

the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Winter 2017

Pub. Mail Agreement no: 40022119

Canada's Not So Safe Agreement

By Deb Mebude

While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau began his term in office by welcoming Syrian newcomers at the Toronto Pearson Airport, Donald Trump kicked off his presidency with three executive orders pushing for expedited deportations and strengthened immigration enforcement. When it comes to immigration and refugee policy, Canada and the United States seem to be increasingly at odds.

The human repercussions of these contrasting policies were on full display this summer, when more than 8,000 Haitian asylum seekers crossed into Canada in July and August alone.

This mass exodus was prompted by an announcement from the United States' Secretary of Homeland Security. He advised Haitians that the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) that had allowed them to stay following the January 2010 earthquake was about to expire. As a result, many chose to head to Canada in hopes of applying for refugee status. But thanks to something called the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), they wouldn't be able to do so at an official Port of Entry.

CPJ has long opposed the STCA, which has been in force since 2004. The agreement states that both Canada and the United States are "safe" countries. As a result, individuals in the United States cannot make a refugee claim in Canada, and vice versa. Instead, they are expected to make their claim from where they are.

Refugees, however, have the right to seek asylum, even if it means crossing

national borders. Entering by foot, then, becomes the natural option for many. Refugee law deems this action not illegal, but rather "irregular."

But if refugees need to flee the United States to make an asylum claim, is it actually a safe country?

The 1951 Refugee Convention mandates that countries not send individuals back to nations where they may be in danger of persecution. Currently, refugee claimants in the United States are in danger of this very issue.

CPJ views the STCA as inherently problematic. Now more than ever, Canada and the United States do not approach refugee policy in the same manner. The STCA makes Canada complicit to violations of refugee rights. With the STCA in place, individuals with legitimate refugee claims are dismissed simply because they've arrived via the United States.

To compound the issue further, the STCA puts already vulnerable populations in harm's way by encouraging them to make dangerous journeys. Often, asylum seekers are vulnerable to smugglers and traffickers, dangerous weather conditions, and even death. By rescinding this agreement, Canada would allow individuals a chance to make their claim in a manner that is controlled, regulated, and that upholds human rights.

Recently, the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), the Canadian Council for Refugees, and Amnesty International launched a joint legal challenge

questioning refugee policy in the United States and calling for Canada's Federal Court to strike down the STCA.

"With the new administration, the previous concerns about whether the US is complying with international law have escalated," said Peter Noteboom, acting general secretary of the CCC.

