

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Winter 2014

Pub. Mail Agreement no: 40022119

{ Help us to discover hope.

God of grace and of creativity,

We know that when you created you saw that everything was good,  
Yet there are times when we don't see things in the same way.  
When we think that things cannot improve because they never have;  
When we only know how to be disappointed and forget how to hope.

**Help us as we struggle.**

Open our eyes to see change; open our ears to hear things new;  
To see the little steps we take and celebrate.

As we see our same struggles in the lives of others and want to help;  
As we work toward health and happiness, recovery and reconciliation.

**Help us to discover hope.**

## In Review

### The Burden of Poverty Report

On October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, CPJ released our latest report on poverty in Canada. "The Burden of Poverty: A snapshot of poverty across Canada" measures the unequal impact of poverty on certain groups such as new immigrants and families led by single mothers. It includes poverty data on 32 communities across Canada that supported the *Dignity for All Campaign's* Chew on This! events. You can read the full report at [www.cpj.ca/burden-of-poverty](http://www.cpj.ca/burden-of-poverty).

### CPJ on the Hill

CPJ and Canada Without Poverty were on Parliament Hill on October 17 for Chew on This! We were joined by Liberal MPP **Yasir Naqvi**, Ottawa Mayor **Jim Watson**, and NDP MP **Paul Dewar**.



During the shooting on Parliament Hill on October 22, two CPJ staff members were present on the Hill for a meeting with MPs and Senators. We thank God that Policy Analyst **Janelle Vandergriff** and Public Justice Intern **Kathryn Teeluck** returned home safe and sound that night after being locked down for several hours.

On October 27, **Joe Gunn** joined Climate Action Network Canada, of which CPJ is a member, along with MPs and Senators from all parties for a celebration of its 25th anniversary.

### CPJ on the Road

On October 1 and 2, **Janelle** was in Toronto to participate in meetings with Campaign 2000, a campaign dedicated to eliminating child poverty in Canada.

At the invitation of the Diocesan Green Group, **Karri Munn-Venn** traveled to Kingston, ON on October 17 to lead a *Living Ecological Justice* workshop as part of the Anglican Diocese of Ontario 2014 Synod.

On October 18, at the Christian Reformed Church Day of Encouragement in Ancaster, ON, **Joe** led a workshop on *Living Ecological Justice*.

**Joe** was in Edmonton on October 22 and 23 to speak to the Western Conference of Social Justice Animators about CPJ's work on ecological justice.

**Janelle** visited a Toronto District Christian High School class on November 4 to discuss creation care.



On November 6 in Scarborough, ON, **Joe** addressed 50 members of the Canadian Religious Conference's Network on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. He reflected on CPJ's work on a Living Wage.

### Pre-Budget Submission

In August, CPJ submitted our annual pre-budget brief, entitled "Budgeting for the Common Good," to the House of Commons Finance Committee. In it, we proposed an enhancement of the Working Income Tax Benefit, the implementation of oil and gas regulations, and the reversal of tax structures that work against the common good of all people in Canada.



### Welcome to CPJ!

CPJ is very excited to welcome **Kathryn Teeluck** as our new Public Justice Intern. Kathryn will be working with our policy team on poverty and refugee issues.

## Editor's Note

We live in troubled times. Every day there is more news of disease, strife, and war from across the world.

We were recently reminded that these atrocities do not stop at our border. October 22 was a horrible, strange, and uncertain day for those who work in downtown Ottawa and, indeed, for all people across Canada. On the cover of this edition, you will see an excerpt of a prayer by Richard Schwass (from *Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty*). This was a source of comfort for CPJ staff in the days after the shooting on Parliament Hill.

But we face many other immense challenges in Canada. In this edition, Michael Cooke (p. 5) tells us about our child poverty rate, which remains too high for a wealthy nation like Canada. Joe Gunn (p. 6) notes that the changing climate threatens God's creation and that time is running out. Ashley Chapman (p. 4) reports on how the shameful treatment of refugees is making it much more difficult for those who have come to Canada to seek a better life.

