

the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Winter 2015

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What Election 2015 Means for Public Justice

By Joe Gunn

“Democracy is more than a quick trip to the polls. After elections, citizens cannot take a vacation. It’s important to engage in political activities year-round.”

— *CPJ’s 2015 Election Bulletin*

The 2015 federal election campaign is now behind us. But what will the new Liberal majority government roll out as its first priorities?

In this election, CPJ focused on democratic reform, poverty in Canada, climate justice, and refugee rights. On all four issues, our members hope to see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau take quick action to fulfill his party’s commitments. But we will also push his new government to fill in the gaps in its platform.

Once again, the triumphant majority party won 100 per cent of federal power, but earned less than 40 per cent of the popular vote. On the question of improvements to the democratic system, CPJ has long favoured moving to a preferential system or a form of proportional representation. Will the 2015 election be, as Mr. Trudeau promised, the last time Canada uses the first-past-the-post system?

CPJ expects our new government to immediately follow through on other campaign promises. Already it has reestablished a functioning long-form census. But

it must also emphasize evidence-based decision-making and end the use of omnibus bills to pass legislation. The Liberals also committed to respect women who wear traditional clothing as part of their culture or religion. To stop what they called the “political harassment” of charities, they will need to clarify the rules on defining “political” activities and introduce a new charities law.

Concerning poverty, the Liberals should quickly put in place the Canada Child Benefit, which would lift thousands of kids from poverty. Unfortunately, the Liberals did not commit to develop a national plan to address poverty’s many other aspects. (Such a promise had been a feature of their 2011 campaign.) Instead, the 2015 campaign focused much more on the middle class. Still, CPJ expects action from this government on intolerable rates of poverty among children, Indigenous peoples, single parents, and newcomers.

On climate change, Prime Minister Trudeau emerged from the campaign without announcing an ambitious and

specific target for greenhouse gas emissions reductions for the Paris climate summit. The Liberal platform promised to slowly decrease subsidies to fossil fuel companies. But this only partially fulfills Canada’s 2009 G20 commitment to end them completely. The platform also promised a renewable energy strategy for Canada by 2017. But Mr. Trudeau did not announce a national price on carbon emissions, which CPJ has called for. Instead, he pledged to give provinces “flexibility” to design their own carbon pricing policies. The environment needs quick and sustained action on climate change. Action that responds to overdue ecological, rather than political, timetables.

On refugees, the Liberals promised to bring in 25,000 Syrians before year end. This requires quick governmental action and concrete support for faith communities and settlement agencies that will assist these newcomers. A recent federal court found the 2012 cancellation of the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) to be “cruel and unusual.” The new government has already announced that it will not contest this ruling. Next, it must fulfill its commitment to “fully restore” the IFHP. It should also, as promised, increase funding by \$100 million to countries which bear the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Canadian voters clearly wanted change. And they massively concluded that Mr. Trudeau is ready to deliver that desired change.

But public justice demands that a Liberal government is also ready - and willing - to act. CPJ will be encouraging our new leaders by keeping a close eye on these four key issues and providing opportunities for our members to hold this new government to its promises.

CPJ uses **JusticeE-News**, our e-newsletter, to invite supporters to join our campaigns. Make sure you are subscribed at cpj.ca/JEN.

Joe Gunn serves as Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice.

In Review



CPJ on the Road

The *Dignity for All Campaign* concluded its series of workshops on our *National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*. In September, **Michèle Biss** (of Canada Without Poverty) and **Darlene O'Leary** were in **Calgary** (pictured above), **Edmonton**, **Vancouver**, **Victoria**, and **Whitehorse**. For an update on the campaign, read Michèle's article on page 4.

Darlene O'Leary also conducted a workshop with the Anglican Diocese of **Toronto**. The workshop focused on a Christian response to poverty and highlighted the work of *Dignity for All*.