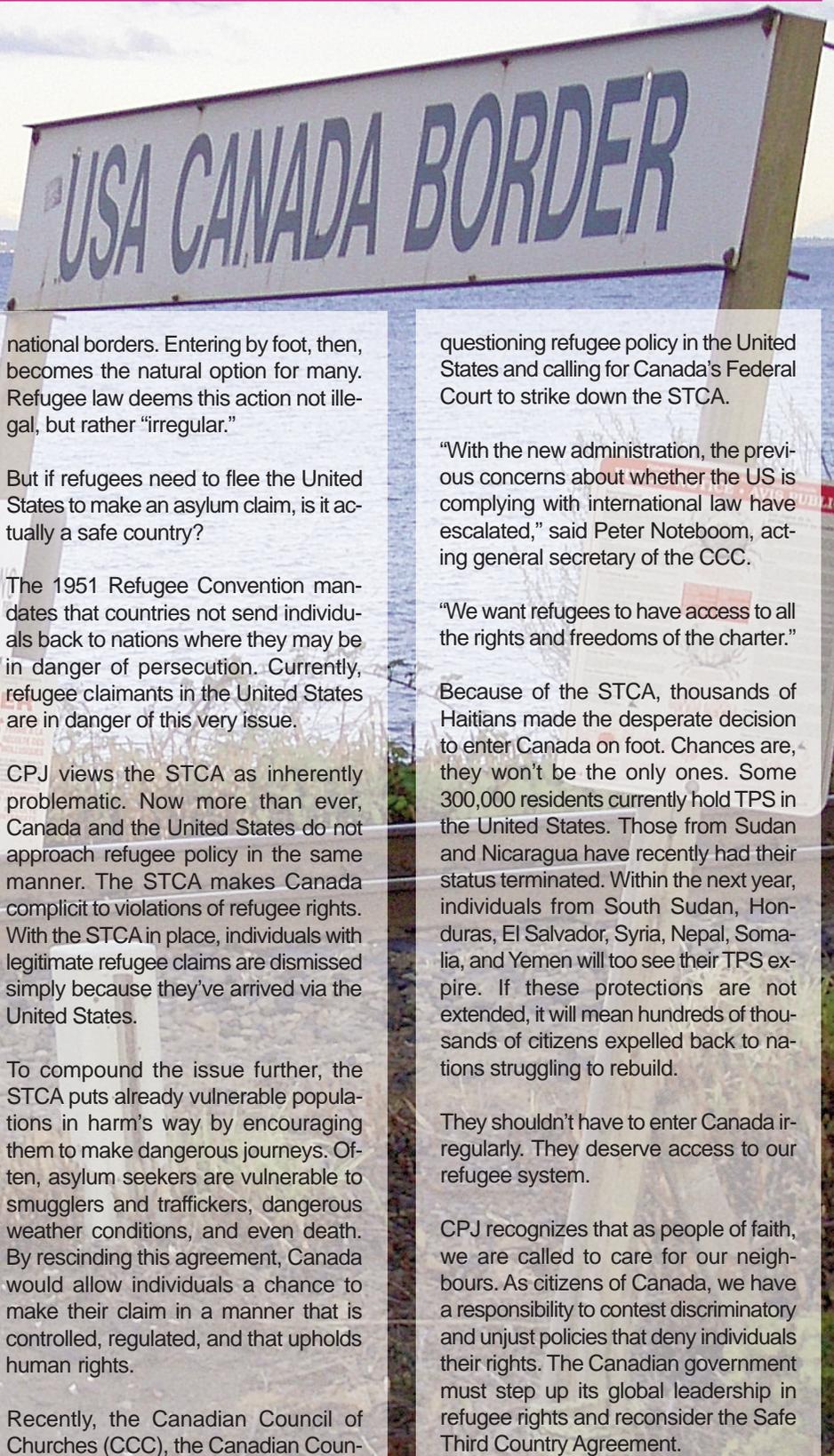
"We want refugees to have access to all the rights and freedoms of the charter."

Because of the STCA, thousands of Haitians made the desperate decision to enter Canada on foot. Chances are, they won't be the only ones. Some 300,000 residents currently hold TPS in the United States. Those from Sudan and Nicaragua have recently had their status terminated. Within the next year, individuals from South Sudan, Honduras, El Salvador, Syria, Nepal, Somalia, and Yemen will too see their TPS expire. If these protections are not extended, it will mean hundreds of thousands of citizens expelled back to nations struggling to rebuild.

They shouldn't have to enter Canada irregularly. They deserve access to our refugee system.

CPJ recognizes that as people of faith, we are called to care for our neighbours. As citizens of Canada, we have a responsibility to contest discriminatory and unjust policies that deny individuals their rights. The Canadian government must step up its global leadership in refugee rights and reconsider the Safe Third Country Agreement.

Deb Mebude is a public justice intern at CPJ.



In Review

On the Hill

CPJ staff attended the **National Poverty Conference** organized by Minister of Families, Children and Social Development **Jean-Yves Duclos**. It was an opportunity to share updates on the recent consultations for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.



Natalie Appleyard, our new policy analyst, and **Sarah DeIVillano**, one of our public justice interns, met with NDP MP **Cheryl Hardcastle** to discuss our Dignity for All campaign following her reference to CPJ's *Poverty Trends 2017* report in the House of Commons. During our *Chew on This!* event, Dignity for All was joined by Liberal MP **Julie Dabrusin**, NDP MP **Brigitte Sansoucy**, and Green Party Leader **Elizabeth May** (above).

Karri Munn-Venn, CPJ's senior policy analyst, was joined by our social work intern **Josephine Adeosun** to meet with Conservative MPs **Ed Fast** and **Michael Chong** (below) as well as NDP MP **Fin Donnelly** for conversations about next year's *Give it up for the Earth!* campaign and how Canada can best address climate change.



In the Community

In October, CPJ's executive director, **Joe Gunn**, spoke on a panel during **Citizens' Climate Lobby Canada's** 2017 National Conference and Lobby Days in **Ottawa**. Joe also gave a talk entitled "Suddenly Doing the Impossible: Social Justice Challenges Facing Canadian Churches Today" at St. Joseph's Parish in **Hamilton**.

CPJ's **Karri Munn-Venn** led a workshop entitled, "Climate Justice in Action" as part of an exciting day of learning and networking at the **Anglican Diocese of Toronto**.

