

## Public Justice – Now, More than Ever!

By Will Postma

For 50 years, Citizens for Public Justice has given voice and legs to my hopes and prayers for a more just Canada. I see CPJ as a little blue engine pulling a long train of carefully-considered policy recommendations over a mountain, undeterred by barriers of unjust legislation or misguided government priorities.

CPJ's focus on justice and our shared responsibility as image-bearers of God makes it an organization that the Canadian faith community can support wholeheartedly. I have come to know CPJ as a truly efficient organization, operating within a lean budget and yet seeing impressive returns. Through CPJ's work to lessen inequality, decision-makers are reminded that three million women, men, and children in Canada are poor; that single-parent families are especially poor; and that poverty makes a country less competitive and its people less healthy, which costs us all in the long run.

I remember when I was a high school student in the 70s CPJ (then the Committee for Justice and Liberty) was working with the Dene Aboriginal people to win a moratorium on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. They persevered all the way to the Supreme Court! Twenty-some years later I worked with refugees at a Reception Centre in Ottawa and was

grateful that CPJ was active in supporting refugees fleeing horrible situations. Even today, my encounters with refugees and with First Nations and indigenous communities are enriched by what CPJ has addressed and accomplished over many years of faithful and persistent work.

Now, as a CPJ board member, I am still encouraged by CPJ's work to support the foreigner, the fatherless, the widow, and the marginalized. For example, CPJ has worked hard over the past several years to encourage our government to develop a national housing strategy. For a while this was done by championing legislation that could have made a serious dent in reducing Canada's number of homeless, which today is at about 400,000. A Bill to this effect garnered much public support but was defeated in May of 2012. Nonetheless, CPJ's many meetings with MPs and their staff effectively reminded them of the economic and human costs of band-aid solutions.

CPJ wants to see our government act justly, for the good of citizens today and for the good of our grandchildren and their grandchildren. Governments are uniquely able to coordinate resources to ensure that our responses to the vulnerable and to the environment are long-term plans of action. CPJ's research

on ecological justice, for example, shows that our government needs a much more comprehensive plan for the future of our planet. As a model, past governments have worked hard on comprehensive plans to bring us national health care, which we access today with a good amount of equity and availability.

In many ways, Canada is seen around the world as a place of opportunity and safety. I know this all too well through my international work, much of which is in poorer, conflict-affected countries. But while Canada is affluent, many are still struggling to overcome a growing mountain of obstacles. CPJ is working hard to climb this mountain, knowing that creative and fair policy solutions are needed now more than ever.

The prophet Micah reminds the otherwise busy Israelites that they must embrace justice and love mercy. Today, CPJ reminds us of our responsibilities as citizens and image-bearers to care for creation, uphold the vulnerable, and prayerfully work for shalom.

Will Postma, shown above addressing CPJ's anniversary dinner in Toronto, represents Ontario-at-large on the CPJ Board, is working primarily in the field of international development management, and is a member of the Friendship Community Church in Toronto.

# In Review

## CPJ on the Hill



The November meeting of CPJ's Board of Directors in Ottawa featured a panel presentation with Members of Parliament. Discussion focused on how faith-based organizations can successfully engage their memberships in making change. After inviting all parties to participate, CPJ was pleased that we were joined for a probing discussion by Scarborough Guildwood MP John McKay and Ottawa Centre MP Paul Dewar.

Later in November, Simon and Ashley visited Newton-North Delta MP Jinny Sims to discuss her new role as Employment and Social Development critic for the NDP and to familiarize her with CPJ. Simon also met with Cape Breton-Canso MP Rodger Cuzner, the Liberal Employment, Social Development, and Labour critic to brief him on CPJ's policy recommendations on poverty. On November 18, Joe and a delegation from the Citizens Climate Lobby held meetings with Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing MP Carol Hughes, Nickel Belt MP Claude Gravelle, Toronto-Danforth MP Craig Scott, and Beaches-East York MP Matt Kellway.