The problems we face require both personal and systematic changes. As a way forward, Kathy Vandergriff (p. 10) and Thomas Coldwell (p. 11) remind us about the importance of political engagement.

Yet in this Advent season, we know that our hope is ultimately found in Christ. Brian Walsh (p. 12) suggests that his presence brings about an alternative reality where our love of neighbour trumps our own desires.

This is what CPJ exists to do. Not only to shine a light on injustices in Canada, but also to work for and declare the good we see in the world.

We are grateful that you have joined us in this pursuit of justice in Canada.

**Brad Wassink**



# Letters to the Editor

## A Response to “Jobs, Training, and the Common Good” - *the Catalyst*, Summer 2014

It is very true that Canadian workers need the latest training in workplace skills to compete in today’s global economy. However the best skills training in the world is insufficient to protect the livelihoods of Canadian workers from corporations willing to abandon employees for the sake of lower wages in other jurisdictions.

In February 2012, the Toronto Star reported, “American industrial giant Caterpillar is closing its locomotive plant in London (Ontario) and putting 460 workers out of their jobs just over a month after they were locked out for rejecting pay cuts of up to 50 per cent.” In that same month, the Toronto Star also reported, “WestJet employees vote 91 per cent in favour of launching a regional Canadian airline that could launch as early as 2013.”



The executives of Caterpillar and other corporations will not base the opening and closing of plants solely on the skills of workers. These decisions are driven by the dictates of the company shareholders. Too often, where the company shareholders do not include workers or their representatives, the employers’ decisions will often give inadequate consideration to the livelihoods of its workers, regardless of skill levels.

Corporate decision-making processes that compare the cost of wages versus

the cost of lower wages plus training costs will often close plants without regard for the well-being of current employees. Caterpillar’s executives are not unique in this world. WestJet management consults their employees in the decision-making process because WestJet employees own shares in the company.

Canadian workers and their unions need to consider including the acquisition of company shares in their contract negotiations. Why should blue collar workers be any different from white collar workers and executives when it comes to aligning their livelihoods with the decision-making procedures and priorities of their companies? Workers of all hues deserve to be included in the ownership and decision-making structures and procedures of their companies.

Canadian workers and their families need to pressure Canadian politicians to adopt policies that encourage companies to increase worker ownership of shares. The future livelihoods of Canadian workers, their families, and their descendants is too important to risk solely on skills acquisition. Companies whose workers are invested in the profitability of those companies will work to develop their skills and keep their companies working for the common good and a shared future.

**Bert Adema**  
Regina, SK

### Refugee Health Care

I want to state how appreciative I was to read the short document by Dr. Doug Gruner regarding the issue of refugee health care. It clearly exposes how the government’s small concern for the plight of the refugee only applies when there is a perceived threat to public safety. It is but a little step down the path to closing our borders to whole populations and countries, thereby encouraging a more rapid spread of Ebola by discouraging disclosure. Once again supposedly for greater public safety.

**Ken Forster**  
Ottawa, ON

### We want to hear from you!

Submit your letters to Brad Wassink at [brad@cpj.ca](mailto:brad@cpj.ca) or 309 Cooper Street, #501, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0G5.



### Citizens for Public Justice

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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 stewardship.

**CPJ annual membership fee**  
includes *the Catalyst*:  
\$50 / \$25 (low-income)

Winter 2014 (Volume 37, Number 3)  
ISSN 0824-2062  
Agreement no. 40022119  
Editor: Brad Wassink

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

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

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

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# Churches Fear Future of Refugee Sponsorship

By Ashley Chapman

The government has been in hot water lately over its refugee policies. First for the underwhelming response to refugees fleeing Syria, and then for the refugee health care cuts which were deemed “cruel and unusual” by the Federal Court. Everyone from doctors to lawyers to frontline refugee service providers have spoken out. And now the government faces another set of critics: churches.

