

the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

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ChewOnThis! 2018 Bigger and more important than ever

For the sixth year, CPJ and the Dignity for All campaign have marked October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, with our nationwide Chew on This! outreach and advocacy activities.

This year's Chew on This! was our largest to date, with over 100 groups participating across the country – in every province and territory.

Chew on This! activities bring together organizers from faith communities, community food and health centres, Indigenous friendship centres, schools and universities, and anti-poverty organizations in every region of the country. It provides an opportunity to raise awareness about poverty in Canada and to call for federal action.

Groups that participated shared messages of hope and care rooted in the reali-

ties of their communities. From the Memorial University School of Social Work in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, to the Qajuqturvik Food Centre in Iqaluit, Nunavut, to Alternatives North in Whitehorse, Yukon – organizers and volunteers expressed their deep concern for those struggling under the weight of poverty and their conviction that the federal government can do more.

Participants wrote messages for social media including, "Poverty is preventable," "Poverty is a violation of human rights," "We can end poverty," and "Without poverty, the world would be a fantastic place." These messages are deeply personal, justice filled and spirit-filled – such as the message "I'm calling for an end to poverty because...All people are breathed with the breath of God!"

Chew on This! continues to grow year-by-year into a truly nation-wide event. However, this year was unique.

Canada's First National Poverty Reduction Strategy

Dignity for All has advocated for the creation of a national anti-poverty plan for years, with the familiar Chew on This! tagline #WeNeedAPlan! On August 21, the federal government delivered. Minister Jean-Yves Duclos launched Opportunity for All, Canada's first national poverty reduction strategy. In anticipation of the release, Chew on This! was designed this year as a thank you to the federal government, but also as a continued challenge to do much more.

The federal government's national strategy takes some important steps forward, in particular in setting targets and timelines for poverty reduction (reduce poverty by 50 per cent of 2015 Market Basket Measure rate by 2030); setting an official poverty line (the Market Basket Meas-

...continued on page 3

In Review

CPJ On the Hill

In July, a CPJ delegation including **Karri Munn-Venn**, grade six student **Taya Lavictoire**, CPJ board member **Martha Wiebe**, and the Minister of Glebe-St. James United Church **Rev. Teresa Burnett-Cole**, delivered **over 2,500 Give it up for the Earth! postcards** to an enthusiastic **Catherine McKenna**, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.



In September CPJ's new public justice intern **Serisha Iyar** joined **Deb Mebude** and Mennonite Central Committee Ottawa's **Anna Vogt** and **Rebekah Sears** to meet with the co-chairs of the Citizenship and Immigration Committee NDP MP **Jenny Kwan** and Conservative MP **Michelle Rempel** to present over 1,500 petitions on refugee travel loans. These petitions will be tabled in the House of Commons. **Darlene O'Leary**, CPJ's socio-economic policy analyst, met with the co-chair of the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus and **Senator Kim Pate** to talk about the new Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. **Karri Munn-Venn** joined **Tony Clarke** to meet with NDP MP **Linda Duncan** to talk about a just transition to clean energy.

Poverty Trends 2018 Report

CPJ released *Poverty Trends 2018*, our annual report on poverty in Canada, a day ahead of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. It reports that a staggering 5.8 million people in Canada (or 16.8 per cent) live in poverty. The report uses several low-income indicators, including the Low-Income Measure (LIM), the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) and the Market Basket Measure (MBM). Each measure of low income provides dif-

ferent information on poverty using different methodologies to calculate rates of poverty. To read the report, visit: cpj.ca/poverty-trends-2018

CPJ In the Community



In August, **Joe Gunn** attended the 98th annual convention of the Catholic Women's League of Canada held in Winnipeg.

In September, **Karri Munn-Venn** attended the United Church of Canada's Indigenous Justice and Climate Justice Consultation in Squamish, BC and spoke at the Christian Schools Canada conference in Ottawa.

In October, **Serisha Iyar** gave a presentation on the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement at a workshop put on by Development & Peace. **Jim McIntyre** represented CPJ at the Sarnia Justice Film Festival in Sarnia, ON in honour of Thea DeGroot. **Joe Gunn** spoke about Canada's poverty strategy at a panel at St. Paul University. **Karri Munn-Venn** joined over 200 people from Canada's climate movement for two days of discussion at **ClimaCON** CPJ held a **Dignity for All Summit**, alongside Canada Without Poverty, which brought together experts to discuss policy solutions to end poverty in Canada following the release of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.