For 20 years, the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul have held anti-poverty vigils at the **Kingston City Hall** every Friday. **Joe Gunn** delivered the keynote address at their final vigil on September 17, reflecting on the changes we've seen in social policy over the past two decades.

2015 Election Bulletin

CPJ's 2015 Election Bulletin, *Exercising Faithful Citizenship* proved to be a highly useful and effective resource during the 2015 federal election campaign. CPJ printed and distributed over 7,000 copies—nearly five times the usual demand. It was also available for free online and was used in churches and at all-candidates' meetings across the country.

The Invisible Victims

CPJ's latest report on refugees, *The Invisible Victims*, was prepared by Kathryn Teeluck, CPJ's Public Justice Intern. It examines the effects that a minimum residency requirement for social assistance would have on refugee claimants in Canada. This policy was changed with provisions in the federal government's 2014 omnibus budget bill, C-43. CPJ's report provides economic, humanitarian, and legal reasons for providing claimants with social assistance. You can find the report at cpj.ca/invisible-victims.

On the Margins

In October, CPJ released our annual report on poverty in Canada. *On the Margins: A Glimpse of Poverty in Canada* provides a breakdown of poverty rates in Canadian provinces and territories as well as major cities and small communities. It also reported on the high rates of poverty among children, single-parent families, Indigenous peoples, and recent immigrants. Read the whole report at cpj.ca/on-the-margins.



Welcome Darlene and Miriam

CPJ is excited to welcome **Darlene O'Leary** and **Miriam Mahaffy** to our staff! Darlene is our new Socio-Economic Policy Analyst and will be leading our research, education, and writing on poverty in Canada.

Miriam, our new Public Justice Intern for 2015-2016, is a recent graduate of The King's University in Edmonton. She will be assisting CPJ's policy team in our climate 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.

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Letters to the Editor



The Trouble With Partisanship

Kathryn Teeluck provides us with a concise and clear review of *Fighting Over God* by Janet Epp Buckingham (Summer 2015). Epp Buckingham's points seem cogent and significant.

I'm reading a biography of Richard John Neuhaus from the United States, a liberal Lutheran pastor who later became a conservative Catholic priest. For decades he argued for religion in the public sphere.

He also argued that advocacy and action are so often misused and abused double-edged swords because Christianity in the West often has become the slave of partisanship on just about any side, depending when one observes and studies the phenomenon. Unfortunately, Neuhaus was later one of the most effective conservative Christian advocates for the Republican Party.

Now I will have to get Epp Buckingham's book to see how *she* advocates religion fitting in the public square.

Jim Dekker

St. Catherines, Ont.

I could not agree more with the title of the article, "Time for Churches to Speak as One" (Summer 2015). However, what perturbs me to no end is that the author is identified with a political party rather than with a faith community.

I firmly believe that the vulnerability of

the faith communities of which the author justifiably speaks (especially their decline in numbers) has everything to do with too many people identifying the Christian message with the platforms of political parties.

Unless the various faith communities distinguish noticeably and radically between their message and the voices of the various political parties, be it here in Canada, the United States, or elsewhere, churches, sad to say, will find it nearly impossible to speak with one voice and the decline in membership will continue.

Furthermore, radicalization, anti-semitism, and all the structural evils dealt with by Cynthia Moe-Lobeda in her excellent book *Resisting Structural Evil* (reviewed by Joe Gunn in the same issue of *the Catalyst*) will only increase.

Simon Wolfert

Surrey, B.C.



Churches Need to Do More

I appreciated the article about the refugee sponsorship system, "Churches Well-placed to Advocate for Refugees" (Summer 2015). The federal government is not doing as much as it used to do for refugees. I know that churches have done much. Given the gap with the government, churches need to join together and do more.

Sister Theresa Nagle

Hamilton, Ont.

2015 Election Bulletin

A million thank yous for guiding us so competently and confidentially with your 2015 Election Bulletin!

Keep on doing what you're doing.

