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The Pandemic Invites Us to Simplicity and Solidarity

By Karri Munn-Venn

I've just arrived home from a lively morning at the local farmers' market, where well-spaced tables overflowed with vegetables, baked goods, and fresh eggs. It has been four months since we left the city, and it feels good to be part of the community here. I know—or at least recognize—more people now, and I feel fortunate to listen to those who have been here for generations talk amongst themselves.

The list of tasks that need doing around the house is endless, to say nothing of the farm projects that need finishing. Today, though, I've decided I'm having none of it. I take a few minutes to re-stake the temporary fencing, let the sheep out of their paddock onto a fresh area of grass, pull up a chair, and take it all in. I'm new here, and the sheep are newer. We're still getting to know one another and figuring out life on the farm.

It is quite remarkable how drastically our lives have changed recently—and not only because we've relocated from central Ottawa to rural west Québec. When we found our place, the coronavirus was a far-away news story. By the time we came home, we were a few months into a global pandemic that had altered everything.

Though we've all been in the same storm these many months, we certainly haven't been in the same boat. Early shelter-in-place directives were applied unevenly. As those of us who were able to work from home settled in, medical professionals and long-term care workers, grocery store clerks, delivery personnel, and many other essential service workers did their jobs to keep society and the economy functioning. Many who faced layoffs have also been at home but with the added strain of economic insecurity—or devastation. Meanwhile, others have faced isolation, depression, homelessness, or violence as a result of the pandemic.

There is no universal experience of this unusual time. For some, it has been tremendously hard and for others just a little bumpy. I've been very fortunate, and I know that this good fortune is wrapped up in my privilege. My experience of the pandemic has been filled with blessings, not least of which has been getting to know my kids and spouse in new ways as we navigated a change of lifestyle. I'm deeply grateful for this time, these experiences, and the lessons along the way.

Without commutes, extra-curricular activities, or community events, those able to safely shelter at home suddenly had time on our hands. It was fascinating to observe how we used it. After the requisite

...continued on page 3

In Review

Research Reports

On October 1, CPJ released our *Poverty Trends 2020* report, highlighting disparities in wealth and well-being among particular groups in Canada. The report uses an intersectional lens by looking specifically at how experiences of poverty differ depending on overlapping identities such as race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status, and regional differences. Read the report at **cpj.ca/poverty-trends-2020**.

In August, CPJ's public justice intern **Keira Kang** released *Restoring Indigenous Rights*, a paper that explores how implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can advance climate justice in Canada. Learn more about the paper on page 4 or read it at **cpj.ca/restoring-indigenous-rights**.

For the Love of Creation

For the Love of Creation – A Faith-based Initiative for Climate Justice organized an e-petition this summer, calling for a just transition to a clean economy, including policies that honour Indigenous rights and support people in the Global South. It received about 2,500 signatures and was presented in the House of Commons by **Liberal MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** in November.

Also in November, For the Love of Creation presented a Fall Forum webinar series that explored concepts including climate grief, theologies of creation care, and climate action. CPJ's **Karri Munn-Venn** was involved in the webinars, "Advocating for Climate Change" and "Communicating Climate Change." To watch these webinars, go to **fortheloveofcreation.ca**.

Virtual Presentations

On June 5, CPJ's **Stephen Kaduuli** presented as a panelist at the spring meeting of advocacy working groups for the **Canadian Council for Refugees**. He spoke about what opportunities we at CPJ see in the pandemic and post-pandemic landscape for refugees and vulnerable migrants.

On September 9, **Karri** joined **Christine Boyle**, a United Church minister and Vancouver city counsellor, to discuss climate advocacy on a webinar organized by **Earthkeepers**, a Vancouver-based Christian climate organization.

During our annual *Chew on This!* campaign, Dignity for All organized a series of 12 webinars on various aspects of poverty in Canada. Learn more on page 5.

CPJ and **Fair Vote Canada** teamed up on October 25 to offer a workshop facilitated by **Velma Morgan** and **Bobby Adore** from **Operation Black Vote Canada**, an organization that supports the election of Black people to public office in Canada. Velma and Bobby presented on why representation matters as well as practical strategies to diversify any organization.

Fall Student Placements

This fall, CPJ welcomed two university students to our team. **Erin Kehler** interned with CPJ through **Trinity Western University** and the **Laurentian Leadership Centre**. During her time at CPJ she researched child detention and the welfare of refugee children and youth in Canada.