Staff Changes

CPJ is glad to welcome **Serisha Iyar**, our newest public justice intern, who will be working on refugee rights for one year. As the child of refugees, Serisha has been a lifelong activist. She is a recent graduate of McGill University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a minor in World Religions.

CPJ is sad to say goodbye to our Executive Director **Joe Gunn**, who has served CPJ faithfully since 2008. Joe will be going on to work at St. Paul University.



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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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...continued from page 1

ure); committing to legislate a Poverty Reduction Act; and promising to establish a National Advisory Council on Poverty.

However, the federal strategy does not commit to new programs and investments and does not offer an implementation plan for its roll-out. There is a great deal more needed for this strategy to be effective in meeting its own targets.

Chew on This! 2018 called for the strengthening of the poverty strategy, specifically for legislation of the Poverty Reduction Act this fall and further investments in the strategy in Budget 2019.

Poverty Trends 2018

As we see in CPJ's Poverty Trends 2018 report, 5.8 million people, or 1 in 6, live in poverty in Canada. It's clear that a strong strategy is needed to address this complex and challenging reality.

While poverty exists across regions and demographics in Canada, some groups continue to be highly vulnerable to poverty. Adults and children in single-parent households, which are largely female-led, continue to face high rates of poverty (36 per cent and 47.4 per cent respectively). Single working-age adults are also seeing high rates at 37.7 per cent. Vulnerability to poverty multiplies for those who are women, Indigenous, racialized and newcomers, and for persons with disabilities, including mental illness.

We know that poverty is not only a matter of income, though low-income is always a part of poverty. In addition to economic measures, it also involves social isolation, health and wellness, as well as spiritual vitality. Poverty is a complex reality that requires a comprehensive response, addressing structures of exclusion as well as injustice.

While some regions of the country are working hard to address poverty in their communities, a multifaceted response is needed that involves comprehensive policy approaches and investments. For many



years, municipalities and provinces and territories have initiated poverty reduction strategies, with varying rates of success (and some with more political commitment than others). Improvements come out of strategies that are legislated, have strong targets and timelines, establish accountability mechanisms, and are well funded.

In assessing Opportunity for All, the Poverty Trends 2018 report highlights the need for an implementation plan, follow through on the commitments to legislation, and increased policy and funding commitments.

Chew on This! organizers had our report in hand to back up the call for a stronger strategy.

Faith Leaders join in Chew on This!

This year's Chew on This! Was particularly special due to the participation of a faith delegation at our Ottawa location for a day of reflection, advocacy, and learning. The ecumenical delegation included Peter Noteboom, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, Reverend Richard Bott, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Rev. Canon Laurette Glasgow of the Anglican Church of Canada, and CPJ's Board President Pastor Jim Dekker.

Our day with the faith delegation began with a reflective moment at the "Homeless Jesus" statue in front of Christ Church Cathedral. It then involved participation in meetings with federal ministerial staff, and of course our Chew on This! event on Parliament Hill.

On Parliament Hill, we were joined by many volunteers, but also Members of Parliament and Senators. The deputy mayor of Ottawa read out a declaration of October 17 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in Ottawa. Also, Minister Jean-Yves Duclos joined the group and

talked extensively with participants about the importance of hope in the face of the deep hardship of poverty.

The day ended with a tour of a local United Church engaged in programming for people experiencing poverty, including an art mentoring studio, social enterprises for street engaged youth, a food bank, and a supper table. We were reminded of the importance of offering space for community and friendship, as well as support and nourishment.

Moving forward – the work continues

In reflecting on Chew on This! it is striking how important this action is to so many, and how groups across the country really take ownership and pride in their activities. It is an inspiring thing to be a part of a national event with so many who are dedicated to ending poverty and who are working so hard to ensure the dignity of all people is respected and recognized.

With the success of Chew on This! 2018, CPJ and the Dignity for All campaign have heard a strong call to continue pushing for a better strategy. As we move into 2019, a federal election year, the need to strengthen and implement the strategy is more urgent than ever. Waiting until another government mandate risks weakening or losing some of the commitments that have not yet been implemented.

We have a plan to build on, and an amazing movement to push federal action forward. The work continues to reach our ultimate goal – an end to poverty in Canada.