Joe Gunn and **Deb Mebude**, one of CPJ's public justice interns, made a presentation to the **Sacred Heart Fathers** in **Kingston**, who have adopted a specific focus on refugee rights work in their communities across Canada and in the United States.

Natalie Appleyard presented at a symposium hosted by the Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador in **St. John's**. Her keynote address focused on poverty in Canada, the forthcoming Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, and suggestions for moving ahead.

Welcome to Our New Staff Members!



CPJ is very excited to have four new staff members join our team this fall. **Natalie Appleyard** is our new socio-economic policy analyst. She will lead our work on poverty in Canada, especially around the Dignity for All campaign.

For the second time, CPJ has two public justice interns who will be with us for a full year. **Sarah DeIVillano** has been working on poverty in Canada and the Dignity for All campaign, while **Deb Mebude** focuses on refugee rights. Meanwhile **Josephine Adeosun**, a social work intern from Carleton University, is assisting CPJ in our ecological justice work.



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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*:
\$50 / \$25 (low-income)

Winter 2017 (Volume 40, Number 3)
ISSN 0824-2062
Agreement no. 40022119
Editor: Brad Wassink
Cover Photo: Vmenkov

the Catalyst, a publication of Citizens for Public Justice, reports on public justice issues in Canada and reviews CPJ activities.

***the Catalyst* subscription:**
\$20 (three issues)

the Catalyst is also available electronically. If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy of *the Catalyst*, simply contact us at cpj@cpj.ca.

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CPJ at the UN Climate Conference

By Karri Munn-Venn

Welcome! Bula! Willkommen!

These were the words of greeting at the site of the UN Climate Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany. Under the leadership of the government of Fiji, COP23 focused on the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Over 20,000 people, representing nearly 200 countries from around the world, attended COP23. With the exception of the most austere negotiating rooms, COP23 was a colourful display of diverse culture and common purpose.

I was there for CPJ, to learn, to meet others in the climate justice community, and to bring a voice of Canadian Christians into the conversation. And I wanted to see firsthand how the Canadian government would frame their priorities in this international context.

When I spoke with Catherine McKenna, Canada's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, she highlighted two key priorities for Canada: the *Indigenous Peoples' Platform* and the *Gender Action Plan*.

"Indigenous peoples need to be part of the conversation," she said. "They need to have the ability to share their experiences. We're working very closely with our national indigenous organizations and Indigenous elders to get this." She also highlighted the disproportionate impact climate change has on women, saying that it's important that "we think about women when we make decisions around climate change, and that they ... be more engaged in the [climate] negotiations."

The adoption, then, of both a strong *Gender Action Plan* and the *Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform* was celebrated by many. Catherine Abreu is the executive director of Climate Action Network (CAN) Canada, a coalition of over 100 environmental, labour, and faith-based organizations working to address climate change. She referred to Canada's contribution to these discussions as "glimmers of real leadership."

Edmonton NDP MP Linda Duncan was in Bonn with a clear eye on the impact of federal climate action on workers, especially in light of the November 10 announcement that the province of Alberta would provide \$40 million to help workers affected by the coal phase-out. Following a *just transition* event that featured Canadian, Quebec, and Alberta trade unionists, Duncan told me that she felt that this was one of the most important conversations at COP23.

CPJ has long advocated for a just transition to a low-carbon economy. A just transition would ensure that workers and their families receive support as they retrain and move to jobs outside the traditional energy sector.

That's why we were pleased to see Minister McKenna also announce that the government of Canada will create a Just Transition Task Force and implement a series of measures to support workers moving out of the fossil fuel industry, starting with coal workers in Alberta.



Still, all this good news is not enough. French President Emmanuel Macron reminded government leaders – and all of us present – in Bonn that the world must course correct within the next five years to have any chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels.

Canada's emissions reductions targets are still too timid.

And developed countries are not providing enough financing to support mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage in the most vulnerable regions of the world.

When I asked Green Party Leader Elizabeth May for her assessment of COP23, she said that we're more or less on track to get a 'rulebook' in place by COP24. "The problem is," she said, "we haven't done nearly enough two years after Paris to actually be reducing emissions to meet the Paris goals."

Because CPJ is a member of CAN-Canada, I was also curious to hear from Catherine Abreu on where we go from here. "We're one of the 10 wealthiest nations in the world," she said, "and it is incumbent upon us to follow-through [on our financial commitments]. And of course, ... we need to make sure that we're walking our talk at home."