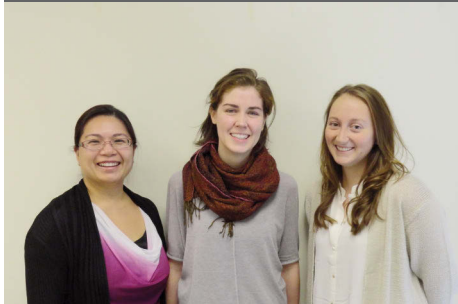
## New Making Ends Meet Report

CPJ has released the fourth and final report in our *Poverty Trends Scorecard* series. "Making Ends Meet" provides a summary of the rising cost of living and the resulting challenges faced by low-income Canadians. As prices rise, the income of the working poor and those on social assistance hasn't kept up. "Making Ends Meet" includes five fact sheets focusing on the cost of living, housing, homelessness, food costs, and access to education. It also calls for a poverty elimination strategy to invest in critical supports for low-income Canadians.

## New Website

Check out the new features at [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca). We've brought the CPJ video onto the front page, increased the visibility of our biweekly feature articles, and organized the content so it's easier to navigate, even on hand-held devices. You can get all of CPJ's latest research there.

## Welcome Interns!



This autumn, CPJ was blessed with three new interns. **JoAnne Lam** is developing engagement strategies for CPJ's new book, *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis*, while a candidate for priesthood at St. Peter's Lutheran church. **Ashley Chapman**, a communications graduate, is working on poverty and refugee rights issues as CPJ's Public Justice Intern. Sarnia's **Nicole Armstrong** is a student at Carleton University's School of Social Work, and is researching and writing on ecological justice issues until December.

## Brad is Back!



**Brad Wassink** is CPJ's new Communications Coordinator and the new *Catalyst* editor. Last year Brad served as our Public Justice Intern, and we're thrilled to have him back on the team!

## Citizens for Public Justice

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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 and justice.

**CPJ annual membership fee** includes *the Catalyst*:  
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*the Catalyst*, a publication of **Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ)**, reports on public justice issues in Canada and reviews CPJ activities.

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# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It was the dawn of Beatlemania, the season the Leafs won the Stanley Cup, and the election when Pearson overtook Diefenbaker. It was 1963, and it was also the year that a small group of young men at King's University created the Christian Action Foundation, which would later join with the Committee for Justice and Liberty to become CPJ.

Fifty years later, the golden anniversary celebrations in Edmonton, Toronto, and Ottawa brought together hundreds of friends and supporters to commemorate CPJ's past and look ahead with renewed vigour.

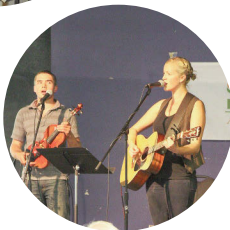
## EDMONTON



Co-founder John Olthuis addressed the crowd at the May 30 event.



Board Chair Mark Huyser-Wierenga, Executive Director Joe Gunn, and board member Lorraine Land. Land, also a former staff member, spoke about CPJ's historical successes and its role in the current political environment.



Justine Vandergrift and Anthony Middel warmed the crowd with their rich folk music.



Board members Naomi Kabugi and Mike Bos joined in the celebrations.

## TORONTO



Board members Will Postma and Leah Watkiss served as the evening's emcees.



The Wine Before Breakfast band (who had some people up dancing!) ended the night with "Let Justice Flow," a song commissioned for CPJ's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



Economist and media personality Armine Yalnizyan spoke on the need for a voice of faith in the public sphere. She also recalled her first few encounters with the late co-founder Gerald Vandezande.



Peter Dale, former MP Lynn McDonald, and Bert Hielema check into the October 3 anniversary event at the Church of the Holy Trinity.

## OTTAWA



The November 1 event overlapped with the board's regular gathering in Ottawa.



Staff members Karri Munn-Venn (left), Michael Krakowiak, and Simon Lewchuk (right) were among the crowd listening to board member Carol Thiessen read her reflection in *Living Ecological Justice*.



