

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Spring 2018

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## Our Journeys to Justice

By Joe Gunn

Are church communities the best places to go if you want to engage in social and ecological justice? Is the prophetic desire for justice encouraged to burn in the hearts of church-goers today? Do our ecclesial structures promote animation and action towards public justice?

A new book by Citizens for Public Justice, *Journeys to Justice: Reflections on Canadian Christian Activism*, answers these questions head on. By recounting stories in ten interviews, church activists detail in their own words where Christians made positive impacts on the Canadian social and political landscape. Working together to align supportive organizations and create public engagement, Christians from varied backgrounds had success in helping to end apartheid, were first to admit refugees from Chile and Indochina, defended Indigenous peoples' rights, achieved cancelation of debts of countries in the Global South—and more.

Earlier generations of CPJ members recall with admiration how their organization won a lasting victory as part of the movement that stopped the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. Known then as the Committee for Justice and Liberty, CPJ's predecessor proposed a moratorium in 1976 and won a crucial case at the Supreme Court of Canada. This derailed the National Energy Board's plans to approve a gas pipeline that lacked support of the Indigenous peoples of the region. In *Journeys to Justice*, John Olthuis describes his efforts as "a liberation struggle" and "an example of what can be done when folks set out in good faith to make gospel-based change."

In another chapter, Peter Noteboom describes how the churches worked together to first create, and then mobilize to defend, the Medicare system in Canada. A former United Church Moderator, Bill Phipps, and a former

staff member for the Catholic bishops, Tony Clarke, depict how churches ran into strident controversy when they challenged the prevailing economic system. Moira Hutchinson describes how the churches created the Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility and pushed Canada's largest banks and corporations to end their investments in South Africa's apartheid regime.

Perhaps the most important section of the book is towards the end. Lutheran pastor David Pfrimmer reflects theologically on the roots of public ecumenical justice work, challenging it to mobilize a future of "public multi-faithism" beyond Christianity. And two Millennial activists, Christine Boyle and Leah Watkiss, consider that while their current work in the churches can benefit from knowledge of the successes of the past, the enthusiasm and devotion of new generations must be harnessed in new ways.

Today, it is entirely possible for a younger generation of Canadians to never hear a sermon about the social justice endeavours in which their national church participates. Some young people attend various denominational schools, rarely learning of the Christian advocacy of justice activists. This book could help change that.

But as George Bernard Shaw once said, "We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future."

These narratives should also be read as challenges—how can we become capable of inspiring new and deeper efforts to advance public justice today?

*Joe Gunn serves as CPJ's executive director.*

# In Review

## CPJ on the Hill

CPJ's socio-economic policy analyst **Natalie Appleyard**, public justice intern **Sarah DeVillano**, and executive director **Joe Gunn** attended a meeting of the **All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus** on Parliament Hill. **Peter Milczyn**, the Ontario Minister of Housing, reported on the province's basic income pilot program.

**Deborah Mebude**, CPJ's public justice intern, and **Joe** joined our partners from the **MCC Ottawa Office** and the **Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue** to talk with MPs about the issues of wait times, allocation limits, and travel loans in the privately sponsored refugee program. Together, they met with Liberal MPs **Rob Oliphant** and **Jean Yip** as well as NDP MP **Jenny Kwan** (below).



## Letter on Fossil Fuel Subsidies

In December, CPJ joined partners including the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Environmental Defence, Oil Change International, Équiterre, and Climate Action Network Canada to write to Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** and other ministers calling on them to phase out fossil fuel subsidies. Read the letter at [cpj.ca/eco-justice/policy](http://cpj.ca/eco-justice/policy).

## National Housing Strategy

The Dignity for All campaign, co-led by CPJ and Canada Without Poverty, welcomed the launch of the federal government's National Housing Strategy. While an anti-poverty plan is still necessary, the housing strategy takes several important steps toward ending poverty in Canada including recognizing housing as a fundamental right and dedicating new funding over the next ten years. Read our entire response at [dignityforall.ca/latest-news](http://dignityforall.ca/latest-news).

