

The Missing Piece of the Puzzle:

Federal Leadership Against Poverty Needed

By Simon Lewchuk

The federal government has taken a decidedly hands-off approach to addressing poverty. When the House of Commons all-party committee released a landmark report in November 2010 calling for the development of a national action plan to reduce poverty, the government dismissed it. As one government MP put it, “we all know that tackling this problem requires a plan, and we have a plan. The best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working. The Economic Action Plan is doing just that...”

The Economic Action Plan, however, is not a comprehensive, coordinated plan to reduce poverty. Too many people continue to slip through the cracks, prevented from living a life of dignity and reaching their God-given potential.

So whose responsibility is it to address poverty in Canada? The government’s official response to the Federal Poverty Reduction Plan report makes it clear: “Poverty is a multi-faceted challenge. Addressing this challenge effectively requires sustainable solutions involving all levels of government, as well as community and not-for-profit organizations.” Most of us would agree with this: we all have a role to play in addressing poverty. This is true for all spheres of society: government, business, community, church, and individual.

Provincial Leadership

In the absence of federal leadership against poverty, the majority of provincial/territorial governments (except for British Columbia and Saskatchewan) have committed to their own poverty reduction strategies.

It’s difficult to quantitatively measure the impact many of these strategies have made to date. Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon are still developing theirs. (The CPJ Board recently sent a letter to Alberta Premier Alison Redford

encouraging her to follow through on her party’s pre-election commitment to implement a poverty reduction strategy.) In other cases, it’s simply too early to tell what impact the plans might be having: Prince Edward Island and Nunavut just released their plans in the last few months, while Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and New Brunswick launched their plans in 2009. Since low-income data for 2010 was just released in June, it is currently impossible to adequately assess the impact these strategies are having.

Three provinces have had poverty plans in place long enough to allow for better assessment.



Quebec

In 2002, Quebec became the first government in Canada to enact a law on poverty reduction (*the Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*). In 2004, they released their first five-year action plan to reduce poverty by half over ten years, and achieved one of the lowest levels of poverty in the industrialized world by 2013. The government introduced the second installment of its strategy in 2010.

Praised for its broad consultation process and considering both the social and economic realities of poverty, Quebec’s plan comes with a budget of close to \$7 billion over five years, \$1.3 billion of it in new investments. The government is required to report on its progress annually. Highlights of the strategy include reforms to social assistance, the introduction of refundable tax credits for low-income workers and child assistance, investment in employment training programs, and new affordable housing.

Eight years into the plan, Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cut Off – After Tax (LICO-AT) data shows the poverty rate for all persons fell from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent. This is a decrease of 13

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In Review

CPJ's Annual General Meeting



With a larger turnout than ever in Ottawa this year, CPJ Board, staff and supporters gathered on May 10th to hear a talk entitled, "Canada's Priorities – Prisons, Pipelines, Planes...and Poverty?" The speaker was **Sheila Regehr**, who had served for seven years as the Executive Director of the National Council of Welfare (the NCW was an advisory body to government that had its funding totally cut in the 2012 federal budget.) CPJ's Policy Analyst **Simon Lewchuk** responded by noting how the NCW's research on welfare incomes and poverty rates will be missed, as it allowed CPJ and our allies to speak truth to power. Board member **John Murphy**, former NCW Chair, graciously thanked Sheila for her presentation, promising that CPJ will continue to provide leadership on poverty issues.



Sheila Regehr and Simon Lewchuk at CPJ's Annual General Meeting.

CPJ's business meeting featured presentations from Edmonton's **Mark Huyser-Wierenga**, CPJ's Board Chairman, as well as Treasurer **Frederick Wind** of Whitby and Executive Director **Joe Gunn**. The membership elected Toronto's **Lorraine Land** and Gatineau's **Dan Monafu** to the Board, and re-elected **Lee Hollaar** (to represent BC and the Yukon) and **Jake Kuiken** (to represent southern Alberta.)

Events



From May 3-5, CPJ staff participated at the North American Basic Income Guarantee Congress at the University of Toronto. The congress was attended by over 150 anti-poverty advocates, academics, and social policy organizations.

CPJ's **Katherine Scott**, along with representatives from Campaign 2000 and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, participated in a panel discussion entitled "Income Security Across the Life Cycle: Next Steps in Canada." The session, moderated by Simon Lewchuk, introduced conference participants to the *Dignity for All* campaign and discussed how a guaranteed income program could fit into current poverty reduction efforts.



Panelists included MPs Elizabeth May (Green), Ted Hsu (Liberal), Anne Minh Thu Quach (NDP) and Michael Chong (Conservative).

On May 14th CPJ organized an event on Parliament Hill where over 100 participants had the opportunity to engage a panel of Liberal, Green, NDP and Conservative MPs on the issue of climate change and the role of faith communities in caring for creation.

the Catalyst Wins Recognition!

In May, *the Catalyst* won two Awards of Merit from the Canadian Church Press. In the Theological Reflection category, Toronto's **Greg Paul** won First Prize for his "The Crux of Justice." (Many members will have also read this piece in CPJ's book, "Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty.") **Chandra Pasma's** "Taxes and Democracy: Two Sides of the Same Coin" also won First Place in the Newsletter category.

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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 stewardship.