Hanh Ngo is a second-year law student from the **University of Ottawa** and a volunteer with **Pro Bono Students Canada**. Hanh will be volunteering with CPJ until February 2021, providing legal research and expertise on a variety of topics.

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...continued from page 1

deep clean—we were all home all the time—we instinctively returned to simpler, more traditional ways of doing things. I was surprised but drawn in and jumped on the sourdough bandwagon before the end of March despite being neck-deep in moving boxes.

With the welcome warmth of spring, many people planted new gardens and expanded long-established plots. Seeds for the most popular vegetable varieties became hard to find. Hatcheries too were running out of laying hens as the backyard chicken coop became the next big thing. Though playgrounds remained off-limits as we headed into summer, trails, parks, and urban walkways offered a welcome change of scenery and a breath of fresh air. Then, on the cool, damp days of the early fall, many of us went back inside to make jams and jellies, pickles, and tomato sauce.

Of course, those on the front lines of the pandemic—nurses, retail workers, and others—carried on. Small businesses in non-essential sectors, including restaurants, endeavoured to join them, making accommodations to limit contact and extend the outdoor dining season. At the same time, educators looked to forest schools and outdoor education programs for guidance on how to create classrooms outside.

Certainly, a lack of options contributed to these homesteading tendencies. So too did a desire to keep people out of enclosed spaces. But I think something deeper was going on. Feeling constrained, we went "back to basics," to a slower, more intentional, and more engaged way of being. In a period of uncertainty and anxiety we sought comfort, and we knew deep down that the activities that would soothe our fearful hearts were old ways that connected us to our food, to the Earth, and to one another.

I have great admiration for Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land. There is profound wisdom in the breadth of the phrase "all my relations," as it includes not only grandmothers and newborn babies, but budding maples, flitting starlings, and glistening streams. It is so important that we honour the significance of these connections as the grounding of efforts to heal from the generational trauma caused by colonialism and ongoing institutional racism.

I have experienced the created world's power to nurture, to teach, and to heal. So Indigenous wisdom about the interconnectedness of all things resonates deeply for me. When I hear Elders speak of the harm they feel when wildlife habitats are damaged, or they lose access to their ancestral lands, my heart aches. I feel deeply that such brokenness impacts all of us, Indigenous or not. As non-Indigenous people, though, we've long lacked this essential collective understanding and connection.

In workshops I facilitate about climate change, I invite people to think about a place where they feel deeply connected to nature. And everyone has that place. Sometimes, people have to reach back to their childhood to find it, but it is there. And maybe after this summer of mandatory staycations, these places are a little closer, and the memories fresher.

It is curious and profoundly revealing to me that a culture that so prided itself on busyness and bustling has so intuitively returned to more grounded (and grounding) activities. I described this earlier as going "back," but of course we don't do these things the way our grandparents did. Sourdough starters, jam recipes, and farm animals are found by putting a call out on Facebook. Vegetable gardens and chicken coops are installed in urban backyards with guidance from YouTube instructional videos and tips shared on Instagram.

It's not that what was once done exclusively in person is now done online. But when physical distance is a major priority, we're finding and creating community in new ways because we know in our being that community matters.

As we move forward, I think we would do well to lean into what this pandemic period has reminded us. There is nurturing in kneading bread, in breaking it, and in sharing it. There is wonder and warmth in the uncurling of a fresh new leaf as it emerges from a tiny seed—and nourishment from the fruits and vegetables that follow. There is gratitude in finding nesting boxes filled with fresh eggs day after day. There is love in the kiss of a warm breeze and the sparkle of the night sky. There is joy in experiencing all of this with the people you love and respect most. And, there is peace in sharing.

The brokenness of our societal structures and our economic systems mean that for many this is a time of tremendous hardship, insecurity, and loss. We need to continue to come together to work to right these wrongs. There is strength in standing in unity to support policies and programs that serve the common good. It is especially important that those of us with privilege, time, and resources seek to be in solidarity with equity-seeking groups. Through initiatives like the one that resulted in the Six Principles for a Just Recovery, For the Love of Creation, and Dignity for All, we can reimagine a better future for our neighbours, our children, and all our relations.