Canada needs to stop increasing GHG emissions — immediately. Then, to align with the Paris Agreement, we should move our emissions reduction target from 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 to at least 50 percent.

The world can't wait.

Karri Munn-Venn is CPJ's senior policy analyst. From November 13-17, 2017 she attended the UN Climate Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany as an observer under the accreditation of the United Church of Canada. The videos of Karri's conversations with Minister McKenna, Elizabeth May, and Catherine Abreu are available on CPJ's Facebook page facebook.com/citizensforpublicjustice.



Tax Reform Can Serve the Common Good

By Sarah DeVillano

In July 2017, Bill Morneau announced the Liberal government's proposed tax reform, which seeks to close tax loopholes and ensure a more progressive tax system in which all Canadians pay their fair share.

One of the main loopholes targeted is known as "income sprinkling" by which income from a private business or corporation is distributed among family members, resulting in a lower tax burden. The proposed reform would prevent businesses from distributing income to family members who have no real involvement in the business. It does allow the practice to continue for those who share ownership or significant

engagement. The government claims these proposals will result in "additional revenue of some \$250 million per year once fully implemented." This reclaimed revenue could mean significant investments in the common good such as strengthening the forthcoming Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, better honouring our environmental commitments, or supporting refugees coming to Canada.

Here at CPJ, we have consistently advocated for a fair taxation system that advances the common good in our society. And we are not alone. As outlined in *Taxes for the Common Good: A Public Justice Primer on Taxation*, 75 per cent of Canadians believe taxes are good because they pay for important social investments that can contribute to an improved quality of life. But not everyone is happy with these proposals, and they have created quite a stir among the Canadian public.

"Taxes are not simply about money or fees collected by governments. Taxes are equally about public programs and services, reducing poverty and the harmful effects of inequality, and protecting the environment. Taxes are about building the kind of Canada we want."

**—Taxes for the Common Good:
A Public Justice Primer on Taxation**

As in any policy debate, it is important that dissenting voices are not silenced, but are given the opportunity to have their concerns heard. And the government did invite submissions from the Canadian public, with doctors and small business owners among

those most vocally opposed to the proposed reforms. To their credit, the federal government did make some changes in order to offer greater protection to small business owners across the country.



Aside from the policy itself, however, controversies regarding the ethical integrity of Finance Minister Bill Morneau have dominated government debates, undermining the credibility of the proposed reforms. If there is one thing that this experience has shown, it is that fairness and transparency are critical when dealing with tax reform rollouts in this country. The current government failed in that regard, and many Canadians are disappointed with their

delivery of these important policy changes – and rightly so.

Nonetheless, the federal government (and we as citizens) should remain committed to a progressive taxation system. Morneau has assured Canadians that "the most impact will be felt by those business owners who are making \$150,000 a year or more, or those who have money to tuck away after contributing the annual maximum to RRSPs and TFSAs." This is important because a fair tax plan includes individuals who use private corporations in their tax strategy. Income earners in lower tax brackets should not bear the financial burden of income sprinkling or any other tax loopholes that are only accessible to the wealthy few. But it is critical that we not allow tax reforms to divide us as a nation. In fact, increasing income equality has demonstrable benefits to social cohesion.

Taxes are not a punishment. However, many critics of taxation frame it as such. Or as a violation of individual rights by the government. But we shouldn't fall prey to a false sense of antagonism between the government and its tax-paying citizens. It is important that we not lose sight of the fact that a fair taxation system can contribute significantly to the common good, and by extension, to public justice.



Sarah DeVillano is a public justice intern at Citizens for Public Justice.

Give it up for the Earth: Lent in a Catholic High School

By Leah Daly

Sometimes my adult faith journey gets stuck in a rut of routine and apathy. During these times, I find myself simply going through the motions of faith, work, and home life. Intentionality and genuine engagement slip away when apathy seeps in.

The antidote for apathy and disengagement, for me, comes through my work with high school students. Teenagers are waking up to the world in a way that is engaging and life-giving. Their emerging insight into their place in this world and their passions for diverse issues can be a real wake-up call. It reminds me to begin again as a novice to ecological and social justice movements. Each new semester and each new group of young adults in my faith-based educational community invites me again and deeper into the call to care for the common good and our common home. Working with high school students has given me renewed passion for ecological and social justice.