Darlene O'Leary is CPJ's socio-economic policy analyst





Irregular vs. Illegal – Why Language Matters

The ‘immigrant story’ has long been the basis on which Canadians unite to embrace multiculturalism. This narrative presents the idea that families from across the world seek out the True North with hopes of a better future for themselves and their children, a future that is contingent on reaching safety. Yet, the means through which this story of migration becomes fulfilled is often forgotten.

In 2015, a strong sense of enthusiasm existed among Canadians. The federal government seemed to be playing a leading role on the international stage by welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada. However, as refugees continued to move to the forefront of the news, this enthusiasm was soon followed by an increase in anti-immigration ideology, which has revolved around refugees and the modes through which they seek asylum.

This shifting narrative indicates that there is a clear misinterpretation of both domestic and international law among Canadians. It also highlights targeted efforts to frame language around refugees to advance specific ideological perspectives.

And so, there exists today a clash between terminology that accurately represents the arrival of refugee claimants in Canada and rhetoric that does not. Whether it be politicians, journalists, or everyday Canadians, there has been an increased number of people describing those who cross into Canada between ports of entry as “illegal border crossers.”

The use of the term “illegal” is entirely inaccurate. Crossing a state border to make a refugee claim is legal in accordance with the United Nations Refugee Convention and the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Pro-

tection Act. To suggest that refugee claimants are taking part in some sort of unlawful activity is plainly untrue. This terminology has predominantly been used to describe refugees coming to Canada through the United States and has been advanced in large part due to ongoing challenges with the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA).

The STCA is a policy that requires refugee claimants to make a claim within the first safe country in which they arrive. This means the United States has been marked as a country where refugees are protected and, therefore, it is deemed a safe country for refugees. Because of this policy, those in search of protection who no longer feel they are safe in the United States are forced to cross the border irregularly to make their refugee claim in Canada.

Rescinding the STCA would not only remove unnecessary barriers that refugee claimants face, but would also eliminate the space for language that intends to vilify refugees. When public figures and every day Canadians choose to forego the use of the accurate term “irregular” in favour of “illegal,” they are responsible for contributing to a culture of fear and hatred towards refugees by insinuating that they are criminals. These terms are not interchangeable and have entirely separate impacts on perception.

It is worth noting, too, that the shift from enthusiasm to disapproval of refugees has also been associated with refugee claimants’ countries of origin. While there was a level of empathy and acceptance for those fleeing violence in Syria in 2015, the more recent wave of inland claimants from Nigeria and Haiti has received a less than a warm welcome.

Anti-Black racism has been ever-pres-

ent in Canadian culture. Now, it has structurally enveloped itself around the concept of immigration through the lens of “the other.” Undermining the humanity of refugees serves to promote racist, anti-immigrant ideology, particularly towards Black refugees. It also wrongly suggests that refugees exist as fundamental threats to the security of Canadians.

The fact remains that refugees are persecuted people in need of assistance – they have survived unimaginable circumstances of danger and have had no choice but to leave their home countries.

Helping to create a narrative that echoes the realities refugees face, rather than one that relies heavily on false assumptions, is key in actively resisting a culture of fear-mongering and discrimination. The language used to portray these individuals and their circumstances is vital to shaping the way Canadians and governments respond to global migration.

This is bigger than semantics. Language matters.

For more information on the STCA, read CPJ’s *Reclaiming Protection* report at cpj.ca/project



Serisha Iyar is CPJ’s public justice intern on refugee rights.



Health, Dignity, and Dollars: Poverty Costs Canada

Poverty costs Canadians our health, our dignity, and our dollars. The Federal government's newly announced National Housing Strategy and Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy both commit Canada to reduce poverty and housing need by 50 per cent over the next one to two decades.

Yet keeping the other 50 per cent of people in poverty and with inadequate housing will continue to drain our pocket-books. When we crunch the numbers, there is a good business case to be made that being more ambitious in addressing poverty simply makes economic sense. This goes hand-in-hand with the human rights-based approach to confronting poverty.



In 2014, our organization Upstream calculated the cost of poverty to the economy of Saskatchewan to be \$3.8 Billion per year. Understanding the cost of poverty involves measuring the additional health care, criminal justice, and social spending that are invested in the lives of people living in poverty. Costs also include the tax revenue and GDP contributions that are lost because of social policies that keep people in poverty rather than capable of fully contributing to Canada's economy.