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

Justice for All Creation

By Dr. Kenneth Atsenhaienton Deer

Climate is fundamentally the environment of Mother Earth. How Mother Earth functions and nourishes us is the principle relationship that we have with her. Another term that we use instead of Mother Earth is Creation. We are all part of Creation. The plants and animals all play a part in Creation. They have a role to play in the harmony of Creation. We, as people, are also part of Creation and we have a role to play in Creation. We have a lifelong quest to find what our role is in Creation and to fulfil that role to maintain the harmony that keeps all of Creation in balance.

In our Traditions, we have invocations before our meetings or every morning called "The Words That Come Before All Others." It is also called the Opening Thanksgiving. In those words, we acknowledge all of Creation like the earth and rocks, the plants and medicines, the trees, the small animals, the larger four-legged animals, the birds and the fish, and other creatures in the waters. We acknowledge the four winds that bring the Thunderers, the rain, and lightning and move the clouds so we have sunshine. And they acknowledge the stars at night and the Grandmother Moon. And finally the Sun, for without it there would be no life. And then we say when we make decisions that we take all of Creation into account so that our decisions do not negatively impact Creation which is what sustains us. So when we talk about climate justice, we mean justice, fairness, and respect for all of Creation.

It is the lack of respect for Creation that has resulted in an imbalance in the environment which is causing the ice to melt, the seas to rise, the more violent storms, plants and animals to become extinct, and the air and waters to be polluted. Human beings have caused this to happen. Not the plants and animals. It has to be human beings that repair Mother Earth so it can continue to sustain all of life.

This environmental degradation has coincided with the dispossession and disempowerment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and elsewhere. The root of this is the Doctrine of Discovery. This Doctrine is based on the Papal Bulls which state that any European explorer can claim any land they discover for their King or Queen if the inhabitants of that land were not Christian. Hence, when explorers found no Christians in the Americas, they could claim the land for Spain, Portugal, France, or England. That is why all land in Canada is called Crown Land, not called the land of the Indigenous Peoples who were there already.

This Doctrine resulted in the religious and racial superiority of Europeans over the Indigenous Peoples in the Americas. This is the fundamental foundation of white supremacy and basis for the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Included in that colonization was patriarchy which was the domination of males over females in European society. This was contrary to the matrilineal customs of many Indigenous Peoples, in particular the Haudenosaunee, which is also called the Iroquois Confederacy or the Six Nations Confederacy, made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations. This patriarchy removed the voices of women in decision making. And it was Indigenous women who took care of the land and the gardens which sustained our people. That disempowerment resulted in the lack of respect for the land and its eventual degradation through thoughtless development.

When I first went to Geneva in 1987 to attend the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations when they were writing the first draft of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I was struck by the fact that some states and human rights experts were against Indigenous Peoples being called Peoples. They called us communities, groups, tribes, and populations, but not Peoples. Because Peoples, under international law, have a right to self-determination. And they were against Indigenous Peoples having self-determination by virtue of which they could freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.

Fundamentally, the land has to be returned to the true owners. It means that the underlying title of the land belongs to the Indigenous Peoples of that area and there must be a partnership between the settler state and Indigenous Peoples in the development of those lands. We can't turn back the clock, but we can make a better future. One that is just for everyone.

This article is an excerpt from Dr. Atsenhaienton's contribution to CPJ's paper *Restoring Indigenous Rights*, which draws on the invaluable insights of Indigenous activists, scholars, and experts to explore how implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can advance climate justice in Canada. Read the paper at **cpj.ca/restoring-indigenous-rights**.

Dr. Kenneth Atsenhaienton Deer currently serves as the Secretary of the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake and is a Member of the Haudenosaunee External Relations Committee.

Photo Credit: Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology/Flickr

When Poverty Talks, Who Listens?

By Sue Gywnn

I have had the opportunity to contribute to many consultations from the perspective of someone with a lived experience of poverty. Over the years, these consultations have taken on many forms and of course have varied in their success.

The most successful consultations are based on an understanding that lived-experience perspectives are critical to include. It's also important to remove as many barriers as possible for the person with lived experiences to be able to fully engage and participate as an equal.

I do this work though Poverty Talks!, a self-governing committee within Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC). I am also a member of the steering committee that guides Enough for All (E4A), the City of Calgary's community-driven poverty reduction strategy that aims to reduce Calgary's 2015 poverty level by 30 per cent by 2023.

Poverty Talks! and its members work to help E4A stay on track and keep the voice of people with lived experiences as central to the work being completed to achieve this goal. We conduct meaningful community engagement and use the information collected to steer the work being done by the groups in E4A.