CPJ annual membership fee, includes *the Catalyst*: \$50 / \$25 (low-income)

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...continued from page 1 "Time to Step Up to the Plate..."

per cent since the implementation of Quebec's strategy. While the situation might have been much different had the strategy not been in place, Quebec made the smallest gains in the country during this time.

Ontario

Ontario's poverty reduction strategy was launched in December 2008 with the ambitious goal of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over five years. The accompanying *Poverty Reduction Act 2009* (passed with unanimous consent from all parties) enshrines this commitment within legislation, specifically requiring the development of a new strategy (including specific targets) every five years. The Act also requires successive governments to report annually on their initiatives to reduce poverty.

At its culmination, the current strategy will result in \$300 million in new provincial spending on anti-poverty measures. Major features of the strategy include an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit and the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

While it's difficult to determine how much of the change can be accredited to the province's actions, the poverty rate amongst children has decreased from 15.2 per cent in 2008 to 14.2 per cent in 2010 (according to Statistic Canada's Low Income Measure, Ontario's measurement of choice for their poverty strategy). 29,000 fewer children live in poverty than before the strategy was launched.

Newfoundland and Labrador

The biggest success belongs to Newfoundland and Labrador, where in 2006 the province's Progressive Conservative government implemented a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. The product of extensive community consultation, the strategy takes a long-term approach and reaches across 14 government departments and agencies. Features of the strategy include expansion of the prescription drug program for low-income residents, reduction in income tax rates for low-income earners, a program to assist people transitioning from social assistance to paid employment, the development of education and training programs for people with disabilities, and partnerships with community-based organizations.

The strategy appears to be working. Between 2004 and 2010, the poverty rate in the province dropped by 44.4 per cent (LICO-AT), by far the biggest decrease amongst the provinces. During that time, Newfoundland has gone from having the distinction of the highest poverty rate in Canada to one of the lowest. Between 2006 and 2010, the depth of poverty has dropped to become the lowest in the country. With progress like this, Newfoundland is well on its way to its goal of becoming the province with the least poverty by 2014.

Lessons Learned

While the scope and success of these strategies varies, the more successful strategies contain certain key elements that can serve as best practices for governments to reduce poverty:

1. Long-term approach
2. Focus on prevention vs. mitigation
3. Measurable targets and timelines
4. Sufficient financial investment
5. Extensive consultation process (including people living in poverty)
6. Coordination within and across governments and other partners
7. Accountability mechanisms (e.g. enshrining commitments in legislation, mandatory progress reporting)

Perhaps most importantly, though, the existence of the provincial and territorial strategies reflects growing public concern about poverty and political recognition that coordinated, concrete action is needed.

Moving forward against poverty

The impact and success of provincial poverty reduction strategies will continue to be limited until the federal government commits to playing a greater role. As CPJ and our partners on *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada* recently highlighted in a letter to the provincial/territorial premiers, the absence of a national poverty reduction strategy means all the best of provincial intentions will amount to little if the federal government is not working towards similar goals.

Sadly, as we've witnessed this past year in Ottawa, the federal government continues to have little interest in helping to lead and coordinate poverty reduction efforts. Think of the continued crises in First Nations communities, the absence of an affordable housing strategy, recent changes to Old Age Security negatively affecting people living in poverty, the unilateral cap to the Canada Social Transfer (hindering provincial social and education spending), or the non-implementation of the *Federal Poverty Reduction Plan* report. The few small, targeted investments and initiatives the government has introduced can be described as piecemeal and ad hoc.

The federal government – with its policymaking, legislative, taxation and redistributive powers – has a role to play in coordinating and supporting poverty reduction efforts in this country. Our 308 Members of Parliament have a unique opportunity to leave a lasting legacy and achieve a moral, social and economic victory by taking serious action against poverty. The newly-launched All-Party Anti-Poverty caucus that CPJ helped get off the ground may lead this effort.

Part of the question is whether the federal government has the political will, but the other part is whether we, as faith communities and concerned citizens, have the resolve to make sure poverty becomes a national priority.



Simon Lewchuk is a Policy Analyst at CPJ.

Hunger in Canada?

Moving from Charity to Social Justice

By Elaine Power

How is it possible in a country as rich as ours that at least 2 million Canadians do not have enough to eat? Or are eating low-cost filler foods to stave off hunger-pains? Hunger in our midst offends our sense of who we are as a caring, compassionate nation.

Similar sentiments most likely motivated the founders of Canadian food banks during an economic downturn in the early 1980s.

As unemployment rates rose steeply, many people fell through the cracks, finding themselves in the social safety net. Acting from their hearts, concerned citizens felt they had to do something. They started food banks with the assumption that the nation was in an “emergency” situation and once the economy recovered, food banks would close their doors.

Thirty years after the first food bank opened in Edmonton, food banks have become our “normal” response to hunger in Canada. Every year, Canadians donate time, energy, and millions of pounds of food so that their fellow and sister citizens do not go hungry.

Unfortunately, food banks do not solve the problem of hunger in Canada. Most hungry Canadians do not use them. Surveys show that only about a quarter of those who can be objectively classified as “hungry” actually use food banks. There are a host of reasons for this, including not being able to access a food bank or not being able to meet religious, cultural or personal food preferences. Using a food bank is a humiliating experience, and some hungry Canadians would rather go hungry than accept charity. Or they tell themselves that there are others who need it more than they do.