The tradition of costing poverty in Canada originates with Nathan Laurie. In 2008, Laurie calculated Ontario's annual cost of poverty to be between \$10-13 Billion, a figure representing as much as 16 per cent of the Ontario government's annual budget at the time. In British Columbia, the 2011 numbers were similar. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimated the cost to be up to \$9 Billion of BC's provincial economy.

Poverty costs because it makes lives harder, less healthy, and more miserable for those living in poverty. This is reflected in the statistics on poverty within a population. Income statistics group Canadians into five income groups, from lowest to highest, known as the income quintiles. According to Canada's death database, Saskatchewan children born into areas with the most poverty (having the most people from the lowest income quintile) start out with 7.5 fewer years of life expectancy than children born into Saskatchewan's richest neighbourhoods.

Similarly, national life expectancy at age 18 is 6.8 years less for the lowest income group compared to the richest. People living in poverty have 2.3 fewer years of life expectancy than their neighbours who are in the second income quintile.

According to global public health expert Michael Marmot, this trend plays out globally, with the least deprived afforded more years before they acquire a chronic disease or disability. In other words, those experiencing poverty have shorter life expectancies and more health problems earlier in life than people that are more wealthy. Every income quintile has more healthy years to live. This is called the Marmot curve. Lower life expectancies and related illnesses make up additional health care costs associated with poverty. Governments can bend this curve the right way with smart policy.

Poverty also costs the well-being and enjoyment of the years that people do have. Poverty makes healthy years more difficult and stressful. For example, the cycle of poverty and state surveillance of people on welfare create a climate of stress that attacks their dignity. Marmot, in his Whitehall study, showed that people can become sick when they are in stressful situations where they lack control or autonomy. Provinces spend money on denying people coverage and policing recipients for welfare fraud. This creates a climate of stress for those on social assistance that makes their health worse.

This money could be put to better use. Governments can choose to implement rights-based policies that lessen the stress and increase the dignity of those currently living in poverty.

With this in mind, over the next year, we at Upstream will be working on a project researching the costs of poverty on all of Canada since the year 2000. We are making an educated guess that addressing poverty would mean less crime, better health, less uncontrolled stress, and more dignity for all Canadians. We will be working alongside CPJ to ask the Federal Government to continue creating more meaningful and comprehensive plans to get all people in Canada out of poverty.

It's time we stop letting poverty cost us health, dignity, and dollars.



Alex Paterson is the Policy and Research Manager at Upstream.



Hopeful Citizenship in a Time of Crisis

Have you ever had the experience, after a particularly challenging life event, of realizing that all this time, God was trying to get your attention? It often starts with a gentle tap on the shoulder, a minor upset or inconvenience, and then it grows. A nudge, maybe a shove, and then something knocks you flat.

In my experience, each event came with a series of messages: “you’ve got this,” “you’re strong,” and, “you’re not alone.” Unfortunately, it was only after a major health crisis that I was sufficiently shaken to be open to these reassurances. My life, and my view of the world changed in that moment.

In early October 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a much-anticipated report about the implications of allowing global temperatures to rise 1.5 C over pre-industrial levels.

Reports don’t usually cause society to sit up and take notice. Might this one be different?

In recent years we’ve seen an increase in the frequency and severity of wildfires, floods, and droughts. Famine and natural resource wars have contributed to increases in global migration. Crisis after crisis after crisis. Yet none have jolted the global community sufficiently to respond appropriately to the world’s changing climate.

How could this report provide the push we need?

By stating in no uncertain terms, that the global community has just 12 years to dramatically change course and avoid serious climate consequences.

Specifically, it says, “limiting global warming to 1.5 C ... require[s] rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure, and industrial systems... [and] can only be achieved if global

CO2 emissions start to decline well before 2030.”

We’ve already hit an average global temperature increase of 1 C, and are experiencing more intense storms, species loss, and rising seas as a result. “Climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5 C and increase further with 2 C.”

Let’s be clear, this isn’t a fringe perspective. This IPCC report was commissioned by the UN, produced by over 90 climate scientists from 40 countries, and consolidates more than 6,000 scientific references. This is a global scientific consensus.

Now, are you ready for the good news?

We know what needs to be done, and we have the means to make it happen.