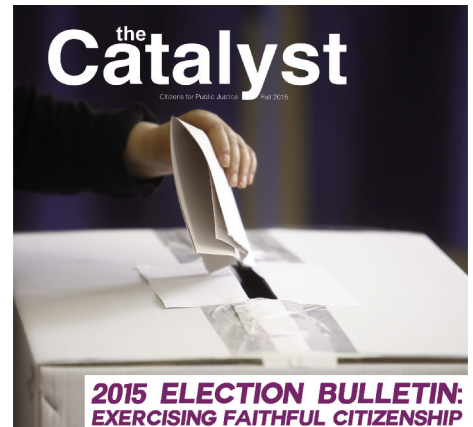
Sister Maura McGrath

Montreal, Que.

Congratulations on your special edition of the 2015 Election Bulletin. You are rendering many people a great service and helping to promote a more authentic democracy.

Remi J. De Roo

Nanaimo, B.C.



Thank you so much for producing the Election Bulletin version of *the Catalyst*. In September, I took a package of 50 copies of the Election Bulletin. I made an announcement at my church, Fellowship Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Edmonton, about this excellent resource and distributed 35 copies. On the eve of the election, I also participated as a panelist in an election forum at West End CRC and distributed the remaining copies.

The thoughtful analysis and commentary contained within the Election Bulletin on a variety of important national topics was very beneficial to me and I'm certain to many others who perused the issue. At the election forum, I also urged attendees to visit CPJ's website to access more of CPJ's superlative work. As taxation had been a frequent talking point among politicians during the campaign, I also referred the audience to Karri Munn-Venn's excellent series on the topic published this past spring at *Loonie Politics*.

Mark Huyser-Wierenga

Edmonton, Alta.

We want to hear from you!

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

Shouting It From the Rooftops: “WE NEED A PLAN TO END POVERTY IN CANADA”

By Michèle Biss

Action on poverty is long overdue. It's time for our federal government to step up and put in place a comprehensive, rights-based approach to poverty.

Over the past year, the *Dignity for All Campaign* has been shouting this message from the rooftops. We've been spreading the word wherever and whenever we can – at events, through media and social media, and directly in the ears of our federal candidates.

An important part of our message is that while we need a plan for the 4.9 million people living in poverty in Canada, we already have a tool to get us there. In February 2015, *Dignity for All* released our model *National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*.

As a national campaign we've been exploring some different ways to get the message out to communities across Canada. From early spring through to autumn, we hit the road to bring the plan to cities and towns from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

We conducted 15 workshops across Canada in five provinces and one territory – Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon. The workshops explore the realities of poverty, the lack of support by the government, and practical action for participants. This message strikes a chord with people concerned about poverty in our country.

Through these workshops, partners and members of Citizens for Public Justice and Canada Without Poverty are becoming actively involved in the call for a national anti-poverty plan. All the sessions were hosted in collaboration with a local partner or member. For example, in Sarnia, Ont., Thea DeGroot, a member of CPJ's Board of Directors, hosted an extremely successful session. Local media, the city mayor, and the new Member of Parliament all attended.

The response from the workshop participants in each of the sessions was inspiring. Policy makers, people with lived experiences of poverty, church advocacy groups, and engaged citizens had honest conversations about poverty.

In our travels, we also saw brief glimpses of poverty in communities across the country. We walked through the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver and saw the stark reality for street-involved people, particularly those struggling with addiction. We spoke in a community centre in Halifax where many attendees would consider themselves working poor. We toured around the city of Whitehorse and heard about the lack of services for people in poverty. These humbling experiences have only strength-



Citizens for Public Justice and Canada Without Poverty are joined by volunteers and federal candidates for *Chew on This!* on Parliament Hill.

ened our resolve that we need immediate action on poverty that understands the diversity of each community in Canada.

After visiting these communities, we asked our friends and colleagues across Canada to help us spread the message through our third annual *Chew On This!* campaign. This year our partners handed out over 20,000 paper bags. Each one had an apple and a postcard with information on food insecurity.