To complete this engagement, Poverty Talks! and VCC make sure that before we set out to engage, we have a well thought out plan to remove barriers that could hinder community members from participating. This includes making sure that community members have meals and peer support at the event, that transit tickets to get to and from the event are provided, and that the spaces we use are physically accessible. But it's more than that. We also provide an honorarium whenever possible to compensate people for their time.

The event will have accomplished its true purpose if the information collected will be put to actual use. We want to ensure that we are not collecting more data for the sake of data collection. This is, unfortunately, a common occurrence for people with a lived experience of poverty.

This model of lived-experience engagement has opened the doors to many of the E4A groups to conduct their own meaningful engagements. It has also allowed for Poverty Talks! to widen its own reach in the world of providing lived-experience consultation to other organizations and groups including Citizens for Public Justice and the Dignity for All campaign.

The *Chew On This!* campaign embodies all of the best practices for meaningful engagement. PovertyTalks! has partnered with the *Chew On This!* campaign for the past few years. Through that partnership, we have been able to encourage our peers, people with lived poverty experience, to reach out in a whole new way. It gives people living in poverty the chance to take their voices straight to members of the government. This unfiltered correspondence is by far the most direct, meaningful and barrier-free way for people with lived poverty experience to send their messages.

The point of approaching community consultation with a focus on engaging people with lived experience in this way is to get the best outcome for both sides. The lived-experience community members are heard and contribute in a real and meaningful way. Meanwhile, if an organization listens, the valuable information that they collect can offer direction, guidance, and meaningful action.

On October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Dignity for All organized our annual *Chew on This!* campaign, mobilizing people from across Canada to call for an end to poverty. Community organizations, faith communities, and citizens called on the Government of Canada to uphold and protect the rights of people experiencing poverty and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression in Canada.

Sue Gywnn was one of 22 presenters at 12 *Chew on This!* webinars that Dignity for All, along with our partners at Leading in Colour, Poverty Talks!, and the Tamarack Institute, hosted in the week leading up to October 17. This webinar series dug deeper into issues, experiences, and recommendations related to poverty in Canada. To watch these webinars, go to **chewonthis.ca**.

Sue Gywnn has been a member of Poverty Talks! since 2016.

Canada Must Step Up Against the STCA

By Ibnat Islam

In 2015, Morgan attempted to make a refugee claim at the Canadian border. She was instead sent back to Clinton County Prison in central Pennsylvania on a claim of acquiring a fraudulent U.S. visa. She was not asked about her reasons for seeking asylum but was instead asked if she had any family in Canada.

Morgan is not her real name. She chose to remain anonymous when sharing her story with the Canadian Council for Refugees.

She spent 10 days in solitary confinement. She describes the prison as cold and the guards as "aggressive and gratuitously cruel."

Release from prison was not easy. Morgan, who didn't know English and only had the ability to call collect, had to fill out forms in English and find a lawyer. Immigration court set her bond at a staggering $10,000. She was finally released after 51 days, after her family found her a lawyer and raised money for her bond.

Morgan was never asked why she was seeking asylum.

The prison experience itself was not the only difficulty Morgan faced. She bonded with the other women there, who she had to leave when she was released. Of these women, Morgan says, "they prayed day and night not to be deported to their country... Alas, they remained stuck in a country that did not care about their rights... they had no one to pay their bond that could buy them more time or enable them to get competent lawyers."

This is the harm of the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA).

The STCA is an agreement between Canada and the U.S. which designates both countries as "safe" for asylum seekers, thereby requiring refugee claimants to stay in the first "safe" country they arrive in. It has long been a controversial topic in the world of migration politics and advocacy. From severe injuries to trauma and death, the agreement has put asylum seekers in dehumanizing, inhumane circumstances. The Canadian government has a responsibility to put a stop to these atrocities. Yet the reality of the government's stance is worrying.

In July 2020, the Canadian Federal Court ruled that STCA is "unconstitutional." The ruling has resulted in Ottawa-based advocates of refugee rights asking "to immediately and unilaterally suspend the agreement with the United States." This ruling, and the reaction it has incited throughout advocacy circles and human rights organizations, shows the importance of major changes being made with regards to the STCA through reformations and ultimate suspension. According to Article 10 of the agreement, Canada is easily able to terminate the agreement by "sending written notice to the U.S. government."