Even worse, research shows that those who do use food banks are still hungry. Food banks can only give their clients what they have on hand. Because demand is so high, most food banks have restrictions on how often households can use the food bank (usually once a month) and how much food is provided (usually enough for 3-5 days). Food Banks Canada reported that in 2010, 35% of Canadian food banks ran out of food. In addition, 50% cut back on the size of their hampers because of rising demand and inadequate supply.

Food banks are not the solution to hunger.

If not the solution, why do they still exist? What unintended purposes and whose needs do they really serve? When we look, we can see that food banks provide a comforting illusion that we are “doing something” about hunger. However, in the case of food banks, “doing something” is hiding the reality of hunger in our midst and detracting our attention from tackling the real problem of poverty. In doing so, food banks keep the political-economic status quo intact, letting our governments off the hook from their obligation to ensure income security.

Food banks also divide us into “us”—those who give—and “them”—those who receive. This undermines social solidarity. It tramples on the dignity of those who are forced to use food banks and elevates those who volunteer and donate. Those of us who donate time or food are encouraged to “feel good” about feeding our neighbours and to understand ourselves as good and worthy citizens.

Why are we not filled with passion about the injustice of so many people going hungry in this wealthy country, while corporate profits and CEO salaries soar? Why have we not taken to the streets with our pots and pans to show solidarity with those who are poor and hungry? Why are we not demanding that our governments fulfill their internationally proclaimed obligations to ensure that the basic needs of all citizens are met?

If we look into our hearts and see that our charitable good works are more about making us feel good and worthy than about meeting the needs of our fellow and sister citizens, then it is time to stop those charitable activities. They are doing more harm than good by covering up the gaping wound of injustice that hunger inflicts.

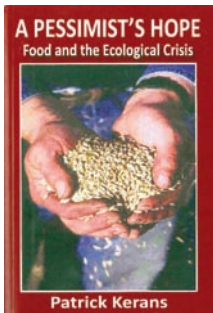


Elaine Power, an associate professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Studies at Queen's University, has served on the Board of the Partners in Mission Food Bank.



Book Reviews

Summer book suggestions from *Citizens for Public Justice*



A Pessimist's Hope:
Food and the Ecological Crisis
By Patrick Kerans
Baico Publishing
Inc., 2011

Reviewed by **Murray Angus**

In the face of growing evidence that humankind is careening headlong towards an ecological disaster, where can a reasonable person find any basis for hope?

It's right in front of us, says theologian and activist Patrick Kerans, if we know where to look for it.

Kerans constructs his analysis around the issue of food, as the food industry contains all the destructive contradictions that plague our society: e.g., heavy reliance on fossil fuels, environmental degradation, and threats to health from the massive use of chemicals and artificial additives.

Food also represents our deepest connection to the biosphere, and because it touches everyone, it has the greatest potential to engage us in critical reflection and action.

Kerans explains why it's reasonable to say we cannot find a basis for hope: first, the scientific evidence about global warming and its catastrophic consequences is overwhelming; second, the global economic system continues to operate on the faulty assumption that the earth's resources are unlimited; and finally, our political leaders and institutions seem incapable of pulling us back from the brink.

Where, then, do we look for hope?

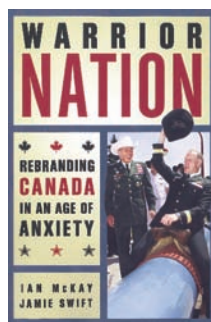
Not, he says, to the "experts" who operate within the dominant system. He cites

scientists, especially in the fields of biology and economics, who have become our authorities and whose worldview is a highly-reductionist interpretation of biological and social reality. This is the intellectual framework which has led us into the current impasse.

Rather, Kerans argues, we should be looking first to ourselves, and then to our neighbours in community.

Hope, he says, emerges when we stop deferring and begin to trust our own imagination, and our dreams of what kind of society we'd like to achieve. When we share our visions in community, they gain strength, until a common belief emerges that such things indeed are possible. This belief assumes the quality of a promise, a promise that Kerans says is not unlike that preached by the Old Testament prophets.

This book brings to fruition Kerans' lifelong intellectual journey; given the unusual breadth and depth of his background, it's a highly informative read, and a journey worth taking.



Warrior Nation:
Rebranding Canada
in an age of anxiety
By Ian McKay &
Jamie Swift
Between the Lines,
2012

Reviewed by **Bob Hatfield**

In *Warrior Nation*, Ian McKay and Jamie Swift paint striking, haunting word images such as the surrealist "Santa Claus parade ... led by an armoured personnel carrier." Images such as this reinforce the book's thesis: the Harper government, helped by new warrior historians like J.L. Granatstein and David Bercuson, is rebranding our military's image and rewriting our country's history.

An example of how the government is rewriting our history is found in the official guide for immigrants studying to acquire Canadian citizenship: *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*. This guide, published by the government, dismisses peacekeeping in half a sentence, but 20 of its 30 illustrations "depict plainly military events or figures."

A key way the government seeks to rebrand our military's image is to simplify the concept of a "warrior." *Warrior Nation's* examination of the contradictions in the lives of key Canadian players unveils psychological and moral tensions, and gives the lie to these new warrior simplifications.