During my time at CPJ, I documented the negative impact of recent policy changes on churches and church-connected groups in our report, “Private Sponsorship and Public Policy.” Church-connected sponsorship groups comprise about 72 per cent of Sponsorship Agreement Holders in Canada, and they were also instrumental in launching the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program. In 1978, Mennonite Central Committee worked with the government to negotiate and draft the first formal sponsorship agreement, and since then, more than 200,000 refugees have been privately resettled.

CPJ’s report, “Private Sponsorship and Public Policy: Political barriers to church-connected refugee resettlement in Canada,” has been featured in the *Toronto Star*, *The Huffington Post* and *The Banner*. It is available online at [www.cpj.ca/refugee-report](http://www.cpj.ca/refugee-report).

But the program does not just benefit those who find refuge in Canada. It can also be quite politically expedient. For example, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) Minister Chris Alexander was quick to announce that Canada would resettle 1,300 Syrian refugees by the end of 2014. The government unilaterally delegated the responsibility to resettle 1,100 of these refugees to private sponsors and their volunteer fundraisers. There has been plenty of debate since about whether that number is a sufficient response and whether those refugees are actually on track to arrive in Canada.

This announcement came as a total surprise to at least some in the private sponsorship community. A representative from one national-level church group reported hearing the news on the radio. “It was such a slap in the face,” they said, “We didn’t even find out before the Canadian public.”

There have also been long wait times and processing delays, which can leave both the sponsoring congregation and the refugee family in limbo for several years. One sponsoring group referenced in the report submitted their sponsorship application in 2011, heard that the refugee family had been interviewed in 2012, but have received no updates in the two years since. As a result, the funds raised to support the family of eight are frozen in an account and the group of volunteer sponsors is uncertain whether they will sponsor again in the future.

Especially in non-family-linked cases, community engagement is vital to the private sponsorship program. With the emotional and financial commitments needed to spend a year as the support network for a newcomer family, the impact on momen-



tum for a sponsoring group is immense when a case goes years without movement.

Ninety-two per cent of surveyed churches and church-connected private sponsorship groups expressed concern about the government’s lack of consultation with Sponsorship Agreement Holders. Yet several respondents were careful to differentiate between the departmental and ministerial sides of CIC, indicating that their frustration is with the Minister’s office, not the civil servants who they regularly work with.

The need for a working relationship with CIC places Sponsorship Agreement Holders in a difficult position, especially when many feel that aspects of the sponsorship program are being co-opted for political—not humanitarian—purposes. But representatives from church-connected groups across Canada report being ignored or chastised when they have tried to raise their concerns with CIC quietly or through internal channels.

It’s a classic Catch-22 scenario. Some groups are hesitant to stay silent about the status quo because they believe that current policy shifts are undermining the core of the private sponsorship program and therefore endangering the safety of refugees. Meanwhile, other groups are equally hesitant to raise their concerns publicly for fear that their role as private sponsors—and therefore their ability to help refugees—will be jeopardized.

It seems that Sponsorship Agreement Holders are getting more and more used to questionable promises, but are still unsure of how to most effectively call for change within the program. With the safety of thousands of refugees at stake each year, they have a case that should demand the government’s attention.



Ashley Chapman was the 2013-2014 Public Justice Intern with Citizens for Public Justice. A similar version of this article appeared in *Embassy News*.



# Canada's Invisible Citizens

By Michael Cooke

June Callwood called children "Canada's invisible citizens." In the last years of her life, she worked tirelessly and passionately to bring an end to child poverty in Canada. She believed that "to them we cannot answer 'Tomorrow.' Their name is 'Today.'"

## A Broken Promise

In November 1989, the members of the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution promising to bring an end to child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. In 2009, they renewed that promise.

Yet today, one child in seven still live in poverty and among our Indigenous children, the numbers rise to a shocking four in ten. In fact, more children and their families lived in poverty in 2011 than in 1989. This is stark and disturbing evidence that we have not kept our promise to our children.

These facts inspired *Keep The Promise*, a two-year campaign that is using the 25th anniversary of the unanimous motion as a platform to re-ignite a public commitment to that 1989 promise. The campaign is designed with children and for children so they can learn about the impact of child poverty and give voice to their ideas and solutions to a problem that will have a profound impact on their future.