## CPJ in the Community

In January, CPJ and International Justice Mission (IJM) co-hosted Jesus + Justice, a half-day conference designed to encourage and equip Christians in Ottawa to work together for justice through prayer, acts of charity, and advocacy. **Mark Woltenberg** of IJM (below) gave the keynote address. **Deborah** and **Sarah**, CPJ's public justice interns, co-led workshops on refugee rights and poverty in Canada.



**Deborah** also spoke on a panel at the **University of Ottawa** as part of the student-run Conflict and Human Rights Conference in January. She presented on ecumenical organizing at a workshop on the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) and explained CPJ's current advocacy efforts to encourage the government to rescind the STCA.

**Deborah** and **Joe** joined the **Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto** and **Becoming Neighbours** for two refugee advocacy training sessions (below). Deborah also joined staff from the **Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue** and **World Renew** at a house meeting in Toronto. They met with refugee advocates to share ideas on how to discuss the issue of wait times with MPs.



In February, CPJ and Joint Ecological Ministry co-hosted Flourishing of Life for All in **Toronto**, with Heather Eaton as the keynote speaker. **Karri Munn-Venn**, CPJ's senior policy analyst, also spoke about our *Give it up for the Earth!* campaign.

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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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# Canada Must End Fossil Fuel Subsidies

By Karri Munn-Venn

The season of Lent is once again upon us. For some, it is a time of sacrifice and repentance, while others use it as a nudge to get back on track with New Year's resolutions.

When we first began to develop *Give it up for the Earth!*—CPJ's Lenten climate campaign—it prompted me to think seriously about my personal Lenten journey. Despite having worked in environmental policy on and off for over 20 years, reflecting on my carbon footprint in the context of Lent led me to a deeper sort of engagement.

In 2017, I decided to “give up” overpackaged goods and, as much as possible, to buy food in bulk, using reusable jars and bins. Over the last year, I've managed to maintain this practice to a large extent. Doing so fed into a larger conversation in our home about “stuff”—how much we have, where we get it, and what kinds of practices our purchasing supports.

More and more, I'm prioritizing quality over quantity, adopting a “buy it once” sort of philosophy when it comes to clothing and household goods. I also make a lot of things myself, and when I do, I endeavour to only create with ethically-produced, sustainable materials.

All this comes from an understanding of integral ecology—the interconnectedness of all things—and a recognition that as humans we are a part of the Earth community. Our well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of the planet.

The way we spend our money reflects what we deem important. What we buy and where we invest are a reflection of our values and priorities. This type of values discussion has helped to create movement of people who are withdrawing their investments from the fossil fuel sector. It has also led to university divestment campaigns and sustainable investment decisions taken by diverse faith communities.

It follows that if *our* spending reflects what we value, the same is true of government spending.

Since the climate summit in 2015, our federal government has repeated it's commitment to climate action. True, they have taken some steps to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but there are still problems with Canadian climate and energy policy.

Among the most egregious contradictions are the subsidies to the

fossil fuel industry. Through a series of tax breaks and direct grants, the federal government continues to provide \$1.6 billion in public funds to oil and gas companies each year. Julie Gelfand, Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, notes that, “inefficient subsidies to the fossil fuel sector encourage wasteful consumption, undermine efforts to address climate change, and discourage investment in clean energy sources.”



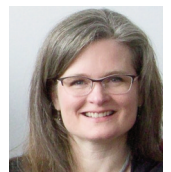
Canada has repeatedly promised to end these subsidies; our government knows that it is the right thing to do. Now it's time for Canada to follow through and make financial decisions that move us closer to our national emissions-reduction goals. It's a tremendous opportunity to better align Canadian policy with the Paris Agreement and to provide climate leadership on the world stage.

That is why *Give it up for the Earth!* is calling on the Canadian federal government to end all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry right away. The \$1.6 billion saved annually can then be invested in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and skills development for workers currently employed in the oil and gas sector. This would help put Canada on course for a just transition to clean energy by 2050.

It is critically important that we, as citizens and people of faith, think long and hard about how our day-to-day decisions affect the fate of creation. But we also need broader changes to achieve the scale of emissions reductions required to address climate change.

This Lent, I hope you'll join me in calling for more federal climate action through *Give it up for the Earth!*

It isn't too late to join *Give it up for the Earth!* Visit [cpj.ca/pledge](http://cpj.ca/pledge) to make your commitment to reduce your personal GHG emissions and urge the government of Canada to end all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry. Over 140 faith communities across Canada are already participating.