The day the IPCC report was released, the Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded to William Nordhaus for his work demonstrating the effectiveness of carbon pricing. In brief, he says, “the pricing of carbon achieves four objectives: it sends signals to consumers about which goods and services are more carbon-intensive; it sends signals to producers about which activities are most carbon-intensive (such as coal burning) and which are less carbon-intensive (like solar or wind); it sends signals to propel innovation to find new, affordable alternatives; and finally, pricing is the best means to convey these signals within well-functioning markets.”

It is also good news, then, that there will be a price on carbon across Canada effective Jan. 1, 2019. This includes a federally-imposed pricing arrangement in the four provinces – Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and New Brunswick – that have not developed their own plans (or have canceled the plans of previous provincial governments).

Still, the urgency of the situation requires that we use all of the tools available. Pricing and regulation must be combined to set Canada on a solid path towards decarbonization by 2050.

Over the last few years, federal governments have stumbled and taken some serious mis-steps. Now, the current government has made some symbolic progress by introducing the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, encouraging provincial action towards the phase-out of coal-fired electricity, and by finally imposing a carbon price.

Now, the IPCC has signaled the scientific imperative of transformational climate action. With a federal election less than a year away, we must make it abundantly clear that we expect more.

First, that the federal government follow-through on commitments and, at the very least, implement measures that will enable us to meet Canada’s (meagre) goal of reducing emissions 30 per cent of 2005 levels by 2030. Then, it must increase national ambition to a level consistent with no more than 1.5 C over pre-industrial levels (as outlined by the IPCC).

Second, as a central plank in the plan to reach this new target, they must invest in a just transition towards a decarbonized economy. This includes action on the federal carbon pricing commitment, follow-through on the longstanding commitment to end subsidies to the fossil fuel sector, and a reallocation of funds towards renewable energy and efficiency measures.

The IPCC has issued a clear and urgent call to action.

It shouldn’t take another major crisis for us to realize we need to change.

We know what needs to be done, and we have the means to make it happen.



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



A Decade of Justice

Executive Director Joe Gunn Reflects on Tenure at CPJ | Interview by Deborah Mebude

Citizens for Public Justice is grateful for the leadership of Executive Director Joe Gunn, who has served CPJ since 2008. Joe's passion for public justice has propelled CPJ to where it is today, establishing the organization as a leader on faith and public policy in Canada. Joe will be finishing his tenure of service on February 1, 2019. He sat down with CPJ's Communications Coordinator to reflect on the last 10 years.

Q: What brought you to CPJ back in 2008?

A: I had known about CPJ for its work in Toronto. When I was invited to apply for the job, I was told the organization was looking at big change - Moving to Ottawa after more than 40 years in Toronto and trying to expand the reach of the organization. I could see there was a need in Canada to have faith communities have an impact in federal policies. CPJ seemed poised to do that.

Q: In your view, what does CPJ uniquely bring to Canada's public policy landscape?

A: CPJ takes faith and politics seriously without taking them down the partisan road. I think Canadian society needs that. There's no other membership organization like it in the faith sphere. People choose to be members. The Board are members. Participants are members. It includes Protestants and Catholics, and it's focused nationally.

Q: How do CPJ members contribute to public justice in Canada?

A: I think it's most evident in the campaigns that CPJ does. ChewOnThis!, Give It Up for the Earth, petitions we've had on refugee issues. Staff provide background research in palatable formats for people to be able to raise issues. CPJ members use that material - briefs, reports, election bulletins - in their local contexts. They drive the change.

Q: In what ways has CPJ's work evolved under your leadership?

A: Over the past 10 years, CPJ has changed its research and program focus. The concern with poverty remains the same, though expanded. In 2009, we launched the Dignity for All Campaign (alongside Canada Without Poverty), which resulted this year in the launch of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. CPJ's work on ecological justice was a relatively new focus for the organization, [but] doing justice as people of faith demanded it. Our definition of public justice had to be expanded. Our third area of expertise had been lost due to lack of funding, but especially with huge numbers of refugees arriving, there was a need to address

not just settlement, which churches were doing, but also policy. We looked at gaps in what we could do and what wasn't being done and then moved into policy areas in new ways.

Q: Has the fight for public justice changed over the last decade?

A: The need for CPJ has not changed, but the capacity for faith communities definitely has. There's been a significant decrease over the last decade in the number of practicing Christians in Canada. The engagement of churches is less. Where churches do engage, there's been a defensive stance by some. Christian interventions are often "being against", rarely advocating for.