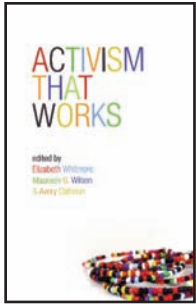
For example, Lester B. Pearson, "Canada's pre-eminent peacekeeper" was also "one of its most ferocious Cold warriors". Pearson was sweet on Mary Austin, who married United Church minister and missionary James Endicott. Endicott became "Public Enemy Number One" because of his activities in the peace movement which were compromised by his "wholehearted identification with the Chinese revolution". Pearson's life clearly belies the simple title of "warrior."

Military rebranding has broader social and economic consequences: "the core economic contradiction is manifested in the cuts to social programs and lavish giveaways for the military," say McKay and Swift.

Also, the Harper government's treatment of the military reeks of hypocrisy: they hold touching ceremonies for the dead, but treat the wounded poorly.

Warrior Nation's sound scholarship is supported by extensive notes and a thorough index. Its' message is clear: "This toxic rebranding of their country demands that concerned citizens resist the war machine."

Book Reviews



Activism that Works
By Whitmore, E.,
Wilson, M.G., and
Calhoun, A.
Fernwood
Publishing, 2011

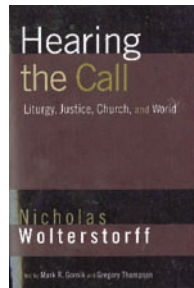
Reviewed by *Joe Gunn*

In my first year as Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice, I spoke at the Annual General Meeting. After my talk, a gentleman asked, “How can you tell if your work is successful?” I had an answer then, but I’ve just read a book that answers that tough question very well.

The three professors who wrote the book define activism as “attempting to bring about ... change for a more just, sustainable and peaceful world.” They asked nine diverse organizations across Canada (several of which collaborate in CPJ’s work) to uncover aspects of how they create change. Examples were chosen from groups working on fair trade coffee campaigns, disability issues, and even a faith group working on international justice and human rights.

This book concludes that assessing success after the fact often hides the complexities of good evaluation. What might be viewed as failure, such as a government’s refusal to implement legislation, may have other positive effects in terms of generating excitement and commitment for new groups of people in this effort. Sometimes developing new analytical skills in affected groups, making new allies, or identifying new funders may be vital signs of progress.

Indeed, under pressure to achieve measureable outcomes, most groups cannot afford to tell the truth: that they may never know the full “results” of their work. Advocacy targets are important, but should not force organizations to focus on quantifiable indicators alone. Work for social change is a committed, long term investment – worthy of a lifetime’s mission.



**Hearing the Call:
Liturgy, Justice,
Church, and World**
By Wolterstorff,
Nicholas, Eds. Mark R.
Gornik and Gregory
Thompson
William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company,
2011

Reviewed by *Ilean and Lee Hollaar*

Wolterstorff, one of the most gifted faith-based scholars of our ages, has written many books such as *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Eerdmans, 1983): classics for the well-furnished Christian mind.

This book compiles 39 of his articles and speeches, spanning forty years, and includes some which have never been published. In typical Wolterstorff style, many difficult subjects are broached, such as his assertion that Christians have often participated in some of the most egregious violations of human rights.

An interesting feature of this work is stories of the author’s life, including his childhood in rural Minnesota, how meeting displaced Palestinians and other like events awakened his passion for justice, and how he was changed when he saw benevolence used as an instrument of oppression. The book also speaks of the death of his adult son and what he learned of suffering and loss during that time.

In the closing portion of the book, he writes about how he became involved: *What moved me was seeing the faces and hearing the voices of the victims. It is what changed me.*

We had the privilege of attending the same worship community as the author and taking courses with him just over twenty-five years ago. His words speak truth and challenge you to act justly, care for and about the poor, and seek beauty in ordinary life and worship. Read this book to better understand a biblical framework for intentional faithfulness today as an individual or as part of a communion.



**The Blaikie Report:
An Insider’s Look at
Faith and Politics**
By Bill Blaikie
United Church
Publishing House,
2011

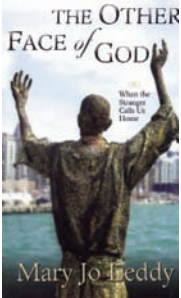
Reviewed by *David Illman-White*

Newly ordained in the United Church of Canada, I arrived in rural Saskatchewan steeped in social gospel articulated by the likes of Tommy Douglas. As such, it was a shock on my first Sunday to hear “the Church has no place in politics.” I soon began to wonder what the role of faith might be in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society.

The Blaikie Report answers my musings in Bill Blaikie’s reflections on his public life. The book is both a history of our times as well as a personal story of a life lived in the public square, as a United Church minister and as a Member of Parliament for Winnipeg-Transcona from 1979-2008. Over these years Blaikie was the N.D.P. critic for Health, Justice, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Environment, as well as Deputy Speaker. He was intimately involved in a number of major parliamentary debates - cruise missile testing, aboriginal rights, and free trade, to name just a few.

Blaikie provides the reader with an insider’s view to the personalities and behind the scenes conversations that bring insight to the issues. To each conversation, Blaikie brings an awareness and appreciation of the place of social gossellers in the progressive left, a place that has not always been a comfortable place to occupy.

The Blaikie Report is a history of our time, but perhaps more importantly, it is also an invitation to consider how faith communities can engage and respond to the challenges that confront us today.



