing. These are important dialogues for a healthy society that can be celebrated by all.

The Spirit of God is rustling through our pews. It is blowing along our streets and alleys. It is rushing along our ravines. It is not content to see greed and neglect abuse people and creation. This is the breeze we want to heed, so that when people wet their finger



Willard Metzger is CPJ's executive director





## 400 Students Gave It Up for the Earth

Last year, our school La Source, in Orleans, chose a few students to do a leadership project with the theme “Beyond the Borders of my Environment”. We had to partner with an organization to solve a problem in the world. We knew we wanted to help the environment because we knew our planet is in serious danger because of climate change.

Then, we learned about CPJ and the campaign that they were running during Lent called “Give it up for the Earth!”. We did more research on the organization and the campaign. It was perfect for us since it was bilingual and we go to a French school. Also, it is a Christian organization and our school is Catholic.

We met Karri Munn-Venn, and she gave us all the details about the campaign. She was very flexible and supportive from the start! She even gave us French postcards because she knew our project was going to be in French. Basically, the campaign was signing a postcard and writing down things that you will give up or do for the Earth to help prevent climate change from getting worse. Once CPJ collects all the postcards, they send them to the Minister of the Environment, MP Catherine McKenna, hoping the government will give less money to companies who aren't good for the Earth and give more money to ecological companies.

We invited all the students and teachers in our school to sign a postcard or to draw a picture of their commitment. We found it great that many children committed to walk or ride their bike more often, carpool or take the bus, to eat local food or to turn off the lights when they leave a room. All those little things that seem so insignificant can make a big difference for our planet's health and future.

The day of the project fair, we presented our project and got the rest of the cards signed. In total, approximately 400 postcards were signed and brought to the



Minister! Taya even got to accompany CPJ and met the Minister. “Even though, at the time, it seemed like I was just meeting a normal person, I look back on it, and realize that it was a huge opportunity and that I am so lucky to have met her!”, Taya affirmed.

Doors and opportunities have opened for us because of CPJ and most importantly, we've done something good for the environment! Any little thing you can do that might have a minimal impact on climate change, DO IT! Don't hesitate! We think that climate change is a real and big problem that needs to be taken care of as soon as possible. Think of it! If we do nothing, the Earth will be seriously damaged, to the point where humans might not be able to live! All of our natural resources that we take for granted will be gone!

We think that the campaign “Give it up for the Earth” is a wonderful way to participate in building a healthier planet. We are grateful for everyone that has encouraged us during this project like our teachers, our friends and our family.

Don't forget that everybody on this planet can do something to help the Earth

and to make the world a better place. If we all do something small, it won't take much to make a big impact. Any little sign of affection and respect that you can give our planet will make a positive difference for our future. Let's give it up for the Earth!

It's not too late to join *Give It Up For The Earth!* Visit [cpj.ca/pledge](http://cpj.ca/pledge) before April 18, 2019 to make your commitment to reduce your personal GHG emissions and urge the federal government to end public financing of the fossil fuel industry.



Taya Lavictoire and Élise Laliberté are students in Ottawa, ON



## A Voice for All – Why Voting Reform Matters

For those of us who were hoping that British Columbia would become the first jurisdiction in Canada in modern times to move away from our divisive, unfair and exclusionary way of voting, December's electoral reform referendum loss was a bitter disappointment.

Despite the fact that post-referendum polls showed that BC voters continue to hold strongly pro-reform sentiments (77 per cent of decided respondents agreed that a party should only win majority power if their candidates won a majority of the votes, and 83 per cent agreed that voters should be able to vote honestly for their most preferred candidate without worrying about splitting the vote), fewer than 40 per cent of voters in the referendum endorsed the proposed shift to a proportional voting system, which would have ensured that virtually every individual's vote would be reflected in the makeup of BC's legislature.

There are a number of important reasons why the reform proposed in this referendum failed to gain majority support. Polls suggest that voters were confused by the two-part ballot structure and concerned that the three system options on the second part of the ballot were not spelled out in sufficient detail. Perhaps more importantly, the BC Liberal Party actively mobilized their supporters against reform far in advance of the ballot question being formulated because, as leadership candidate Dianne Watts put it candidly, "If we do not defeat PR (proportional representation), we will forever be a minority". In other words, those in the Liberal Party saw reform as a threat to their ability to hold majority power on minority support, and campaigned hard to prevent this from happening.

We should not find this surprising. As Christians, we know that those holding power do not yield it easily, but it is our obligation to speak truth to power and to advocate for those without a voice in our par-

liament and legislatures. With our current "First Past the Post" voting system, fully half the votes cast are not reflected in representation in parliament, so these voters are effectively voiceless.

Why does this matter? Perhaps we can gain some insight by considering why the BC Conference of the United Church endorsed proportional voting in the recent referendum.