Karri Munn-Venn is CPJ's senior policy analyst.

# Mobilizing Young Adults for Social Action

By Monique Verhoef

Young adults often get a bad rap. If they aren't failing to launch, they are too addicted to their "likes," unreliable, and unengaged.

Besides for a few small caveats, I couldn't disagree more.

Young adults really care, and when given the proper space, place, and some tools, they exercise incredible levels of ingenuity and creativity to raise awareness among their peers and take action in their communities.

I have worked with university students in a variety of capacities for 18 years. Most of that time has been at a large, public university. It was there that I started a peer-to-peer education program. It fostered in the student leaders, and through them the campus, the knowledge, skills, and awareness to work competently across lines of difference and to engage with issues and topics that impact social inclusion. They addressed the daily issues now crossing our Facebook feeds such as racism, power, privilege, historic injustice, fear of difference, xenophobia, and sexism and discussed how these issues impact our social realities.

Jesus said that those who have eyes to see and ears to hear will truly understand the wisdom of God. I do not claim to be passing on the very wisdom of God, but Jesus' words stick with me as a great place to start in giving students tools for inclusion work as well.

## Helping Students See and Hear

Every week we sat together circled up around a few snacks and some candles. The question was always "what did you see this week?" or "what did you learn that speaks to how other's experience belonging?" That's where we heard the stories. A Muslim student leader told us, "My friend and I were on the bus and someone tried to rip her hijab off." A visible minority said with tears, "I was in the mall and a man shouted at me to 'go back where you came from, terrorist'...but I was born here". A Sudanese immigrant student shared that, "I gave my mom most of my school loan to cover our bills. How else would she have gas money to get my little brother to school?"

Stories shared and heard and eyes opened. These students shared in the day-to-day experiences of their peers and applied what they learn in the classroom and training. Through this, they recognized the diversity of experiences that people have nav-

igating systems, attitudes that exclude and oppress, and harmful actions.

## Moving to Action

Stories are powerful, and I have seen the power they have to move students to act. Taking the things students are already passionate about builds their motivation for action. Sometimes that's a direct action like making warmth kits and delivering them to those who experience homelessness. Other times it's exercising creativity to figure out how they can raise awareness about the social exclusion or suffering of others.



This is especially powerful when students respond to real-time events. When the Syrian refugee crisis was just exploding into mass awareness, the student leaders created an intricate experiential exercise for their peers. Set up in the busy hallways of campus, participants had to frantically pack a suitcase while being timed. They felt what it might be like to make the decisions to leave family, an heirloom, or a loved pet behind. Next, they experienced what it might be like to try to

get through all the hoops of government systems to become a refugee and end up in a new land. By the time they went through the simulation, they felt even to the smallest degree something of what a refugee might feel, learned about the realities of the refugee crisis, and connected to real refugee stories.

It can be difficult to keep momentum going during students' busy lives and to get students to go deeper toward the roots of issues that come "into the circle." But my experience is that young adults do care and want to participate in movements that promote change.

It is difficult to engage societal issues alone. But we can bring students together so that their actions are supported in community. By helping them discover the tools available to them, we encourage them to claim their space and place, engage, and make social action come alive.

Monique Verhoef has worked as the Director of Community Life at Ambrose University in Calgary for the past two years. She has lived in Calgary for the past 13 years with her husband Paul and three kids. She is in her fourth year serving on the board of CPJ.



# Living in the Gap

By Natalie Appleyard

If you have been a follower of Citizens for Public Justice for a while now, you are probably familiar with our call for a comprehensive national anti-poverty plan. You may be familiar with statistics like “4.8 million Canadians live in poverty” or “1 in 8 households struggle to put food on the table.” You are probably familiar with the complexity of poverty and government processes. And perhaps, if we’re honest, you have become familiar, too, with doubts as to whether or not we will ever see a poverty-free Canada.

Let me first encourage you by saying that you are in good company. We should not underestimate the challenges before us, nor the stakes. And yet it is precisely in engaging with the many facets and faces of poverty in Canada that we will find the key to overcoming it together.