Amnesty International Canada, the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Canadian Council for Refugees have brought forward this court challenge. In July, they wrote a letter to the Canadian government, urging them to stop sending asylum seekers back to the U.S. and refrain from appealing the court ruling. They write that the ruling, "provides a crucial opportunity for the government to act decisively and live up to its responsibility to bring to an end years of grave violations of the rights of refugee claimants seeking protection."

The Canadian government, however, responded with an appeal. On August 21, 2020, Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety, released a statement confirming the appeal. He justifies it by saying the Canadian government found "factual and legal errors" in parts of the court's findings. He adds that the government is "committed to upholding a compassionate, fair and orderly refugee protection system. STCA remains a comprehensive vehicle to help accomplish that."

The Canadian government believes that the agreement is a process through which asylum seekers are able to seek refuge through the "compassionate, fair and orderly refugee protection system." Despite first-hand accounts of asylum experiences with the STCA, advocate and expert oppositions, and a Federal Court ruling binding these together with strong contestation, the Canadian government seems firm in its stance that the STCA should be upheld.

In 2017, Morgan crossed the border at Roxham Road, an unofficial border crossing south of Montréal. She is currently in Canada. Morgan's painful journey shows the government's negligence of asylum seekers' rights. Such a harrowing experience would not have occurred were it not for the government allowing the STCA to carry on as it does.

The government must prevent future instances of these experiences. Instead, they must prioritize the lives and rights of asylum seekers by rescinding the STCA and developing a system that values the lives and rights of asylum seekers.

This fall, CPJ partnered with STAND Canada, a youth-led advocacy organization, to release a report on the Safe Third Country Agreement and coordinate our joint advocacy efforts.

Ibnat Islam is a student at the University of Toronto and a policy researcher at STAND Canada.

Photo Credit: Daniel Case/Creative Commons

CPJ's New Board Chair: An Interview With Cherilyn Spraakman

By Brad Wassink

In the summer of 2020, CPJ's Board of Directors elected Cherilyn Spraakman as its new chair. Cherilyn was born and raised on a farm in Olds, Alberta, and she has lived in Newmarket, Ontario with her husband and family for the past 28 years. Seven years ago, she retired from a long career in physiotherapy and has now embraced social justice causes. Cherilyn spoke with Brad Wassink about her new role as CPJ's Board chair.

What types of social justice initiatives are you involved with locally?

At Holy Cross Lutheran I lead the Global Justice Team. We connect with KAIROS and CPJ campaigns and support Canadian Lutheran World Relief and a street outreach van.

We have a local KAIROS group that I help to coordinate it. I am also the co-regional representative for the KAIROS Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Region.

Since 2015 I have been on an advisory board for homelessness in York Region. This board, aligned with the United Way, has become very busy because of COVID-19 in helping to allocate millions of dollars from the federal government to address homelessness.

When did you start to make connections between your faith and social justice?

As I ponder this question, I think the first connection of faith and social justice is learned in Sunday School, from the stories of Jesus' care for the sick and the poor.

Working in health care gave me a grounding in social justice. As an older adult I can look back and connect health care and justice, which I would not have recognized as a new physiotherapy graduate. Faith and health care and justice definitely overlapped when I began working in cancer care and palliative care at the Newmarket hospital in 1999.

How did you become connected with CPJ?

I first heard about CPJ in 2013 when I attended a Toronto conference. Joe Gunn, then-executive director of CPJ, was a featured speaker. People at the conference spoke of him with deep respect. In 2018, through Lutheran connections, I was asked to apply to be on the Board of Directors of CPJ.

What excites you most about the work CPJ is doing?

What is exciting to me is the keen interest of university students in pursuing an internship or student placement at CPJ. There are always many applicants for the positions. These young people bring new perspectives and enthusiasm to their placement at CPJ. They benefit from the wise and experienced mentorship of CPJ staff. A recent example of the contribution by interns is *Restoring Indigenous Rights* by Keira Kang.

The second exciting piece is "The Intern Exchange" podcasts. There are 20 in the series, featuring interviews with past interns. They are distinctive in political podcasts, representing social justice advocacy and a positive message.

What do you think CPJ brings to Canadian faith communities?

At the local level, CPJ's campaign resources assist in enhancing the education and community outreach ministries of congregations. CPJ resources give guidance and structure to sometimes overwhelming societal issues.

CPJ specializes in its campaigns of climate justice, refugee rights, and the elimination of poverty. The research and advocacy tools developed by CPJ staff are available for regional and national faith organizations to use in their social justice causes.