As their resolution stated, advocating for justice has been a long-standing part of the United Church tradition. The ethos of the denomination is rooted in a concern for those who have been marginalized, and the church has long fought to end poverty, racism and discrimination, to help refugees and prevent war, to preserve the integrity of our ecosystem, and to pursue justice and reconciliation in Canada's relationship with its Indigenous peoples.

These injustices arise in no small measure from a voting system that, by using a winner-takes-all approach; gives all the spoils to the candidate who wins a mere plurality of local public support; encourages those with wealth, power and privilege to act in their own interests without having to fully and properly take into account the interests of the broader community; and enables these elites to more easily claim and legitimize this self-serving power.

This suppression of minority voices is frequently amplified at a regional level – by allowing Members of the Legislative Assembly from a single party to win every seat in a region, even substantial local minority perspectives can be completely ignored. Federally, for example, Conservative or NDP supporters have no representation in Atlantic Canada, Liberal supporters have no representation across much of the Prairies, and Green Party supporters have no representation almost anywhere.

Our current system also presents significant obstacles to electing a legislature that

adequately reflects the full diversity of our society. Women continue to be significantly under-represented, and MPs from diverse cultural backgrounds are rarely elected anywhere other than where their ethnic community comprises at least a plurality. Young voters are also systematically under-represented, so few politicians pay explicit attention to their concerns. And Indigenous communities have rarely been able to elect MPs who will represent their perspectives. It was therefore fitting that Grand Chief Stewart Phillip recently noted that proportional representation could, "Provide a greater opportunity for Indigenous engagement and direct involvement in the legislative affairs of the Province of British Columbia."

How we vote is therefore clearly a civil rights issue. This has been blindingly obvious in the United States, where many churches were centrally involved in the civil rights movement that empowered African-Americans to end official segregation and begin to exercise their voting rights. Here in Canada, on the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote in federal elections, it is also fitting to remember the close connections between the Protestant Churches and the social reforms of the early twentieth century that supported women's political engagement.

We believe that electoral reform is our era's equivalent of last century's suffrage movement. And so, despite the setbacks of Trudeau reneging on his commitment to change and the recent result in BC, we must take a breath and prepare for the next opportunity to push for a more inclusive way of voting that will move us much closer to the democratic ideal of representation for all.

Antony Hodgson is president of Fair Voting BC and served as president of Vote PR BC, the official proponent in the 2018 BC Referendum on Electoral Reform







## Working Together For More Than A “Half Welcome”

In 2017, CPJ released the report *A Half Welcome* profiling some of the challenges of the refugee sponsorship system. As an advocate in the field I appreciated the report’s thoughtful illumination of well-known challenges in Canada’s sponsorship system. So we began working with CPJ staff to discuss the findings of *A Half Welcome* and the perspectives of refugee sponsors with parliamentarians.

The work of justice is best when it’s shared, so it’s been a pleasure for us to work with CPJ, World Renew, Mennonite Central Committee, and others to encourage Canada to make sponsorship programs more welcoming and just. We affectionately call this the *Half Welcome advocacy partnership*.

One of the issues addressed in *A Half Welcome* is the burden that repaying travel loans places on sponsored refugees. Refugees who come to Canada under sponsorship programs are required to repay the travel costs to bring them here. These travel debts can be quite large, particularly for families traveling from remote locations.

Until earlier this year, refugees were required to begin paying off these loans within 30 days of arriving in Canada and were charged interest on the balance owing. We know from front-line refugee workers that this financial burden is overwhelming for refugees who often need to learn the language and many other things before getting into the job market.

### Small steps in the fight for justice

Our coalition brought this issue of travel loans to conversations on Parliament Hill. Other refugee advocates and citizens around the country raised the issue with MPs in a petition and online action alerts. In fact, in our little shop, our joint action alert on travel loans got some of the best engagement we’ve ever seen!

Earlier this year, the Canadian government responded to all of this advocacy. They

acknowledged that travel loans burden refugees and moved to delay the start of loan repayment from 30 days to one year and removed the interest on the loans. For newcomers with thousands of dollars of debt, these small changes are helpful and worth celebrating.

Nevertheless, these changes don’t fully eliminate the burden of travel loans. One of CPJ’s founders, Gerald Vandezande, often reminded us that justice comes in small steps. These small changes to refugee travel loans are an example of that truth. These changes reduce hardships and are some of the many steps for justice and welcome for refugees.

Together we’ve helped to make some of this change, and our *Half Welcome advocacy partnership* will continue to seek justice and welcome for refugees.