Friends and supporters filled the Parliament Pub to hear reflections from *Living Ecological Justice* and to see our new website launched.



Board member Sr. Sheila McKinley read her *Living Ecological Justice* reflection, "Of Garden Spiders and Galaxies," which one listener rechristened as "An Antidote to Cynicism."

# Charity and Justice: Food Bank Volunteers Call for Government Action

By Simon Lewchuk

On October 17, frontline volunteers from food banks, emergency meal programs, and drop-in centres took to the streets in 12 cities across Canada to point out that their charitable actions are only part of the solution to poverty. They handed out lunch bags to passersby that contained an apple, poverty and hunger statistics, and a postcard calling on the federal government to develop a national poverty action plan.

The event (dubbed “Chew on This!”) was coordinated by CPJ and Canada Without Poverty as part of the *Dignity for All* campaign, and it coincided with the release of a new CPJ national report, *Poverty Trends Highlights: Canada 2013*.

In total, 10,000 bags and postcards were distributed to a largely receptive public. The day’s activities were covered by CBC, CTV, CHCH, Northern Beat, and several local newspapers.

Part of what made the events so unique was that it wasn’t just your usual anti-poverty activists who were involved. A diverse group of church folks, retirees, university students, and local business people took part, each having tremendous credibility and on-the-ground knowledge of poverty in Canada.

## Does charity impede justice?

Food banks were started in the early 1980s as temporary stop-gap measures to address hunger. But like many other emergency supports (for example, the “Out of the Cold” programs, started in the same era) there continues to be a persistent need. In March of this year alone, 833,098 people relied on a food bank.

Some people think that food banks and the like should be shut down. They argue that the continued existence of such charitable programs actually lets the government off the hook and keeps us from tackling the real problem of poverty. For many others, calls to close such emergency programs are unrealistic and would further harm those living in poverty. Accusations that frontline volunteers are complicit in the problem can create divisions amongst those who are working for change.



## A “both/and” approach

Through “Chew on This!,” participants had an opportunity to affirm the currently necessary (albeit unfortunate) role that food banks and meal programs play in satisfying hunger in the here and now (charity), while also calling for change at a policy level to address the systemic, underlying causes of food insecurity (justice).

Many of the most effective instruments for fighting poverty are controlled at the federal level. In *Poverty Trends Highlights: Canada 2013*, CPJ outlines several concrete recommendations for the federal government to take action on poverty, including expanding important income security programs (like the Working Income Tax Benefit and the Canada Child Tax Benefit), funding a pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of a Guaranteed Livable Income program, and investing in the construction and repair of affordable housing.

## Time to speak out

Many of our members and supporters were involved in the “Chew on This!” event, gathering at places like the Church of the Redeemer in downtown Toronto (almost 1,000 lunch bags handed out over lunch hour on busy Bloor St.), the public library in Richmond, BC, and

the City Hall in Sarnia. Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Ottawa even used the bags and postcards to highlight the need for a “both/and” approach to charity and justice at a Sunday service during their Thanksgiving food drive.

Compassion and assistance to the poor are core components of the DNA of faith communities. As some of the longest-standing and most dedicated groups assisting those in need, churches have earned a voice when it comes to issues of poverty in our country. They are well positioned to lead the way when it comes to calling for long-term, policy-level solutions to poverty and hunger. Are we doing a good job of exercising that voice – and responsibility?

For the latest on poverty in Canada, check out CPJ’s *Poverty Trends Highlights: Canada 2013* at <http://cpj.me/1etRWxJ>



Simon Lewchuk is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

# BC's Carbon Tax: Reducing Emissions, Spurring Action

British Columbia's carbon tax is an effective policy that is creating a healthier environment and prompting Christians to consider our own ecological footprint.