The campaign was an incredible success! It facilitated conversations about poverty in Canada in over 50 communities across the country. Then on Saturday, October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, our message was trending all over social media and reached more than 300,000 people across the country.

This recent federal election was the ideal time for people in Canada to consider the future of our nation. Now that it is behind us, it is even more important to get the message out that we need a plan to end poverty.

The response we've heard is clear – people in Canada want to see action on poverty. With this new federal government, we're ready to jump in. By next year we want to see the federal government taking real steps to end poverty.

Together, we can do this!



Michèle Biss is the Legal Education and Outreach Coordinator at Canada Without Poverty.

Inter-faith Statement Links Poverty and Climate Justice

By Randolph Haluza-DeLay, PhD



One wouldn't think helping the poor would be controversial. After all, that's what Jesus called us to do. Christians have mostly tried to help the poor with charitable works, but at times have focused on justice. It's the difference between feeding the poor and asking why they have no food.

Demanding action on both climate change and poverty, the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) has released *On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada: Faith Communities in Canada Speak Out*. Citizens for Public Justice helped to draft this inter-faith statement, which also adds a call for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The statement calls churches to stand up on several of Canada's most pressing issues. Climate change is a global threat. We've not made much progress and the consequences could be severe. Ending extreme poverty is one of the new Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. We have made progress globally, but inequality is steeply rising in Canada. The end of the statement acknowledged the poor conditions for Indigenous peoples in Canada. It strongly supported implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – but much more needs to be done.

So what do these three issues have in common?

Climate justice is linked to poverty for two main reasons. First, the effects of the changing climate vary by locale but are already being felt and will worsen. Adapting to the consequences will require money, new energy technologies, climate-resistant food production, strong and resilient civil organizations, and other resources that are not abundant in poorer communities.

Second, richer, not poorer, countries are largely the cause of the changing global climate. Canadian data show that per capita carbon emissions increase by income level. The richest emit much more because of factors like bigger houses and more travel. Meanwhile, as the CCC statement declares, the poor and marginalized are already facing the worst consequences of global environmental degradation.

And who is more marginalized in Canada (and much of the world) than Indigenous peoples? Many Indigenous people are poorer than most Canadians. What's more, colonization has damaged cultures that explicitly frame human beings in ecological relationships.

And so the CCC is right: Jesus' call to take care of the poor does mean addressing climate justice. It means facing overly consumptive lifestyles and ecologically-expensive population levels. It

means dramatically scaling back fossil fuel use, which Europe has shown can be done. It means rethinking our cultural frameworks to be more faithful in discipleship to Jesus. Our reconciliation with Indigenous cultures should involve learning from them. This can help us to conceive of ourselves as part of the community of all creation.

On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada grew out what Canadian church leaders heard during the 2015 Justice Tour. CPJ co-organized this tour with the CCC in eight Canadian cities this past spring. There are more than 65 signatories on the statement. They run the gamut of Christian denominations, albeit with the near-absence of evangelical Christians. The statement is also signed by representatives of Buddhist and Sikh organizations. This demonstrates a growing inter-faith movement on these issues.

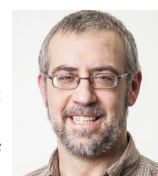
Notably, the head of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops also signed the statement. This is a change from the *Canadian Inter-faith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change* in 2011. At that time, leaders of many churches and diverse faiths signed, including some Catholic representatives, but conspicuously not the bishops' conference.

There are other signs of momentum on these issues. Many congregations, temples, mosques, and synagogues are working to increase energy efficiency. Several Canadian denominations have divested from fossil fuel companies. The Christian Reformed Church has hired five people (including two in Canada) to increase climate justice awareness. A delegation from the CCC is participating in events surrounding the important UN climate talks in Paris this December. Christian groups have been essential to highlighting the global justice implications of climate change.