### Maintaining Momentum

Canada has just come through a period of resettling a historic number of refugees in response to the crises in Syria, Central Asia, and East and Central Africa. In the next three years the Canadian Government and private sponsors will settle approximately 30,000 refugees per year. Canada’s good efforts over the last few years are important – the momentum for #RefugeesWelcome needs to continue and grow.

One of the common challenges to welcoming refugees to Canada is public opinion. Negative public opinion and a lack of public support for refugee resettlement makes governments wary of investing political capital and public resources in it. The controversies related to irregular border crossings (most notably at the Canada-U.S. border in Lacolle QC) and apparent spikes in asylum claims create narratives of suspicion towards refugees – whether they be claimants or sponsored refugees.

Even as the numbers of irregular arrivals have dropped, these narratives have

slipped into media spin and partisan politics that contribute to negative public opinion for refugees. For this reason, it is important to share positive stories about the good that refugees and other migrants bring to our shared lives in Canada.

That’s why our *Half Welcome advocacy partnership* is planning a media and op-ed strategy targeted at policy makers and shapers. We’ll continue to encourage church communities who have experienced the gift of having refugees in their lives to share their stories with policy makers and their friends. We hope that this work of building a positive narrative will contribute to thoughtful debate in Canada about our responsibility for refugee welcome in the 2019 federal election campaign. All this is to say – CPJ supporters and churches and communities in our extended networks will be hearing more from this partnership. Stay tuned!

This spring, CPJ will be launching a #WaiveRepayment travel loan campaign featuring a series of infographics that highlight the effects of travel loans on 10 refugee families in Canada.

Mike Hogeterp directs the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue and has been honoured to work with CPJ staff to co-convene the *Half-Welcome advocacy partnership*



Danielle Steenwyk-Rowaan is the justice communications team coordinator for the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue





## A Shared Vision of Social Justice

**F**or much of my journey of faith, walking in the way of Christ was discussed largely on the individual level (i.e. your personal relationship with Christ). Several years ago, however, I began exploring a more communal vision of our calling and witness. I was also engaging more with social justice issues and was learning to take a more systems approach to change. In both my faith and pursuit of social justice, I began to see the power of the collective. And perhaps more importantly, I became more aware of those ahead of me who were already well into the work.

Discovering CPJ was a tremendous encouragement for me. Until then, I had little experience with the collective pursuit of social justice as an outworking of faith. Through my experiences with CPJ and subsequent work with housing advocates on the Legislating the Right to Housing Campaign, I have grown more and more convinced of the need for the church to come together in pursuit a shared vision: a world that reflects the heart of God in its honouring of all creation, its justice, compassion, unity, and in its diversity. I have also grown more convinced that this is not just the work of the church; we do not have ownership over this vision, nor should we go about our work in a proprietary way. This is true not just for differences within the church but also for those outside the church. This vision is bigger than us, and the work is certainly beyond our capacity – though we mustn't let ourselves off the hook by thinking we have no part in it!

As we await the upcoming federal election, I'd like to encourage us individually and collectively to consider how we might strengthen our witness by collaborating with those we might consider "unusual suspects". For example, I believe there is a shift happening amongst Evangelical circles that I had long been a part of that signals a return to the social gospel that many Mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches have historically taught and practiced, but who may find their capacity waning. At the same time, Evangelicals could greatly benefit from the wisdom and experience of those who have been engaging in this work for centuries. How might we foster greater connection and collaboration within our com-

munities both within and outside "the church" to strengthen our collective agency to bring about the change we want to see in our world?

Change takes both well-placed individuals with influence and a mass of ordinary citizens willing to keep those in power accountable. It takes researchers, people with lived and learned expertise, and policymakers to draft and refine strategies, laws, and mechanisms. But unless those outside the inner circles are paying attention, asking questions, and bringing news from the frontlines, it can all get a bit abstract, prescriptive and dehumanized.

While staying informed is important, I think the most important thing we can do as citizens is to make sure our elected officials (and candidates) know what we care about – even if we don't have all the solutions. We may not know or agree on exactly what should be done to address these issues, but at the very least we can come together to get them on the table. One of the taglines I enjoyed most on the right to housing front was "We know you support the right to housing. Does your MP?"

I often wonder (aloud, ideally when speaking to a group of Christians) what it would be like if every Christian across Canada asked their candidates what they planned to do to eradicate poverty in Canada; to ensure everyone had a safe, accessible place to live; to welcome those fleeing persecution, war, or disaster into a life of equal opportunity for a hopeful future; to protect and nurture our environment and put us on a path to sustainability?

What if Christians were willing to collaborate with others outside "the church" who share our concerns about these issues? What if people could see through our priorities and pursuings a shared vision for a world in which all people and all creation can flourish in peace, justice, and unity? I think only then will the church itself reflect the heart of God.

Natalie Appleyard is a justice-seeker and teacher based in Ottawa, ON