As Chaplaincy Leader at Immaculata High School last year, I engaged with my students and staff in the *Give it up for the Earth!* campaign last Lent.

The focus on ecological justice from a faith perspective was an ideal way to engage youth in the disciplines of the Lenten season. They were able to grow into a more thoughtful and mature approach to fasting during the Lenten season of repentance and renewal. They were also able to deepen their awareness of and commitment to ecological justice by transforming their Lenten fasting into a compassionate response to the consequences of climate change on the earth and on vulnerable populations.

We kicked off the campaign on Ash Wednesday by making it part of our classroom prayer service. Students and staff were challenged to “give it up for the earth,” to give something up for Lent that put their care for God’s Creation into concrete action. The challenge in presenting the campaign to youth is that they don’t have as much control over their lifestyle choices as adults. We needed to empower them to find the ways that they can make positive environmental choices. We took inspiration from Pope Francis when he said, “everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation.”

Students can choose how they spend their fast food dollars and how they dispose of their garbage while in public. They do have some control over how they get around town, and they can offer to help out at home with groceries and meal preparation. Here are the suggestions we offered on Ash Wednesday:

Give up...

- disposable cups, straws, bottles, cans, shopping bags
- meat one day a week
- long hot showers

Take up...

- walking or cycling
- repairing rather than replacing
- recycling or composting
- eating local fruits and veggies

For each week of Lent, we presented both an easy and a difficult challenge. These challenges got everyone thinking about their lunches, coffees, shopping, and travel habits. One weekly challenge was to commit to a “buy nothing” day. Student were encouraged to get their entire household on board. The challenge also included signing the postcard to our MP and Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna. Her constituency office is just across the canal from Immaculata. It felt like an easy connection to make to let her know what kinds of commitments we were making as individuals and what we were asking her to do as an elected leader and cabinet member.

The campaign truly allowed us, as a school faith community, to engage in the spiritual discipline of fasting in a meaningful and life-giving way. The *Give it up for the Earth!* initiative provided more than an opportunity for putting political pressure on the government. It helped me to shape our journey through Lent. Our prayer,

fasting, and giving was all connected to our care for God’s Creation.



(From left) CPJ staff Asha Kerr-Wilson and Karri Munn-Venn, Leah Daly, Immaculata student Chelsea Donoghue, and CPJ board member Geneviève Gallant drop off postcards at Minister McKenna’s office.

CPJ has launched *Give it up for the Earth!* for 2018. Think about ways that your community can use this campaign. Learn more at cpj.ca/for-the-earth.

Leah Daly has been engaging young people in faith-based social justice education and activism as a Chaplaincy Leader with the Ottawa Catholic School Board since 2002 and is currently working at St. Mother Teresa High School.



Faith Groups Join Chew On This!

By Brad Wassink



Fernanda de Castro from St. Paul University participates in *Chew on This!*

We are on the cusp of seeing Canada's first national poverty reduction strategy. And faith communities have played a major role in getting us here.

It's been a long time coming. In 1989, Canada's House of Commons unanimously voted to end child poverty by the year 2000. With 17.4 per cent of children in Canada living in poverty, clearly we failed to meet this commitment.

So, in 2009 CPJ and Canada Without Poverty (CWP) launched the Dignity for All campaign to mobilize people across the country and create the political will to make this happen. One way that we've done this is through *Chew On This!*, the nation-wide outreach campaign that we organize each year around October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

With CPJ as a co-leader, Canadian Christians have had a central role in this campaign. And the fifth anniversary of *Chew On This!* was our largest event yet.

Both the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada issued statements to mark the day and reiterate their calls for a national anti-poverty plan.

CPJ was joined by Bishop John Chapman of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. At a press conference on Parliament Hill, he spoke directly to the vision of the Dignity for All campaign. "This is not just the work of charity," he said. "We are discussing human dignity, the beauty and wonder of every human being, the unique gift a person brings to our civil society."

Across Canada, many other faith communities echoed this call. A dozen United churches held *Chew On This!* events. In Calgary, students at Ambrose University signed postcards as part of their chapel service. Christian high schools in Edmonton and Smithville, Ont. also took part. Meanwhile, Catholic religious

congregations and parishes from New Brunswick to British Columbia took to the streets to encourage passersby to join. And in Ottawa, students from St. Paul University joined CPJ and CWP on Parliament Hill.

This type of work isn't new. Canadian churches have a long history of calling for federal action on poverty. As Lutheran Bishop Susan Johnson said, the call to address issues of poverty in Canada is "central to what it means to be a church."