Let us rewind to 2007. Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* was educating millions of people around the world on the science and impacts of climate change and encouraging action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

In BC, Premier Gordon Campbell framed the issue closer to home by warning us that the impacts of weather events like heavy rain and snowfall, flooding, and drought would become increasingly severe. In July 2008, British Columbia became the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce a revenue-neutral carbon tax. The carbon tax covers GHG emissions from all fossil fuel sources based on the volume used, and establishes an economic incentive to reduce fossil fuel use. The tax rate was designed to increase slowly over time. Revenues raised from the carbon tax are offset by cuts in income and other taxes.

Five years later, the results are in: the carbon tax is working. BC's Provincial GHG Inventory Report shows that overall GHG emissions have been reduced by 4.5%. A study conducted by Sustainable Prosperity shows that BC's fuel consumption has decreased by 17.4% per capita and that these reductions have occurred across all the different fuel types covered by the tax. Lower-income persons are not disproportionately affected, due to the tax refunds they receive. Meanwhile, BC's economy has kept pace with the rest of Canada, showing that economic viability and reducing carbon pollution can go hand-in-hand.

In 2013, the enthusiasm for a carbon tax has waned slightly due to concerns about economic recovery. The tax rate has been frozen at \$30 a tonne, with no increase on the horizon. And BC's push to promote the liquefied natural gas industry could unfortunately double the province's

GHG emissions. These developments could eventually generate emissions levels equivalent to that of Alberta's oil sands. BC must decide about whether and when to increase the tax rate and by how much. There will also be other decisions to make about how to best promote further GHG reductions across the economy and in communities.

Stakeholder consultations on the carbon tax have shown that there is an increased interest in using carbon tax revenues to improve energy and resource efficiency at public institutions such as BC schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals, and to expand and improve public transit.

The carbon tax has prompted British Columbians to consider behavioural changes and their own ecological footprint. A poll commissioned by The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions and Pembina Institute in 2012 found that British Columbians were improving energy efficiency at home and were

driving less frequently. These actions also have spin-off benefits such as cost-savings and reduced air pollution in urban centres.

As Christians, we are reminded that we care about the earth and the climate due to our love for God (Psalm 24). We have a responsibility to be diligent caretakers of this beautiful province and planet that God has blessed us with (Genesis 1:26-28) and to care for our neighbours (Matthew 25). This includes being aware of how climate change adversely affects people living around the world. By being conscious of our environmental footprint and changing our behaviours and habits, – and by working for policy change – we can live out this responsibility. We should also pray for wisdom for our leaders as they are making public policy decisions (Jeremiah 29, 1 Timothy 2).

BC has made an inspiring start in acting on climate change. Let's all play a part by responding to climate change with moral conviction and concrete public actions.

When we do, we do this for the glory of our Lord Jesus, in whom and for whom all creation is made (Colossians 1).



The author is a CPJ supporter and Regent College graduate student. The views expressed here are the author's own.

# Linking Justice and Faith in the Christian Reformed Church

By Steve van de Hoef



“As I read through the report, I kept looking for a surprise – something new – but I didn’t find it.”

This was the observation of a longtime justice advocate, shared in a recent meeting to discuss the findings of the Justice and Faith Pilot Project. This pilot was the first phase of a new research partnership between the Christian Reformed Church, the Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics at the Institute for Christian Studies (CPRSE/ICS), and the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR). It explored the way that Christian Reformed congregants understand the relationship between faith and justice, and has received two years of further funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Like the aforementioned justice advocate, many of us would welcome a surprise, a big insight or a magic bullet; something we don’t already know that we could use to convince others that doing justice is an integral part of Christian faith and life, and encourage them to join in working for public justice and the common good.

The Justice and Faith Pilot Project’s findings help us understand the landscape of justice commitment and mobilization in the Christian Reformed Church. The Pilot Project report identifies common perspectives on justice and faith; pinpoints knowledge, attitudes, actions, and conditions that act as barriers and enablers to further action for justice; and suggests possible ways of mobilizing people to greater justice engagement.