Citizens for Public Justice is a lead partner in *Keep The Promise* along with Campaign 2000, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Canada Without Poverty, First Nations' Child and Family Caring Society, Toronto Children's Aid Society, and Family Service Toronto. Learn more about the campaign at [www.keepthepromise.ca](http://www.keepthepromise.ca).

*Keep the Promise* is establishing programs in schools across the country that will involve children, their teachers, and their parents in projects to examine and address child poverty in their communities. On November 18 and 19, 2014, children from across the country participated in a national student summit in Ottawa. The summit included a town hall, meetings with MPs, and a range of educational activities. It enabled participants to share their experiences and projects and to decide what they can do to ensure that child poverty is part of the debate leading up to the 2015 federal election.

## Poverty is Not Inevitable

Canada is among the richest countries in the world and yet child poverty is at an epidemic level here. Research demonstrates unequivocally that low-income children experience

multiple barriers to success: a lack of safe and adequate housing, increased risk of hunger, low participation in extra-curricular activities, compromised readiness to learn, poor educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities.

Despite the commonly held belief that the poor will always be with us, poverty is not inevitable. Child poverty rates within developed nations ranges from a low of 5 per cent in Iceland and Finland to a high of over 23 per cent in the United States and Romania. Governments in Canada have made progress in reducing poverty in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and some parts of Ontario.



Allowing children to live in poverty is wrong. It puts them at a learning disadvantage before kindergarten starts. Some grade 4 and 5 students describe poverty this way: "feeling ashamed when my dad can't get a job," "pretending that you forgot your lunch," "being afraid to tell your Mom you need gym shoes," and "not getting to go on school trips." Poverty burdens children with complex feelings of inadequacy and taints their attitude toward learning. Ultimately, poverty affects a child's brain. And a feeling of insecurity is passed on through generations.

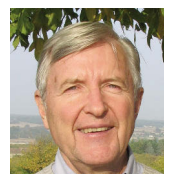
## How to Keep the Promise

*Keep The Promise* will give voice to Canada's children. Participants will spend this year learning about child poverty in their communities. They will discuss the root causes and develop their ideas about what needs to be done. They will remind the adults they meet of the 1989 promise not yet fulfilled. And they will ask them what they intend to do. They will press for clear, concrete answers as only children can do.

*Keep The Promise* kids will ask that we commit to a federal action plan to eradicate poverty in consultation with provincial and territorial governments – a plan that includes an enhanced child benefit for low-income families, a strategy for affordable housing, and income security for all.

We have the fiscal capacity to act. The projected \$10 billion surplus by 2018-19 shows that money is not lacking. What may be lacking is the willingness to act on the evidence. There is no better investment than to spend this on our children.

Michael Cooke has five children and three grandchildren. He is also the President of the Carold Institute, the former Vice President Academic at George Brown College, and the Project Coordinator for *Keep The Promise*.



# 2015: A Big Year for the Climate

By Joe Gunn

Canada is failing.

In October, the federal Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development, Julie Gelfand, released a scathing report on our government's environmental record. If it were a report card, Canada would certainly receive a failing grade and be sent to the Principal's Office for the severe offense of breaking our word.

Concerning climate change, the Commissioner noted that Canada's emissions are growing, not falling, and the 2020 targets agreed to under the 2009 Copenhagen Accord will be missed.

Why? Because, as the Commissioner herself said, "Environment Canada lacks...an effective planning process for how the federal government will contribute to achieving [our climate] targets."

First, Canada's coal-fired electricity regulations, which come into effect in 2015, will only deliver half of Ottawa's promised reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This is because they were weaker than needed and allow old generating plants to extend their lifespans.

Second, regulations on the oil and gas industry, promised for years by Conservative Environment Ministers, have been "repeatedly delayed."

Finally, Ottawa has not developed GHG reduction plans with the provinces and territories, in spite of the fact that provincial actions account for 63 per cent of all projected emission reductions in Canada by 2020. Ontario's phase out of coal-fired electricity is one notable example.