This is core to why so many have taken action. But they are also speaking out because it matters. It matters because there are still 4.8 million people living in poverty in Canada. According to CPJ's latest report, *Poverty Trends 2017*, single working-age adults, people with disabilities, and newcomers to Canada still experience high poverty rates.

And now we are so close to seriously doing something about it.

Before the next federal election in two years, we expect to see the first Canadian poverty reduction strategy. This has the potential to be a huge win for the 4.8 million people living in poverty and the network of advocates who have championed the effort for so long.

But just having a plan isn't a win. It really matters what that plan looks like.

From the very beginning of the Dignity for All campaign, we've been clear about our expectations. We've called for a plan that is legislated so that it can't be simply rolled back by a new government. And it needs adequate funding to make a significant difference in the lives of people currently living in poverty. At the policy summits we've held over the years, faith groups have joined us to iron out the details that we presented in our model *National Anti-Poverty Plan* in 2015. Since then, we've been calling for a comprehensive plan that addresses income security, housing, health care, food security, employment, and early childhood education and care.

Faith communities have been there every step of the way. And if we expect to see this project cross the finish line, we will need to stay engaged, doing the important work of mobilizing Canadian Christians to make their voices heard.

Poverty Trends 2017, CPJ's annual report on poverty in Canada, was released one week ahead of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. It reports on poverty rates across Canada in provinces, territories, and municipalities. It also identifies several key demographics of people in Canada that have particularly high poverty rates. Learn more at cpj.ca/poverty-trends-2017.



Brad Wassink is the communications coordinator at CPJ and editor of *the Catalyst*.

The Poverty of Loneliness

By Courtney Reeve and Becca Sawyer

Justice looks like a refugee mother serving Ethiopian food to a gathering of volunteers who welcomed her to the city.

Justice looks like a teenager being free to express themselves through art, dance, and music because someone believed in the creative beauty of their imagination.

Justice looks like family-style meals where everyone breaks bread together and overturns systems of paternalistic charity.

Where is the Spirit of God working for justice in the city of Toronto? This was the incredibly complex and multifaceted question that we addressed during the summer of 2017 through the Living Justice Project. The question was daunting, intriguing, and humbling to say the least.

A ministry of justice proclaims freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed and ultimately the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19). When we pursue justice, we are responding to what God is already doing in our city. So rather than engaging in identifying the justice needs all around us, we entered into a process of observation, listening, prayer, and storytelling to help us see where the Spirit is already at work.

We arranged to sit down with 29 different people including front-line workers, veterans in the field, activists, priests and pastors, founders and directors of nonprofits, authors, social workers, and volunteers. At the heart of these conversations we met a recurring theme: injustice is always at a place of deep disconnection between people. At the heart of all injustice and poverty is a poverty of relationships. And, where we saw a living and embodied justice in people's lives, we saw a flourishing of human connection and the renewal of relationships amongst neighbours.

From a movement that inspires abundant living through deep relational engagement to an organization connecting homeless men to new home communities; from support groups for the social reintegration of past offenders to family-style drop-in centres; from a neighbourhood oriented church community to a network of interfaith leaders for action, we saw a city ripened for rich relationships that restore the oppressed and broken-hearted to renewed life.



Courtney Reeve is currently completing her Masters of Theological Studies in Urban and International Development at Wycliffe College while also working as Kensington Community Chaplain at FreeChurch in downtown Toronto.



Our neighbours who are poor, Indigenous, or mentally ill, those who experience racial discrimination, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalized people are fighting to be seen, heard, and known. And the Spirit is busy calling us to lives of friendship and community building with these neighbours. We cannot ignore this epidemic of loneliness.

We were given a very important reality check by Mary Jo Leddy, founder of a transition home for refugee claimants called Romero House. "You shouldn't be involved in justice," she warned us, "if you don't have a friend who's poor." If we are going to be people of justice, where are our friends who are poor and disenfranchised?

In the face of this epidemic of loneliness, we must abandon relationships of paternalistic charity or self-righteous morality and embrace a friendship of justice that accompanies our friends in their suffering. Mary Jo and Romero House director Jenn McIntyre suggested this kind of just friendship with the poor is only made possible by suffering alongside them. Jenn brought it all home for us when she pressed upon us the necessity to hear a personal call from God.