This month, CPJ and the Dignity for All campaign released *Living in the Gap: A Snapshot of Precarity in Canada*. This report includes six infographics highlighting households across Canada struggling to make ends meet. These profiles represent compilations of typical people’s experiences, with numbers drawn from the actual communities in which they are situated.



The main message of the report is that if we are serious about ending poverty, we need more than piecemeal programs and siloed approaches.

“People’s lives are complex. When a family is struggling with prohibitively high costs of childcare and housing, for example, they need more than one simple program like the Canada Child Benefit.” says Sarah DelVillano, CPJ’s public justice intern who authored the report. “Canada’s upcoming anti-poverty plan needs to recognize the intersecting root causes of poverty. We need a strategy that tackles precarity and poverty in a targeted and comprehensive way.”

To tackle such a complex problem in a comprehensive way, we need all hands on deck. This is precisely why federal leadership is so important. We need national targets, timelines, and measurements to make various federal ministries, as well as provinces, territories, and municipalities, work together towards a common goal. The symptoms and causes of poverty and inequality know no jurisdictional boundaries.

Here’s where I see an opportunity for us as citizens. Consider the combined power of all the charities, advocacy groups, and churches across this country. We can come together with a united voice. What if every elected official, including Cabinet Ministers, MPs, provincial and territorial representatives, and city councillors, heard that their constituents have had enough? Enough waiting, enough debating about whose job it is, enough fear-mongering about how much it would cost instead of acknowledging what we have to gain, enough of poverty in the midst of such wealth. We would see change happen quickly.

We are already seeing it. Thanks to the outcry of many voices, we are about to get Canada’s first national anti-poverty plan. Will it have everything we want? Surely not. But it will be a step in the right direction. And it will formalize an acknowledgement that the government is responsible for putting in place policies and budgets that dismantle current barriers and build new systems of support. Our job as citizens will be to keep them honest, to monitor the impact of their policies and point out where gaps persist. And we must continue calling on our elected officials to push forward best practices and reform barriers that stand in the way.

Our work is not nearly done, but our work *is* working. There are people in government and civil society committed to making Canada a more equitable society. Now we need to get others on board by showing them how they can—and must—help. Consider sharing *Living in the Gap* with your friends, church, elected officials, and anyone else in your community who has a voice to lend to the call.

Together, we can build a poverty-free Canada.

Check out *Living in the Gap: A Snapshot of Precarity in Canada* at [dignityforall.ca/in-the-gap](http://dignityforall.ca/in-the-gap).

Natalie Appleyard is the socio-economic policy analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.



# Disenchantment for Refugees in Canada

By Justine Nkurunziza

*The perception of Canada as a welcoming country extends far beyond our borders, and it's something we can be proud of. In the last few years, while more and more nations have prioritized national interest over humanitarian need, Canada has remained open to foreigners and continued to stand by multiculturalism as central to our identity.*

*And yet, even with this cultural mosaic as a guiding principle, our good intentions can fall short of truly offering a place of welcome for newcomers. Barriers in Canadian policy, including challenges associated with the transfer and recognition of foreign credentials, affordable housing, social services, and access to employment, have meant that refugees face an increased uphill battle to establish themselves upon arrival.*

*Justine Nkurunziza is a protected refugee from Burundi. She fled the country in May 2015 following political unrest surrounding the announcement from president Pierre Nkurunziza (no relation) that he, against the Burundian constitution, would be running for a third term. As a result of assassinations, torture, and other crimes committed against those who opposed the president's rule, she spent a year and a half in*

*"Yes!" I thought. "Once I'm in Canada all my dreams as a refugee will be complete!"*

*I thought you could come here as a doctor, physician, engineer, construction worker, or journalist. As an immigrant, you think you'll be considered at the same level as your Canadian counterparts. But once you land in Canada, your dream is over because you don't have "Canadian experience."*

*Your diploma, qualifications, and experience mean nothing. You start to wonder why. You feel humiliated intellectually. Your self-esteem is challenged and you start to ask yourself what kind of integration Canada is expecting from you.*

*Once you're here, only your secondary school is recognized. But why is this? This is discrimination. African, Asian, and Caribbean universities follow Northern programs.*

*So you try to weigh your options. Shall I go back to university and get a Canadian diploma, or get a cleaning job to make money to survive and gain Canadian experience?*