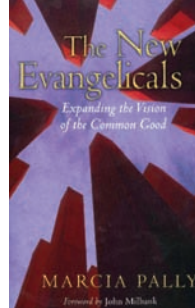
The Other Face of God
By Mary Jo Leddy
Orbis Books, 2011

Reviewed by *Melodi Alopaeus*

In her book, Mary Jo Leddy weaves narrative, poetry and theophosophical musings into an eloquent reflection on the stranger, us, and the space in between. Resonating throughout is the idea that strangers, in their difference and newness to us, reveal a part of God. Recalling ancient Hebrew tradition, Leddy writes that “God is not what we imagine, not the same as us. The stranger reminds us of this.”

It is at the borders of difference that Christ calls us to dwell—a place where indifference to our neighbours is not an option. Leddy draws the reader to this meeting place by sharing from her experiences living with refugees in Toronto. Through her narratives, social issues take on human faces. Refugee poverty is made tangible in Teresita – a single mother who works night shifts scraping gum off theatre seats to make ends meet. The inconvenience of red tape is evidenced in the story of Clara who inexplicably has to wait three years before her two boys are given permission to join her in Canada; then, she reunites with them only an hour before succumbing to terminal cancer. These stories draw us close to the need and suffering of strangers among us, calling us to compassionate action.

Although the book can feel fragmented at times, its varied components collectively challenge us to set aside even our most subtle notions of cultural superiority and to reside at the borders where strangers meet. It is at the borders we can look the stranger in the eye and find God reflected.



**The New Evangelicals:
Expanding the Vision
of the Common Good**
By William B.
Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 2011

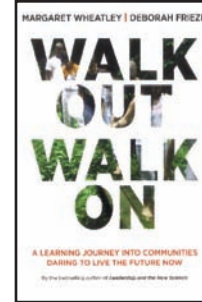
Reviewed by *Simon Lewchuk*

At the same time some evangelicals were applauding California's Proposition 8 – a referendum ballot prohibiting same-sex marriage – others were fighting to reclaim their identity: one not narrowly defined by certain hot-button issues, but one based on the pursuit of the common good. Marcia Pally traces the roots of this “new kind of progressive Christian social conscience” in the US, one that is broadening evangelical concern to include justice, peace, and the environment.

Pally traces the turn of evangelicals to political conservatism, and provides contemporary examples of evangelicals working for a more inclusive society. “New evangelicals,” maintains Pally, retain the core theological beliefs of other evangelicals, but see Jesus’ life and teachings as calling them into the public square. Their framework allows for policy assessment and activism on an issue-by-issue basis.

While *The New Evangelicals* focuses on the American context, much of Pally’s analysis can be applied here in Canada. Our “Religious Right” claims to speak for Canada’s evangelicals, pursuing a narrow agenda often at odds with the common good, but a similar shift is also occurring. With evangelicalism the fastest growing expression in the Canadian church, how do we encourage the “new evangelical” movement to become an active voice in the public sphere?

Although repetitive at times, *The New Evangelicals* does an excellent job at challenging stereotypes of evangelical Christians and identifying just how potent a force the church can be when it’s focused on living and proclaiming Jesus’ radical message of justice, peace and reconciliation.



**Walk Out Walk On:
A Learning Journey
into Communities
Daring to Live the
Future Now**
By Margaret Wheatley
and Deborah Frieze
Berrett-Koehler
Publishers, Inc., 2011

Reviewed by *Sister Sheila McKinley, osu*

This beautifully illustrated book by Margaret Wheatley, co-founder of the Berkana Institute and her successor, Deborah Frieze, invites the reader to take part in a “learning journey”. In the course of the book you will meet seven resilient communities from around the globe, communities that have decided to “walk out” and “walk on”.

As the writers explain at the beginning of the book, “walk outs who walk on” refers to people who “bravely choose to leave behind situations...that restrict and confine them...They walk on to the ideas, people and practices that enable them to explore and discover new gifts, new possibilities.”

As we travel from community to community, we are invited to rethink some conventional wisdom around problem-solving, aid and success. We meet each community in turn and are introduced to their surroundings, their history, their challenges and their approaches to dealing with them. The reader is then invited to reflect on the experience and to examine personal beliefs and practices.

The journey brings us face to face with some of our most cherished assumptions and approaches and shows how unhelpful and even damaging they can be. By the time you have read and reflected, you may think differently about progress, growth, speed, efficiency, power and intervention. At the same time, you may see play, friendship, and leadership in a new way.

Finally, the authors remind us, “Whatever the problem, community is the answer.” This book is both inspiring and challenging. It is hope-filled and thought-provoking.

Book Reviews *for children of all ages*



A Bloom of Friendship
By Anne Renaud
Lobster Press, 2004
Recommended for ages 9-12

Why do we have friends? Because we need each other. In war, we need each other even more.

Friendship during WWII started the Tulip Festival in Canada's capital city. A Bloom of Friendship explores these events, focussing on the origin of the Tulip Festival. It presents abundant information about WWII to help the reader understand why Holland needed Canada's help. There is a timeline of important events, and boxes

which highlight important historical facts. By the end, the reader knows why Ottawa blossoms with tulips every spring.

Ten year old Alida said it was, "Pretty good: now I know a lot more than I did before about the Second World War." Seven year old Emma liked it too: "Awesome! I really liked the pictures!"