As the Commissioner summarizes, "Current federal measures will have little effect on emissions by 2020." Canada is failing. And we are paying for the failure.

Citizens for Public Justice prepared a climate change infographic and several worship materials which have been used in over 30 faith communities across Canada. You can download these resources at [www.cpj.ca/climate](http://www.cpj.ca/climate).

In July 2014, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said of climate change that "no country is going to take actions that are going to deliberately destroy jobs and growth in their country."

But research from Blue Green Canada reveals investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, or public transit create six to eight times more jobs than comparable investments in fossil fuels. What's more, breaking our promises to meet GHG reduction targets costs citizens in increased health costs due to carbon pollution and increased insurance premiums. In

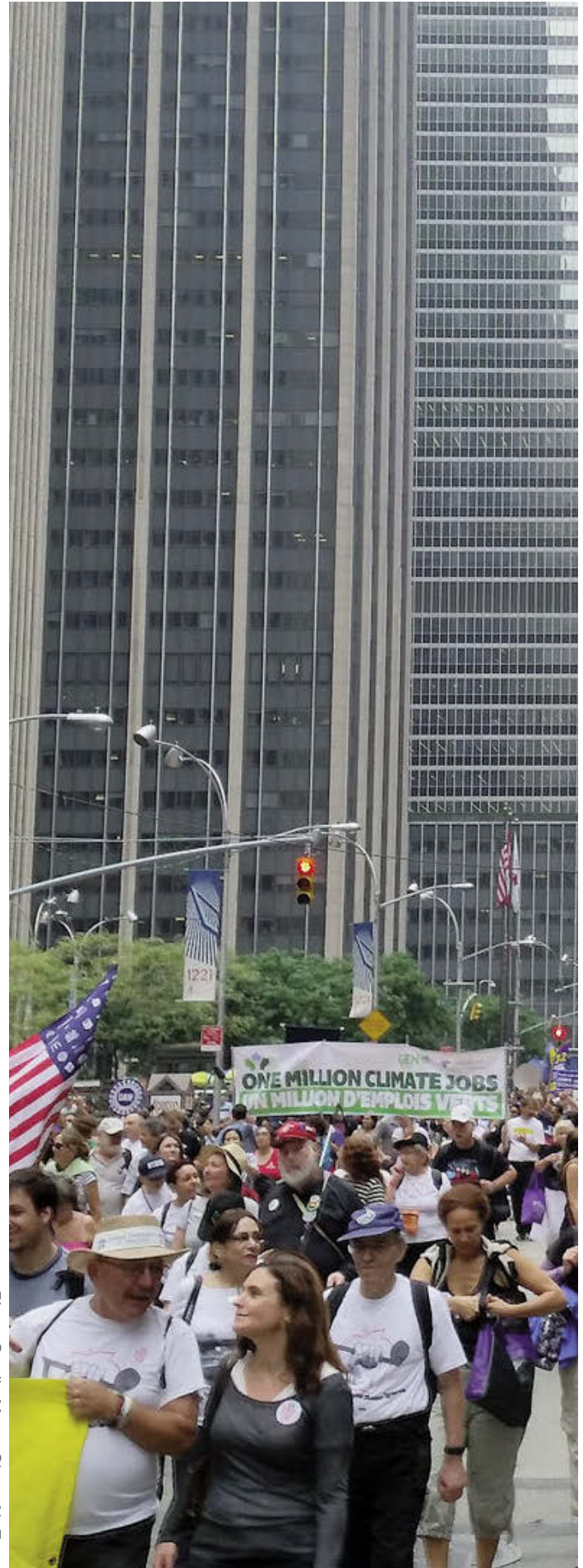


Photo Credit: Moms Clean Air Force





2012, the Insurance Bureau of Canada's report, *Telling the Weather Story*, said the rate of warming in Canada between 1948 and 2007 was about twice the global average, "likely responsible, at least in part," for more severe weather events. They later said that the 2013 flooding in Calgary and two costly storms in Toronto contributed to \$3.2 billion in insurance claims by Canadian property owners.