*But what is Canadian experience to a physician or an engineer?*

*Rwanda. In September 2016, she had little choice but to turn to Canada for safety.*

*Justine holds a BA in social sciences from the University of Burundi and, before coming to Canada, was well-established in her career, holding jobs at ActionAid International, USAID, and the US embassy in Burundi.*

*What Justine quickly realized, however, was that the land of opportunity she had hoped for left much to be desired. Between the challenges of isolation, trauma, poverty, and dispossession, many refugees are caught up in a whirlwind of new obstacles to overcome.*

*Thanks to Carty House, an Ottawa-based home away from home for refugee women, Justine was able to secure housing. Sadly, many other challenges persist.*

*Justine was gracious enough to share her story and examine a few policy issues that have stood in the way of her ability to receive a full welcome in Canada.*

— Deb Mubude, CPJ's public justice intern

*Canada does welcome immigrants. But they should be welcomed with all their dignity, which includes the recognition of their qualifications and various skills.*

*We know newcomers tend to concentrate in major cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. But strategies to provide more social services, such as social housing, in smaller towns should be put in place. This would encourage immigrants to move to small towns where the communities need their valuable services.*

*Canada is one of the most welcoming countries in the world. It should consider how these issues impact immigrants' human rights. A debate on these subjects should engage people and politicians at all levels to find solutions. There are real social problems related to the integration of immigrants in Canada. If these things are addressed, I'm sure that it will bring the image of Canada to a higher level.*

*Justine Nkurunziza came to Canada as a refugee in September 2016. She holds a BA in social sciences from the University of Burundi and has extensive experience in the non-profit sector. Nkurunziza is a fierce advocate for just and comprehensive refugee policies in Canada.*





## The Living Relationship Between the People and the Land

By Mark MacDonald

Two years ago, I attended an international conference on the environment. Gathered to consider the alarming physical and spiritual implications of our global climate crisis, we looked for ways to inspire and motivate people to effective action in our various local contexts. It was an earnest, committed, and well-informed group. Taking my turn, I spoke about some of the issues developing in the Arctic. Though the group was aware of massive changes in the climate of the Arctic, it was clear that there was little awareness of the human, largely Indigenous, dimensions of climate injustice in the North.

Unfortunately, this lack of awareness is widespread, even, and perhaps especially, in places that are a part of the North, like Canada. In identifying this deficit, we uncover a hidden but critical dimension of our global reality: Indigenous Peoples, among the least responsible and most threatened by climate injustice, are essential to both the fullness of our understanding of the climate crisis and, also, to the quality and character of our ecological future.

For the Canadian context, this is urgent. Canada, because of the promises and challenges of the emerging relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the larger society, will play a crucial and potentially defining role in the moral, physical, and spiritual crisis of our age.

Indigenous environmental wisdom, as Pope Francis underlined in *Laudato Si*, is a part of a healing way forward for humanity and ecology. The Spirit of Truth appears to have placed a large portion of the answers to our world's problems in the teaching and lifestyle of the often-marginalized people of the land. The growing recognition of Indigenous wisdom is important. But to be effective it must directly connect Indigenous well-being to the well-being of the rest of humanity and creation. With the appreciation of Indigenous wisdom, there must be a moral and practical recognition of the living reality of Indigenous life.

The living relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land is prophetic. It points to a livable future for all, in that it displays the living relationship of all humanity to the larger realm of cre-

ation. If humanity can see this, it has a more hopeful future.

The living relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land is also protective. This is true in the immediate sense that Indigenous Peoples are often directly in the way of harmful development. It has another critical aspect: respect and recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples are an embodiment of humanity's acceptance of its own responsibility to creation and the relationships that sustain life.

The only way to achieve this respect and recognition is by dismantling the persistent and systemic threats to Indigenous life both in on-going colonialism and through the impacts of climate injustice. If the global society of politics and economics does not respect and protect the relationship of Indigenous Peoples to the land, it will not have the moral capacity to find its own way forward. The fullness of the practical demands of creation's survival is dependent upon a complete embrace of the integrity of Indigenous Peoples and the larger reality of creation.

Canada has a potentially vital role to play in this unfolding reality. Its troubled relationship with Indigenous Peoples has an ongoing environmental context and focus. The dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from the land has been both the means and sometimes the goal of Canada's colonial policy. The results have been catastrophic to Indigenous Peoples and the environment.