Reviewed by Ruth Malloy with help from her daughters Alida & Emma



Lessons From a Street Kid
By Craig Kielburger
Greystone Books, 2011
Recommended for all ages

It all started when a young man called Craig Kielburger went to Brazil for a trip. The first thing that he noticed were the kids ... they were selling and advertising things for a living!

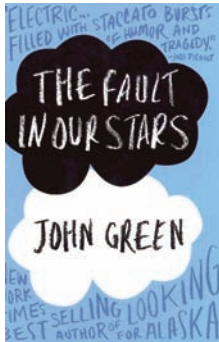
While Craig was walking around, he saw a boy that almost got hit by a car while he was trying to sell oranges. Craig asked if he was OK and offered him lunch. The boy took Craig to the place where he called home, an abandoned bus station.

He also introduced Craig to his family, which consisted only of other kids like him. They played soccer with a water bottle and made music with random things in the street. When they were all tired, the boy and Craig traded a special gift as a symbol of their friendship.

I highly recommend this book to those of ages 3 to 103!

Reviewed by Taisa Graca (age 12)

This book tells an amazing true story about friendship.



The Fault In Our Stars
By John Green
Dutton Books, 2012
Recommended for 12+

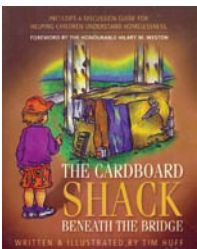
Early on in *The Fault In Our Stars*, Hazel says that some books are so special and rare they become entwined with the very fabric of your being and you don't want to share them with anyone. That, in a nutshell, is what *The Fault In Our Stars* is for me.

From the description, you would think this book is about two young people who bravely fight against their cancer, and perhaps start a foundation to raise money for kids like them. It isn't. It is a book about being human, and everything that comes with it. John Green

tells the story with wit and style, pulling you into the small yet fiercely alive world of Hazel and Augustus. Hazel is the kind of person you wish you had in your life – honest, witty, and loving.

If you love a story that is full of life, oblivion and humour, this is a brilliant book that I highly recommend.

Reviewed by Charlotte Scott-Frater (age 13)



The Cardboard Shack Beneath the Bridge
By Tim Huff
Castle Quay Books, 2007
Recommended for ages 4-10

As a well-known outreach worker and advocate amongst marginalized youth in Toronto, Tim Huff is no stranger to the realities of poverty and homelessness. As a father, Huff knows just how challenging it can be to engage children in meaningful conversation about such crucial issues.

In *The Cardboard Shack Beneath the Bridge*, Huff provides a vehicle for parents, teachers, and caregivers to start talking about homelessness. Through colourful illustrations and rhyme, Huff gently and sensitively addresses many of the common questions kids can have about the topic. Homeless people are portrayed as deserving of inherent dignity and respect ("No matter what you see or hear, one thing is always true / Each one without a house and home was once a child like you.") Some possible reasons for homelessness are given while acknowledging it is a complex issue. Also, suggestions are

provided as to what children and their families can do to respond.

Some of the material was a little beyond our 3 year-old daughter Sophie, but it did lead to some great questions and conversation ("Why doesn't she have a bed? If he doesn't have a home, where does he go?") The page-by-page discussion guide is a definite bonus and provides for even further conversation.

Reviewed by the Lewchuk family

Changing Directions, Changing Lives:

Canada's First-Ever Mental Health Strategy Launched

By Mary Bartram



My life has been long and hard but I am now a mentor for others living with mental health issues. I work in the system, and I understand what my clients are going through. I believe I'm a better person for it. But it should not have taken so long, it should not have been as hard, and services should have been more available. When I tell someone I'm sorry I don't know where to send them for help, I know only too well how it feels.

**Social worker with lived experience,
quoted in *Changing Directions, Changing Lives***

On May 8, Canada finally received its first-ever mental health strategy, shaped by stories and advice from thousands of people across the country. Developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada* is a comprehensive plan to improve mental health and well-being for all people. It's also meant to create a mental health system that meets the needs of people of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses.

The Strategy tackles the full spectrum of mental health issues and presents a broad range of recommendations for change that will help improve the lives of everyone living with mental health problems and illnesses, no matter how complex or severe.

It recognizes that opportunity to achieve the best possible mental health does not come equally. People with better incomes, more education and stronger social networks tend to be healthier. Poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, and low levels of education all put people at greater risk for developing mental health problems and create significant obstacles in accessing appropriate services.

"The future mental health of the nation depends crucially on how, collectively, the costly legacy of poverty is dealt with."

- UN National Research Council and Institute of Medicine

Thankfully, there are already successful approaches to solving disparities in living conditions, such as innovative anti-poverty initiatives underway in different parts of the country. These collaborative efforts span the public, private and voluntary sectors. Canada must continue to build on these, and strengthen them by including a focus on the improvement of mental health.

We must also invest in proven ways to detect mental health problems early and reduce the impact of depression, substance abuse, psychoses and suicide. We must build on the plans many

governments already have in place and engage all the government departments whose work affects mental health. We must ensure that governments provide coordinated leadership to better measure outcomes, develop new knowledge and share best practices.

Please visit www.strategy.mentalhealthcommission.ca/strategy/ to learn more. Ask yourselves what are you and the communities and organizations that you belong to already doing to advance the recommendations in the Strategy? Where are there opportunities to do more? What steps can you take today, this month, this year?