But high-level statements like this will mean very little if they are not taken up by people in the pews. A first step is to become familiar with the content of the statement. The next step is to encourage the leaders of your religious communities to endorse it. Then, Christians and like-minded people of other faiths should examine what they can do. How can our households and congregations (both the buildings and communities) reduce our fossil fuel use? Finally, advocate with municipal, provincial, and federal governments to address these issues. Politicians must know what we believe, that climate justice, Indigenous rights, and ending poverty are important to people of faith in Canada.

Read the full inter-faith statement, *On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada*, at cpj.ca/ccs-statement.

Randolph Haluza-DeLay is a sociologist at The King's University in Edmonton and co-editor of the book *How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change*.



A Better Future for Our Children

By Karri Munn-Venn

Last winter, my nine-year-old son accompanied me to a climate talk at our church. I had warned him that it would be long, and likely boring. The presentation did indeed go on for over an hour. But rather than bored, Oscar was captivated. He suddenly took to journaling. He was writing about climate change, flooding and drought, and the significant oil and gas reserves that must stay underground.

I was intrigued by Oscar's interest. I was encouraged by his energy and extremely proud when he began to share what he was learning with others.

Then I began to worry. How much did he understand about what the world might look like when he's my age? And did he (as I do) have faith that we could muster the ambition necessary to take action?

What's at stake?

To date, the world has warmed 0.85°C over pre-industrial levels. Super storms are more frequent. Wild fires are more pervasive. Sea level rise threatens small island states, and major coastal cities like New York risk being under water by 2100. The health of our oceans is declining rapidly, and with it, this life support system of the Earth.

The Inuit in Canada's north have experienced some of the fastest rising temperatures in the world. Food security and human health are increasingly at risk due to diminished access to and contamination of local foods. Shifting weather patterns, glacial melting, and permafrost thaw also challenge northern infrastructure, which is designed for frozen ground.

Climate change has also contributed to reduced habitat for many marine species. It has prompted changes in breeding grounds for birds and interruptions in the migration and feeding patterns of some mammals. Habitat loss across Canada is expected to be among the worst in the world, with a potential 20 per cent loss of species in vulnerable ecosystems by 2100.

Growing seasons in the rest of Canada may be getting longer, but production is hampered by invasive pests and increasingly frequent water shortages. Warm weather viruses (such as West Nile) and water-borne diseases have become more common in towns and cities. There is more air pollution and intense smog. Figures from the World Health Organization indicate that heat-related deaths are expected to climb from 70 per year in Montreal currently to 460 annually by 2020.

The integrity of the Earth is being tested. And though it is tempting to feel overwhelmed, as Christians, we are a people of hope.

What is being done?

World leaders are gathering in Paris for the UN Climate Conference (COP21) from November 30 to December 11, 2015. They are there to finalize an ambitious, binding international climate agreement with clear targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Leaders know that much more is needed to keep global warming below 2°C over pre-industrial levels.



Prime Minister Trudeau has not yet identified a new emissions target for Canada, but he intends to participate constructively in the Paris talks. He has assembled a strong team of federal officials and environmental advisers; and he is joined by several Canadian premiers. He knows there is a long way to go, and has committed to get us there.

Canadian church leaders have also spoken up. *On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada: Faith Communities in*

Canada Speak Out calls on the Canadian government to establish more ambitious emissions targets.

Now, as individual Christians and communities of faith, we too have a role to play. God calls us to protect, care, and advocate for all of creation. Our faith compels us to bring our concerns for the Earth, our distress for those most heavily impacted by climate change, and our hopes for climate justice to God in prayer. Our faith must also compel us to make choices that support the flourishing of creation – and to press our government to do the same.

Hope for a better future

I don't think that Oscar has truly contemplated the impacts of unchecked climate change. And at barely ten, he shouldn't have to. What he does understand is that people around the world are working to set a course for a cleaner, healthier, more life-giving future. So while I remain anxious about the planet we are set to leave our children, more than anything, I am hopeful.