You are taking over as CPJ's Board chair after a period of some transition, with a new executive director and a new house in downtown Ottawa. Where do you see CPJ going from here?

Yes, CPJ has had many changes in the past one and a half years, now compounded by staff needing to work from home because of COVID-19 restrictions.

I see CPJ as being well-positioned with our 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, approved in November 2019. This emphasized expanding individual and organization membership and starting chapters of CPJ in cities across Canada. The goal is for increased visibility of CPJ.

I look forward to the continued relationships with the range of organizations with which CPJ collaborates. The number is far reaching and enriches the campaigns. CPJ will continue to change and progress with influence from such groups as *Leading in Colour* and *The Tamarack Institute* with whom we are sharing webinars during *Chew on This!* 2020.

What will happen when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides? CPJ will need to continuously reassess what is happening in Canada. In planning for the future CPJ has signed-on to "A Just Recovery for All," a national campaign with nearly 600 signatories. We will continue to advocate for equal opportunities for *all* vulnerable citizens in Canada.

Brad Wassink is CPJ's communications coordinator.

Finding Hope in Uncertain Times

By Meaghan Fallak

We are living in unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the weaknesses and deep systemic inequalities of our institutions to become glaringly obvious. Systems such as capitalism and neoliberalism have placed the burden of this pandemic disproportionately onto already vulnerable communities. While the demands of this pandemic are great, there is a very clear role for grassroots activism in these difficult and uncertain times.

In her book, *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit writes, "Your opponents would love you to believe it's hopeless, that you have no power, that there's no reason to act. Hope is a gift you don't have to surrender, a power you don't have to throw away." Finding hope amidst a crisis can feel like an impossible task. However, hope doesn't mean denying difficult realities or believing everything is going to be okay. Solnit describes hope as locating itself in the idea that we do not know what is going to happen and finding in that uncertainty a spaciousness that provides room to act.

In these times we must try to embrace the uncertainty, because trying to control the future is a futile act. Solnit says it beautifully: "It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand." Find hope in the small victories, in living your life in a way that you can be proud of. We must remember that our victories may come in the form of subtle changes and not the grand shifts that we hope for, they may not happen in the timeline we imagine, we may not even see them ourselves, but we must count them anyway.

Many countries have implemented policies that deny elderly patients and those with chronic illnesses access to medical services. This leaves these communities to suffer and, in some cases, succumb to this virus because of ableist and ageist policies put in place by their governments. While this is a global pandemic, vulnerable communities are disproportionately affected by social distancing measures, barriers to health care, and economic challenges. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit has served to perpetuate these social inequalities in Canada by creating barriers to access for many vulnerable Canadians. There was no additional funding given to individuals unable to work due to disabilities or those relying on income assistance who receive a fraction of the $2,000 monthly that the government has set as the income floor for Canadians.

In addition, the pandemic has prompted a rise in racism and xenophobia. Violent attacks against Asian citizens and businesses have been reported across North America. These attacks are motivated by messages shared in the media and even by politicians such as Donald Trump who coined the term "China virus" to label COVID-19. This rhetoric of blaming Asian Americans for disease is not new in North America. Governments have been relying on these tactics to "other" these communities for centuries. This pandemic has shed light on how deeply racism and discrimination are ingrained in our societies.

So where does this leave us? Many of the responses to the pandemic are a result of political and economic systems that have left us vulnerable to situations such as the one we find ourselves in now. This is where grassroots activism comes in. Grassroots activism serves the purpose of creating alternatives to the systems we now have. We can start by imagining new ways to respond to this crisis, by speaking out against racism and xenophobia and by promoting equal access to health care and financial support.

Solnit writes, "The sleeping giant is one name for the public; when it wakes up, when we wake up we are no longer only the public: we are civil society, the superpower whose nonviolent means are sometimes, for a shining moment, more powerful than violence, more powerful than regimes and armies." Remember that we have already overcome so much and there will be much more to overcome. Remember that success may not look how you imagined. And remember to listen to that glimmer of hope inside yourself that tells you that you have the power to create change.

This article was originally published by The Awakening Project, a collection of Canadian university students exploring the connections between faith and social justice. Learn more at **awakeningproject.ca**.

Meaghan Fallak is an activist and recent graduate of the University of Winnipeg with a double-major in International Development and Conflict Resolution.