It found that understandings of justice vary widely, including a divide between seeing justice as restoration and renewal and seeing it as retribution and judgement. A similar continuum of understanding exists between seeing justice-based action as addressing systemic barriers versus alleviating individual needs. Reports of “doing justice” ranged from serving in food banks or soup kitchens and participating in mission trips or service projects to advocating to elected representatives for policy change and giving money to community development or policy organizations seen to be “doing justice” (World Renew and Citizens for Public Justice were commonly cited examples).

Our research identified several enablers of justice engagement that resonated with people in our church:

- **Casting a biblical vision of justice:** People are more receptive to seeing justice as an integral part of Christian faith, and more likely to act, when it is expressed in biblical language or shown to be rooted in the witness of scripture.
- **Identifying through personal experience:** People are more likely to engage in justice work if they experience situations of injustice or have contact with people who have suffered injustice. The church can play a role in facilitating these kinds of experiences and authentic connections and can create safe places for dialogue and for breaking down barriers.

- **Leadership that promotes justice:** Organizations such as CPJ, World Renew, World Vision, and others were identified as important leaders in demonstrating what “doing justice” looks like and in challenging people to get involved, then providing encouragement and support when they do. Leadership at local levels, including from youth who are enthusiastic about justice, was also considered necessary for justice engagement. Leaders who act as facilitators and mentors rather than as teachers or directors were identified as most desirable and effective in promoting justice engagement.
- **Community context facilitates engagement:** Several participants observed that when a community, or a group of individuals within a community, was engaged in justice work, other individuals were more likely to also participate. This underscores the importance of seeing justice mobilization as a community activity, not only as individual change.

The full report of the Justice and Faith Pilot Project is available at: <http://cpj.me/1hy6oJg>

Your feedback and continued participation is welcome as the Justice and Faith Project continues. To learn more, provide input, stay connected, or get involved, contact Steve van de Hoef at [svandehoef@crna.org](mailto:svandehoef@crna.org), Ron Kuipers at CPRSE/ICS, or Rich Janzen at CCBR.



Steve van de Hoef is the Justice and Faith Project Coordinator for the Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

# Participatory Budgeting: Let Canadians Decide on Spending Priorities

By Simon Lewchuk

If this spring's string of Senate scandals has shown us anything, it's that Canadians care how our tax dollars are spent.

Yet those hundreds of thousands of dollars in questionable housing, travel, and campaign expenses pale in comparison to the \$280 billion or so of taxpayers' dollars that the federal government will spend this year with little meaningful consultation.

This isn't to say that all these expenditures are necessarily bad. Much of this public money goes to noble and necessary causes: important income security programs, affordable housing, community infrastructure, environmental protection, and food safety.

But it's also being spent on corporate tax cuts, partisan political advertising, subsidies for big industry, and paint for the prime minister's jet.

While the process for making these choices used to be more open and democratic, the federal government's current budget process is anything but.

Operating under the guise of "consultation," in June the federal Finance Committee announced its annual pre-budget process. People were invited to "share their priorities for the 2014 budget" via an online form. Many vacationing Canadians weren't even aware of it.

The parameters of the pre-budget consultation process are becoming increasingly narrow. In 2011, for example, respondents were asked to provide their views on how to "create quality, sustainable jobs, ensure relatively low rates of taxation and achieve a balanced budget." To start from the premise that low taxes are non-negotiable doesn't leave much room for an honest, frank discussion.

As a recent Canadian Press article pointed out, the response rate to the pre-budget e-consultations has fallen sharply since being introduced by the Conservatives in 2006. Last year, only 642 individuals and organizations across the country bothered to share their views, down from the peak of 7,760 in 2007.



People are losing faith in the process.

The Finance Committee used to take the show on the road, making it easier for people in places like Edmonton, Moncton, and Summerside to participate in public hearings. Now the hearings all take place in Ottawa, attended by powerful lobbyists promoting their clients' narrow interests.