It isn't yet too late.



Karri Munn-Venn is a Senior Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

Prayers for Paris

By Miriam Mahaffy

In the lead up to COP21, CPJ launched *Prayers for Paris*, a suite of worship materials and advocacy tools that are designed to help people of faith engage with climate justice. *Prayers for Paris* includes sermons, prayers of intercession, hymns, and Bible studies that can be used to bring climate justice into weekly worship. The campaign invites members of faith communities to sign a **Call for Climate Action**, advocating climate justice with a united voice.

During the climate talks, CPJ has also organized a nation-wide prayer chain. Faithful citizens are praying for climate justice during every hour of COP21. The prayer chain begins at 1 p.m. on November 29 with prayerful participation in Ottawa's march for climate solutions and justice. After the march, prayer continues all across the nation until the end of the climate talks on December 11.

As world leaders meet at COP21 to shape the future of action on climate change, these prayers amplify the voices of the economically, socially, and ecologically marginalized who are most at risk from climate change. An outpouring of concern from faith communities around the nation helps shape political will towards meaningful and just climate action. Together, we remember with gratitude the gift of creation, pray for those affected by climate change, and hope for change.

Below, we hear from five citizens across Canada on why they are joining *Prayers for Paris*:



"I am praying for Paris because I love and care for all life! I pray for a transformed relationship between Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and humanity. I am praying for Paris because I care about those of us who most suffer the effects of climate change and those of us who most need transformation of heart and action. I am praying for Paris because the next generations of all species have a right to enjoy and respect their home. I am praying for Paris because I have hope that our delegation will return Canadians to our place as world leaders in the work to address climate change."

—Sister Sheila Smith is a PhD Candidate in theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa.



"I'm praying for Paris because I believe we are called as faithful citizens to care for creation and love our neighbours in our communities and around the world. I'm praying for courage and wisdom for political leaders to collaborate, commit, and work together toward a hopeful and realistic climate change agreement."

—Trixie Ling is a Youth Case Worker in Vancouver. She was CPJ's first Public Justice Intern and is now a CPJ Board Member.

"I'm praying for Paris because of my daughters. It says in the book of Romans that even if a person has never heard of God they would see His presence in creation. I want our nations to be legally bound to protect our world so that my daughters will see clearly God's handiwork and experience Him through it. Psalm 8 lists off the incredible beauty of the Earth and reminds us that we have dominion over it. I'm praying for powerful stewardship."

—Sarah Scott is a Chaplain at GrandView Manor and Homeschooler in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia.



"I am praying for Paris because prayer and action are impossible to uncouple. Like breathing in and breathing out, each needs the other for life. The more we pray, the clearer we become about our next best steps in this journey of participating in God's healing of soul, community, and creation. I will be in Paris throughout the COP21 talks, leading the United Church of Canada's delegation. Hope has never been higher that we, as humanity, will do what is morally and spiritually necessary. Knowing that we are in prayerful solidarity fuels that hope."

—Mardi Tindal was Moderator of the United Church of Canada from 2009 to 2012.



"I'm praying for Paris because I want the world to be a better place when I grow up."

—Oscar Munn-Venn is a Grade 5 student at Vincent Massey Public School in Ottawa.

Call for Climate Action!

People of faith are calling on the Canadian government to take climate action! Join your voice to the call at cpj.ca/climate-call.



Miriam Mahaffy is the Public Justice Intern at Citizens for Public Justice.

An Advent Call to Listen in the Face of Fear

By Dena Nicolai

As we enter this season of Advent, I have been reflecting on what it means to listen.