### **Change the System, Not the Climate**

Naomi Klein's new blockbuster book on climate change tells all in its provocative title: *This Changes Everything*. She argues that climate change could be the catalyst for change "from below" by creating a peoples' movement in favour of a new "Marshall Plan for the Earth." To do this, however, means confronting powerful economic interests that profit from climate disruptions and, more seriously, curtailing the frenetic pace of extraction of fossil fuels by the most powerful economic actors in world history – the oil lobby.



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wants action, which is why he summoned world leaders to a Climate Summit on September 23. *Sojourners Magazine* wrote, "The Climate Summit is his altar call, his 'come to Jesus moment' for heads of state on climate change – and he wants the whole world to be his witness." CPJ and World Renew Canada, along with an alliance of 140 different churches, asked Mr. Harper to attend the Summit. (He refused.)

Nonetheless, over 300,000 people marched in the streets of New York City in the largest climate protest ever. Several Christian denominations are studying divestment options – putting their money into "fossil fuel free" alternatives – which a 2014 report by the Responsible Investment Association said offer investors comparable financial returns.

### **While Ottawa Fiddles, the Planet Burns**

The Environment Commissioner noted, "To meet Canada's long-term emission reduction objectives, the federal government, working with the provinces and territories, will need to plan for further reductions beyond 2020. It has not yet done this."

The way forward for Christians, as protectors of God's creation, is clear. We have to encourage our government to develop a strategy for lowering GHG emissions in this country, including ending subsidies to oil and gas companies and introducing a price on carbon. We have to commit money and technological expertise for adaptation and especially mitigation efforts in the countries of the Global South.

Canada's next federal election is currently slated for October 2015, with the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris following just two months later. These two events present Canadian citizens with crucial opportunities to put pressure on our government to change course.

During the next election campaign, CPJ will be active in making sure climate change is on the agenda. In Paris, the nations of the world must agree on new carbon reduction targets, as the Kyoto Accord expires. To be successful, Canada must show ambition in the negotiations, backed by hitherto-lacking carbon reduction at home.

The Environment Commissioner stated the obvious: "If Canada does not honour its climate change commitments, it cannot expect other countries to honour theirs."



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

# Chew On This! a Success

By Thea deGroot

October 17, 2014 was the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and for the second year in a row the *Dignity for All Campaign* organized Chew on This! At 45 events in 36 cities across Canada, food bank workers and anti-poverty advocates joined together to call for a poverty elimination plan. Volunteers passed out lunch bags with an apple, a fridge magnet, and a postcard to be sent to the Prime Minister. The postcards called for systemic change to address the underlying causes of hunger and poverty for the 833,000 people in Canada who use food banks each month and for the millions of others struggling to get by.

In Sarnia, ON, at the annual Stand Up Against Poverty Rally organized by Sarnia's *Poverty Reduction Network*, students from the local college, members of the network, local politicians (including the mayor), and interested citizens gathered. By their presence, they demonstrated that there is poverty in Sarnia and a certain number of its citizens, including children, go hungry on a regular basis. The group handed out 100 Chew On This! bags and collected signatures for a petition.

The Sarnia & Lambton County's Nutritious Food Basket survey compares the lowest prices of 67 food items at nine local grocery stores. According to the survey, it costs just over \$835 per month to meet a "nutritionally adequate" diet for a family of four. That total represents a 7.8 per cent increase from last year. The cost of nutritious food and rent leaves some Lambton County residents without enough remaining income to pay for other basic needs such as transportation, utilities, household and personal care items, childcare, clothing, school supplies, and medication. When money is tight, many residents struggle to make ends meet by cutting their food budget.

Food banks were started in Canada in the early 1980s as a temporary way to address hunger, but they were never intended to be a permanent measure. Most of us are used to them being a part of our communities and we donate food, dollars, and perhaps volunteer hours as our response. The high levels of donations and volunteer hours speak strongly to the compassion and caring of many Canadians as well as our deep sense of social responsibility to others.