Canada has a plan to improve mental health. Now we all need to work together on the common goal of building a system where every door is the right door to meeting people's mental health needs. Transforming the mental health system is truly a job for all of us.

Mental Health Care in Canada:

- Underfunded and poorly coordinated across Canada.
- A maze for many who seek help.
- Only sought by 1 out of every 3 Canadians who need it.
- Only sought by a 1/4 of our children & youth who need it.
- Costs over \$50 billion/year.

Mental Health Issues:

- Affect 1 in 5 Canadians every year.
- Don't discriminate: any age, occupation obackground is susceptible.

*Mary Bartram is the Director,
Mental Health Strategy for Canada,
of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.*



Rio+20:

Hope within Disappointment

By Sue Wilson

Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, was promoted as a “once in a generation” opportunity to build on the significant achievements of the original Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992. Hope was high as the 1992 conference produced milestone agreements in terms of our global capacity to protect biodiversity and address climate change. However, it became clear in the year leading up to the Rio+20 conference there would be no similar big step forward. By the time of the conference, there was concern we might even take steps backward.



Panel discussion on “Climate Change and Social Inclusion” at the Peoples’ Summit

With expectations set so low, I thought it would be hard to be disappointed. However, I could not help but be disappointed with the lack of leadership among government representatives. For instance, after 20 years of talking about the need to end subsidies for fossil fuels, the relevant section was removed from the final conference document. It was all the more disappointing since the money spent on these environmentally harmful subsidies would significantly support financing for the transition to a sustainable world.

The final document from Rio+20 contains no specifics for transitioning to sustainable development. There are no new commitments to address climate change. We are left to wonder what exactly is meant by a ‘green economy’ with no concept of its underlying principles. The efforts of government leaders fall far short given the importance and urgency of the issues at hand.

Too many government leaders seemed oblivious to the ways our current thinking about economy, society and environment are creating harmful relationships with our earth and each other. Indeed, governments like those of Canada and the US were determined to pretend we can do a little green-washing and let business go on as usual with an economy based on fossil fuels.

Yet to my surprise, I found myself leaving Rio with new hope and energy. Why? I was inspired by the civil society groups that gathered, both at the official UN Conference and at the more colourful and vibrant Peoples’ Summit.

In particular, at the official UN Conference, the voice of indigenous people was exciting. One woman insisted that governments had been ‘colonized’ by corporations and she urged us to expose what corporate and financial powers are

doing in the world today. Another speaker noted that traditional Indigenous knowledge, where practiced, has been effective in protecting land, water and diverse species. Lastly, questions were raised: Are we willing to learn from Indigenous people? What might it mean to acknowledge earth as a being with rights? Does water have the right to exist without contamination? Might such consciousness-raising begin to shift our patterns of production and consumption?

Likewise, at the Peoples’ Summit, civil society groups got right to the heart of the matter. Much of the dialogue expressed the current state of affairs as a crisis of culture, a crisis of values. Vandana Shiva, a well-known physicist and activist from India, articulated this well. She noted that the current economy has globalized greed and consumption, insisting it is time to globalize compassion and solidarity. Shiva saw the failure of governments at Rio+20 as a call to action for the people of the world. It is time to show our governments the way.

This call to action is especially important for people of faith.

After four years of financial and economic crises, many of us hoped that our governments would recognize the need for a new economy: one built on real values, not fictional financial market wealth; one that recognizes the needs of the many instead of indulging in excess for the few; and finally, one that values nature without putting a price on it.

Rio+20 showed that we, the people, must lead our governments to this new horizon. Our hope lies in reconnecting the mystery of God with the wonder of God’s creation; in letting the visions of truth, compassion and justice, which form the fabric of our faith, guide us into sustained ethical reflection and action.

Rio+20 left us with a document filled with ambiguities and missed steps. However, the document itself is less important than the way people take up it up and give it life. Let us, in Canada and beyond, take this document and give it the backbone it’s missing. Let us take steps together into a new world of equity and environmental care.

Sue Wilson, a former CPJ Board member, lives in London, ON where she works as Director of the Office of Systemic Justice of the Sisters of St. Joseph.



“Buddy, can you spare a dime?”

Canadian Charities Seek Help

By Joe Gunn

While Canadians think of themselves as most generous, Canada’s charitable sector has been faring poorly. This seeming contradiction is explained in Statistics Canada’s own surveys, which report that the charitable sector’s increased reliance on fewer donors augurs a worrisome future. Data from the 2010 report shows that while charities’ needs have multiplied, the percentage of the population that donates, the total amount of donations, and the total number of volunteer hours remain relatively unchanged, or slightly lower, from 2007.

In addition, government funding for social institutions is threatened. Nonetheless, charities play a huge role in Canadian society. If hospitals and universities are included, charities’ contribution in 2007 was over \$100 billion – representing 7% of the Canadian economy.

It is no wonder Parliament’s Standing Committee on Finance has been undertaking a study of tax incentives for charitable donations.

Government Stepping Back: Charities Stepping Up

Proposals to Parliament have included a range of options. Since the mid-1990s, the capital gains tax has been waived on charitable contributions of shares, resulting in a surge of giving. Some groups have argued for even larger tax concessions, enabling large capital gifts, gifts of securities and lands. These types of proposals promise major new sources of income, but invariably come from very well-to-do Canadians and most are usually directed to larger, institutional charities.