Q: What do you believe is the future of CPJ and ecumenical justice work in general?

A: In the future, to have an impact, we'll have to work in coalition. No one faith tradition will be able to engineer social change by itself. That signals a whole new maturity in reaching across our theological differences. Increasingly, work for change will have to include people of faith who are not Christian and people of no-faith. We can't be afraid to work with others.

Q: Leading up to the next federal election, what policy issues should Canadian Christians be paying attention to?

A: I would so like to see Christians in the lead for advocacy for the environment - seeing it as a Christian responsibility, and a necessity for governments to take action. It's huge. It will affect immigration, our trade relations, our industrial development, and how we produce and use carbon. The science of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report tells us we have 12 years. Generations to come will view any organization that refuses to take that seriously as irrelevant. Failure for faith communities to act on ecological justice dooms us.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I am going to remain a member of CPJ. A proud member. But it's a good time to move on after a decade of service and allow new leaders to flourish. I thank everyone for the opportunity, and the great friendships and work relationships I've learned so much from.

Deborah Mebude is CPJ's communications coordinator.





The Vulnerable Voices

One of the astounding things about the Bible is the way that it repeatedly gives voice to those whose stories are normally ignored, the marginalized. These stories tell us who our God is, who we are called to be, and what true healing looks like.

One of those pivotal stories is that of Hagar, Sarah's slave, given to Abraham so that she could bear a child by proxy. Hagar, a slave woman, was used for sex, beaten, and then sent away into the desert, thirsty and hungry. Hagar cried out to God. She lived because she saw God, the God who hears the cry of the slave (see Genesis 16 and 21 for the whole story).

Of course, we aren't surprised, for this is the God who rescued the Israelites from Egypt and tells us to proclaim freedom for the oppressed. Who is this God? The one who hears the cry of the slave and sets them free. Who are we called to be? The ones who image this slave-freeing God by setting free the oppressed.

Two other pivotal stories revolve around women named Tamar. One is denied her right to a husband after her first two husbands die. Dressed like a prostitute, she seduces her father-in-law, gets pregnant, and avoids being burned to death when he realizes that the sin was his (which was, interestingly, not using a prostitute, but denying Tamar of her rights; see Genesis 38). The other story describes the rape of another Tamar, the daughter of King David. When King David hears of this, he does nothing (2 Samuel 13). These stories highlight the violence done to women throughout the biblical narrative and indeed throughout history. We sense the desperation of the first Tamar and are told of the devastation of Tamar after her rape.

In the New Testament, however, we see a shift. Women are no longer victims, but partners in the proclamation of the gospel. The tide has turned, their voices now heard.

So, what do these stories tell us about our God? That our God works through and on behalf of the most vulnerable. And what do they tell us about who we are? That we are called, with Judah, to acknowledge the righteousness of the vulnerable. We are called to look for justice. We are, with Paul, called to work alongside the vulnerable in

announcing redemption.

A third story is that of Ruth. This story is one of hospitality given by the detested enemy people, the Moabites, to Naomi and her husband, who had come as refugees to Moab. It is the story of one of those Moabites, now a refugee herself, arriving in Israel. And it is the story of Boaz recognizing that Ruth was righteous for all she had done for Naomi. This is the story of the enemy becoming family, of deeply ingrained hatred being overcome, of welcome for the stranger. It is a story of the stranger demonstrating the welcome that God and Jesus call us to throughout the Biblical story.

Who is God in this story? The one who loves the stranger, who gives them food and clothing. And how do we image this God? By welcoming the stranger as God has welcomed us.

The last story is that of Naboth, whose ancestral inheritance, his land, was desired by the King. When the Queen realized this, she had Naboth framed and killed so that the king could take possession of his land (1 Kings 21). This story is all too familiar. It's the story of the ancestral inheritance taken by the powerful, by the colonizers.

Who is our God? The one who brings judgement on those who take the land of another. Who are we? We are the ones called to give it back.

These are the stories our culture would like to keep hidden. They are the stories of those suffering from economic oppression (the slaves), violence (the women), exclusion (the stranger) and land loss (Indigenous peoples). But these stories are also about those who dare to name the pain, and so dare to hope for God's newness. When we hear their voices, we too can glimpse the kingdom.

Sylvia C. Keesmaat's forthcoming book (with Brian Walsh) is entitled: *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*.

Sylvia C. Keesmaat is Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies at the Toronto School of Theology.