We cannot wait for those more skilled to complete the work of justice; each of us carries the responsibility to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our whole lives. We need to hear from God that our lives are bound up with justice. If we heed these words, would we not be subverting Toronto's greatest poverty - the poverty of relationship in a climate of loneliness?

This is just one of the life-changing conversations we were fortunate to have. We had the privilege of seeing firsthand the fruit of those who have been working for social justice in Toronto. In this city we have seen profound feats of compassion as well as justice for the oppressed. Yet there is new work to be done that has been left for our millennial generation. It is to this generation we dedicate this project, trusting you will take our assessment to heart so that loneliness will no longer oppress our city.

The Living Justice Project was supervised by the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry to the University of Toronto, and funded by CPJ, the Community Counts Foundation, and Resonate of the CRC. To read the full report, please visit crc.sa.utoronto.ca.



Becca Sawyer has her Masters of Theological Studies in Urban and International Development from Wycliffe College and is currently working with The Saben Group.

We Need Refugees

By Danielle Steenwyk-Rowaan

Photo: Flickr / United Nations

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

— Hebrews 13:2

One of my biggest spiritual hang-ups is my self-sufficiency.

I get caught up in the idea that if I just work a little harder, learn a little more, or give a little more, I can solve any problem I or those I care about might have. Hollywood likes to share these stories of individuals overcoming all odds, and sometimes in my advocacy and education for social justice, I fall into the same mental and spiritual pattern. Like the Pharisee flaunting his goodness to God in Luke 18, I can get caught up in checking all the boxes. It's a self-defeating pattern—I can only give 110% for so long, and feeling self-sufficient keeps me from calling out to God. Self-sufficiency is a lonely place.

Into this self-sufficiency come my refugee-d friends.

My friend Carlos, a refugee claimant, was sent hundreds of dollars' worth of bills for a hospital stay, back in the days when refugee claimants' health coverage had been severely restricted. With friends, we came out to the rallies organized by healthcare professionals for the reinstatement of fuller coverage for claimants. We wrote blog posts. We connected him to specialists. We prayed. We lent support to a fundraiser to cover their medical bills. And then we waited. And waited. And waited.

In the end, the government discovered that they had sent Carlos' medical coverage documents to the wrong mailing address. He had coverage all along. All of Carlos' stress had been caused by a mere clerical error of the bureaucracy. This was a great ending because he didn't have to worry at all about future medical stays. The things we did with Carlos were worth doing. All things I would do again. But in this case, they didn't fix anything for Carlos and his family.

Or there's my friend Sayid, a refugee claimant who has been in Canada for more than a year and still doesn't have a date for his hearing. He's not alone—the average wait time for inland refugee claimants to even see a member of the Immigration and Refugee Board is officially 16 months. Many refugee advocates say that

the real wait times are often much longer. Again, we are waiting.

As I walk with Carlos and Sayid, my self-sufficiency doesn't cut it anymore. I learn that I can't always fix things. I have privilege to leverage for their good, yes. But nothing has brought me to my knees more than recognizing the way I am caught up in a web of social relationships, both just and unjust, and that my complicity in those that are unjust cannot be discharged with one letter, one article, one program, one rally. Walking with my refugee-d friends teaches me, over and over again, that we depend together on that other Visitor who “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” (John 1:14, The Message)

This is a deeply biblical theme: the stranger holds a blessing. Matthew 25 even suggests that Christ himself can be hidden in those who are “strangers.”

I would never wish these difficulties on Carlos and Sayid. That's not what I'm suggesting here. And yet, in the guise of those considered “strangers,” Christ has taught me a lesson about depending on him. Christ is freeing me from the prison of privileged self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, through my refugee-d friends.

We are called to welcome the stranger, because we need them.

I need them, in a deep and sometimes mysterious way. This subversive biblical teaching, along with the call to welcome because we have been welcomed, breaks down the charity mindset and the delusion of self-sufficiency.

I can help my refugee-d friends in some good ways, yes. The rallies, letters, advocacy, visits, and the like are mustard seeds of faith entrusted to a faithful God.

But I'm not going to save anyone. Jesus is redeeming the whole world, not me. There is the freedom of grace and dependence beyond this prison of self-sufficiency! That's good news.

Danielle Steenwyk-Rowaan is the Justice Communications Team Coordinator for the Christian Reformed Church, working for the Centre for Public Dialogue, Office of Social Justice, Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee, and the Office of Race Relations. This reflection was sparked by this sermon preached by Mary Jo Leddy.