Canada can point the way forward and play a visionary role, by weaving Indigenous rights and its approach to environmental protection together.

A hopeful future awaits Canada's decision and action.

For the past ten years, the Rt. Rev. Mark MacDonald has been the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop for Canada. Prior to this, he was the Bishop of Alaska. He has been much involved in the intersection of Indigenous rights and the environment.



A new publication from Citizens for Public Justice!

# JOURNEYS TO JUSTICE

## REFLECTIONS ON CANADIAN CHRISTIAN ACTIVISM

A new book by Joe Gunn features interviews with ten key people from varied ecumenical backgrounds who have been active in social justice struggles across Canada for many years. How did Christians work together to help end apartheid, admit refugees from Chile and Indochina, defend Indigenous Peoples' rights, promote economic justice, and more?

These wonderful stories from tireless labourers for justice present relevant lessons for today. Current leaders of justice ministries will find guidance from these accounts, as well as inspiration from the newer generation of activists who reflect and act upon them.

“The prophet Micah reminds us of our responsibilities to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. In our work to ‘do justice’ many of us experience periods of discouragement or despair. I encourage you to read and study *Journeys to Justice: Reflections on Canadian Christian Activism* in order to be encouraged and reinvigorated in God’s call to work for justice. Together, we can make a difference!”

—Rev. Susan C. Johnson  
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

“Activists for social justice and climate action will find new allies in this volume. If they didn’t already know the rich history of Canadian Christian activism, Joe Gunn’s compilation of this movement’s great history and closing essays from great young leaders in ministry provide an invaluable lesson. And hope for the future.”

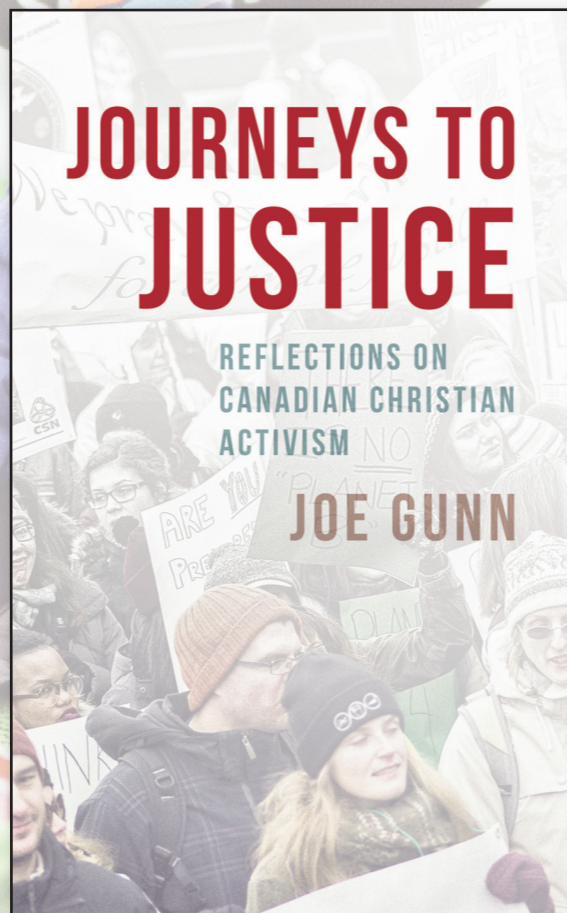
—Elizabeth May  
Leader, Green Party of Canada

“Through interviews with leaders in the Christian social justice movement in Canada, this volume both provides a valuable history of what has been accomplished, and remains to be accomplished, and introduces a new generation to the call to serve justice through theological reflection and action.”

—Rev. Canon Dr. Alyson Barnett-Cowan  
President, Canadian Council of Churches

“Reading this book has given me a new appreciation for the impact that men and women of faith have had—and can have—on vital social issues in Canadian society. I encourage all church leaders to read it and share it with others: this inspiring, challenging and encouraging text calls us all to renew our commitment to God’s reign of justice, peace, and joy here and now.”

—Mgr. Paul-André Durocher  
Roman Catholic Archbishop of Gatineau



Order your copy of *Journeys to Justice* for \$20 (includes shipping).

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