At a time when the Syrian refugee crisis leads voices from all corners to yell, “Act!,” the din can almost drown out that most ancient of calls from Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

This “hearing” was meant to remind Israel of its identity and calling as the people of God. Today, it reminds us of this same identity as a people who follow the way of the risen and ascended Lord, a Lord who, incarnate, was himself a refugee – a startling reminder to some. As poet Malcolm Guite writes, “We think of [Christ] as safe beneath the steeple / Or cosy in a crib beside the font / But he is with a million displaced people / On the long road of weariness and want.”

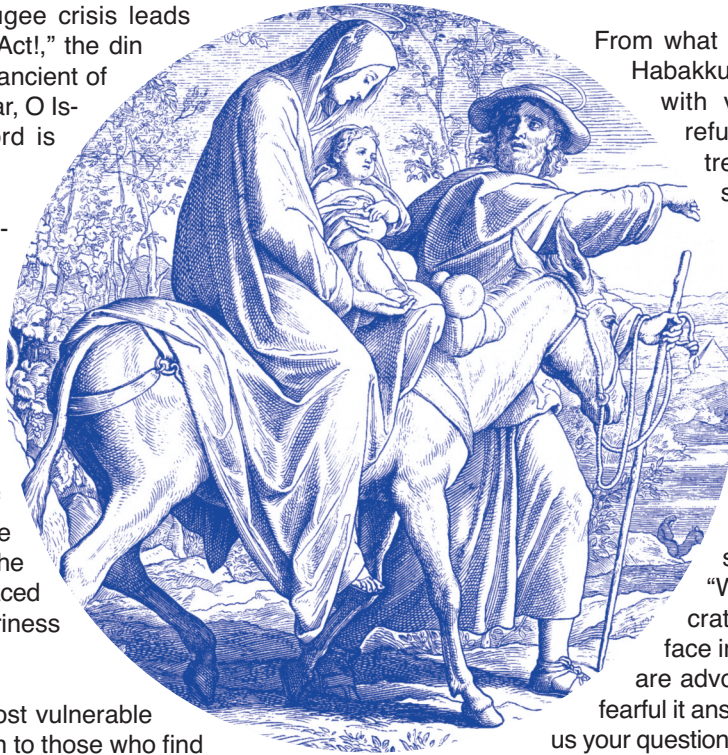
Christ’s identification with the most vulnerable among us demands that we listen to those who find themselves as refugees. We must seek their voices among the voices of fear in our midst, those telling us to protect our own welfare, our own security, our own prosperity.

The longing of Advent and the celebration of Christmas this year must also involve preparing for the arrival of thousands of Syrian refugees.

Yet, perhaps paradoxically, the Gospel call also demands that we listen to those Canadians afraid of the impact of such an influx of newcomers. Though it is far easier to dismiss these voices as ignorant, selfish, or Islamophobic, listening is perhaps the most just thing we can do. Fear generates a fight-or-flight response. Yet listening, at its best, implies patience, reflection, and a dignifying of the one speaking.

Of course, listening is not solely passive — it demands a response. Like the prophet Habbakuk, we are called to proclaim:

“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what [God] will say to me and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”



From what I observe, CPJ has taken up Habakkuk’s call to listen and respond with vigour. To those who sit in refugee camps, detainment centres, and border huddles it answers, “We hear your cries. We are pushing our government and our institutions to help Canadians welcome you.” To those in the halls of power it answers, “We heard the promise you made to facilitate the arrival of 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada. We are holding you to account.” To churches and organizations wishing to sponsor these refugees it answers, “We heard about the bureaucratic barriers and difficulties you face in the sponsorship process. We are advocating on your behalf.” To the fearful it answers, “We hear your fear. Bring us your questions and concerns. We wish to engage them critically, with research and analysis, without dismissal.”

In the midst of these preparations, God’s word in 1 John 4:18 continues to exhort us, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”

And especially in this time of Advent expectation, God continues to call us: “Listen!”

Can you hear the voice of one calling? “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.” (Isaiah 40:3-5)



Dena Nicolai lives in Vancouver and is completing her MA in Theological Studies, with a focus on Church History, at Regent College.