As a result, those who can't afford lobbyists, such as low- and middle-income Canadians and the growing number of civil society organizations that have had their funding cut, aren't being heard.

Not that the real decision-making power rests with the Finance Committee: our current government has been criticized for shrouding the budget process in secrecy, something they explicitly campaigned against in 2006. Budget decisions are being made behind closed doors and forced through the House of Commons as part of massive omnibus legislation.

It all leaves one seriously doubting the value and integrity of the current budget consultation process.

What we do with our money – as families, communities, or countries – reflects our priorities, commitments, and vision of the sort of world we want to live in. Budget decisions demand a broad, inclusive decision-making process.

In other parts of the world, citizens are reclaiming their rightful roles in budget

decisions. Participatory budgeting, introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in the late 1980s, enables people to be part of a democratic process to choose how to allocate public budgets. Ideas are shared and public expenditures are identified, discussed, and prioritized in an open and democratic fashion. Everyone's voice counts.

The city of Guelph, Ont. has adopted a form of participatory budgeting in which neighbourhood groups can apply for grants for community projects. Citizens have worked together to allocate municipal dollars for breakfast programs in low-income neighbourhoods, language classes, community centre renovations, and various social and recreational services.

The experiments in participatory budgeting show that citizens want a seat at the budget table. Will our federal government continue to head in the opposite direction, concentrating power in the hands of a select few to make closed-door decisions, or will it engage Canadians with an open, participatory budget process?

Simon Lewchuk is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice. A similar version of this op-ed was published online by the *Toronto Star*, August 9, 2013.



## Faith House

By Miriam Illman-White



Since September of this year, I have been living at Faith House, an intentional interfaith community in Ottawa. There are seven young adults of different faith traditions living under one roof, engaging in intentional community work.

In the past two and a half months I have learned many things about myself and about what it means to live in an intentional community. Living with six other people with different experiences and backgrounds can be very challenging as well as incredibly life giving. Anytime you have seven people sharing living space and responsibilities you are bound to have some degree of tension over doing the dishes or leaving the toilet seat up. The support and inspiration I receive from my roommates, however, is what I will remember for the rest of my life. At Faith House we are as intentional about our work in the community as we are committed to checking in on one another, sharing our values and sharing our faith.

We have been living together for less than three months and we already feel safe in voicing our concerns about our individual lives, futures, and our concerns for the world. I have had meaningful con-

versations about life, love, faith, self-esteem, politics and how all these things intersect with each of my roommates. The fact that we have built this trust and safety in such a short time is really exciting. Expressing the concerns closest to your heart can be intimidating and vulnerability is scary; when you feel safe, however, being open can be a liberating experience.

My roommates not only try to create a safe space for people of all walks of life as a community, they are also incredibly inspiring individuals. Each has their own worldview, talents, struggles, and passions, and each one inspires me to keep working for a more just world.

This past week our intentional reflection prompt was, "What inspires you to lead?" At first we had many current affairs jokes such as, "Poor leadership inspires me to lead, looking at you Mr. Mayor of Toronto!" But then we delved into more serious contemplation. I missed the house meeting where everyone shared their responses, but I know what I would have said.

My community, my family, and my housemates inspire me to lead, watching each of them reach for their goals, striving to

make the world a more just place. One of my roommates is incredibly passionate about buying local produce and products. Another is passionate about eco-friendly technologies. The third is passionate about gender equality. The fourth is passionate about stopping destructive Canadian mining in other countries. The fifth is passionate about mental health. The sixth is passionate about global development. While their focuses and faith traditions differ, their passions all intersect and are rooted in a call for social and environmental justice.

My experiences at Faith House have brought me closer to my own faith as I lead and follow in humble devotion and am surrounded by inspiration. Although living in community can be difficult, it is definitely worth it.

Miriam Illman-White is a third year English major at Carleton University. She was the summer student at CPJ this past summer. She is a children and youth coordinator for a United Church in Ottawa.