Other proposals recommend a “stretch-credit” system, designed to give a greater tax deduction amount when a donor has increased her new giving over the previous year. An alternative proposal recommends simply increasing the tax credit rate for amounts over the current \$200 threshold (presently at 29%).

Are Tax Breaks the Answer?

Helping charities through changes to the tax system is complex, and some faith-based organizations that simply argue for greater tax breaks for charitable gifts can miss the larger point.

Tax policy is a way to promote the common good, ensuring that communities are inclusive and beneficial to everyone, especially those too young, too old or otherwise unable to provide for a dignified existence. Charitable tax incentives should not be used to disguise inequality or to allow some to avoid their fair contribution to society. Neither the tax structure nor charitable

giving should be allowed to metastasize the problem of inequality in Canada.



As Linda McQuaig and Neil Brooks point out in their 2010 book, *“The Trouble with Billionaires,”* virtually all income growth in the past thirty years has gone to those in the top ten percent, but particularly to those in the top one percent. The median Canadian family income has slightly declined, while those families who’ve been able to “keep up” are those working longer hours. The number of Canadian billionaires more than doubled in the past decade

from twenty five to fifty five. A generation ago, the average Canadian CEO typically made twenty five times that of the average worker; today, he makes roughly 250 times as much.

Changes to the tax structure favouring the wealthy have been part of the reason for these growing inequities. It would seem virtuous for the fabulously well-to-do to donate increased amounts to charity, but a more useful effort towards the common good would be to lessen inequality by returning income tax levels on these high earners (as well as corporate tax rates) to their previous, higher levels.

Additionally, Canadians for Tax Fairness, a group CPJ helped initiate, argues that “causes upheld by the rich tend not to be in the interest of the poor. Choice of priorities differs between different income groups.”

Finally, the 2012 federal budget implementation bill, while focusing on deficit reduction, also included \$8 million in additional funding to audit charitable activities. This sends a troubling message, especially when viewed in light of fewer grants.

Let’s support charities in playing their rightful role of building a more equitable society. Making the tax system more progressive to lessen inequality would go much further in meeting Canada’s social needs than providing tax breaks for the elite’s charities of choice.



Joe Gunn serves as CPJ’s Executive Director.

In Faith

By Nick Overduin

Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

In high school, I often received either an A or an F in mathematics. I would simply "get it", or "not get it." Sometimes the teacher would carry on for weeks, while I repeatedly received an F in the daily quizzes. Then suddenly she would say something which, in her mind, was inconsequential, but was pivotal for me. All the pieces would dramatically fall into place. After that, I would receive an A on a daily basis.

A similar moment occurred while I was chairing the Christian Reformed Church Synodical Advisory Committee on the Climate Report. At the start, I did not "get it". Then, one of the scientists on our team said, "If carbon were purple, we would not be having this conversation. The whole world would be able to see that the ring of carbon around the globe is getting thicker and thicker, still allowing the sunlight to come in, but not letting the heat escape."

Suddenly I understood.

I realized it is like theology: faith, as it says in Hebrews, "is being certain of what we do not see." Likewise, in the matter of climate change, we need to rely, in faith, on what good scientists are telling us. Carbon dioxide is, unfortunately, invisible. Like the disciples, scientists issuing warnings about climate change are trying to honestly portray the reality they have detected. They are in a profession which does not cater toward conspiracy theories.

God has told us He wants us to care for His creation. He knows we need it to survive. Consider Amos 7: 1-3, where an impending ecological disaster in the Bible was averted: *"This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me..., I cried out 'Sovereign Lord, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small.' So the Lord relented. 'This will not happen,' the Lord said."*

However, the God who mercifully protected his people from this environmental catastrophe continued to confront them, finally presenting a plumb-line (Amos 7:7): a non-negotiable standard of truth. In construction, plumb-lines are used to make sure houses are built straight. In Amos 7, God uses a plumb-line to make sure His people are being true.

Globally, we are facing a plumb-line of truth: the emerging consensus of the international scientific community.

There may still be a small amount of wiggle room at the bottom as the plumb-line hovers over its final resting point (there are interesting ongoing conversations among the experts and among the laity.) However, as one of the delegates at this summer's Synod said, "If we wait till everyone agrees with everything, the agreement will come on the day that it is too late; the globe will have passed the tipping point."

Politically, the key development at Synod 2012 was the wording which had Synod "recognize" the emerging scientific consensus, rather than "agree" with or "affirm" it. The complicated issue of whether climate change issues are even the "business" of the institutional church in its limited ecclesiastical gathering weighed heavily on the discussions.

Spiritually, however, the key event was much more dramatic. In writing the report on climate for Synod, the internally divided Task Force took more than a year to become unified. In preparing for Synod, the internally divided Advisory Committee of Synod took four days to become unified. At Synod, the internally divided group of 188 delegates became unified in only 4 hours.

There is a powerful drift in that: a momentum which felt very much like what Jesus called "the finger of God," a relentless surge towards truth-telling and truth-facing.

In the end, Synod added a recommendation that our Advisory Committee had not thought of: "We encourage the members of the churches not to descend into apocalyptic despair or to be judgmental towards each other because of ongoing diverse opinions." Amen! Hallelujah! Let's preserve God's creation.



Nick Overduin has been the pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto for eleven years. His oldest daughter warned him once that he did not "get it" when it comes to the serious issue of climate change!