But as food bank use continues to grow, communities are finding it harder to meet the real needs of their citizens. If food banks, soup kitchens, and other frontline agencies across the country were to shut down tomorrow, poverty and hunger would become much more visible. These types of charity are

necessary right now, but they are not an answer for the long term. We need to go beyond charitable acts and recognize that access to healthy food is a human right.

Why do we think it is okay to fill a paper bag with food items as a donation a few times a year? Why do we think it is okay that some of our community's citizens have to do their shopping at a food bank and eat some of their meals at a soup kitchen? Grocery stores and restaurants should be options for us all.

Jane Roy, Co-Executive Director of the London (Ontario) Food Bank said, "If people fall into hard times and are really in

need, we shouldn't put them on a bus and bring them to a warehouse kind of model, an industrial scale model, where they can come to us, pick up their food, get back on the bus and go back home. That is not what a community is."

There are better ways to address poverty and hunger in a rich country such as Canada. But the federal government isn't taking poverty seriously; they don't even think that poverty is their jurisdictional responsibility.

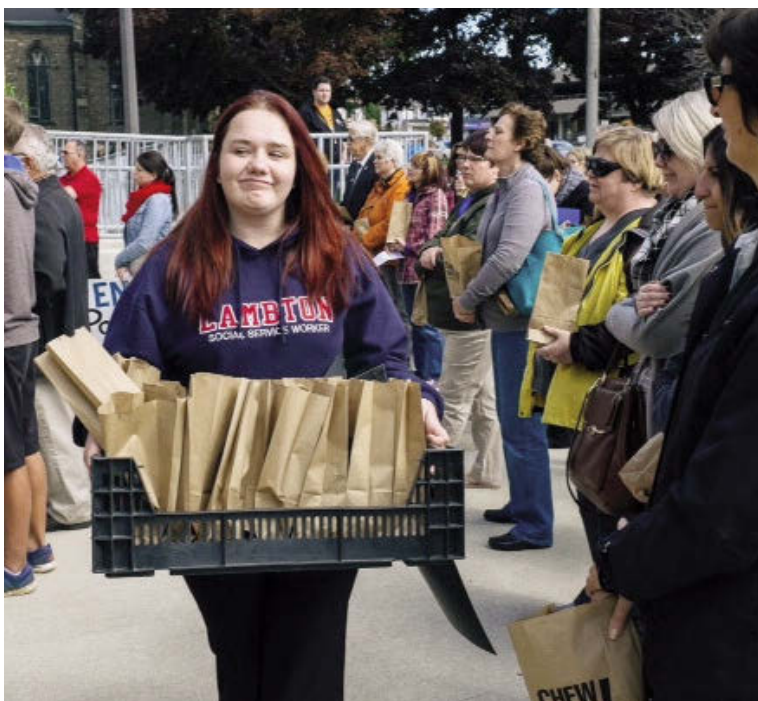
Many of the most effective instruments for fighting poverty (income security payments, tax ben-

efits, pensions, and vital funding for provincial/territorial health and social service programs) are controlled by the federal government. In the last five years alone, the United Nations, the Senate, and the House of Commons have all called for the creation of a national strategy to address poverty. And yet, Canada still has no such plan.

Many Canadians expect more from our federal government. Charity is not a sustainable or dignified answer to poverty. Justice is.

If you missed participating in a Chew On This! event, you can still support this initiative through [www.chewonthis.ca/join](http://www.chewonthis.ca/join).

Thea deGroot is a retired teacher, grandmother and gardener. She fits in as much activism as she can especially in matters of poverty, aboriginal rights, refugees, and democracy. She represents Canada-At-Large on Citizens for Public Justice's Board of Directors and is a member of Redeemer Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, ON.



Volunteers hand out Chew on This! bags at Sarnia City Hall.



# Is your church Living Ecological Justice?

CPJ's latest book has been studied by faith communities across Canada. Start your own book study or invite CPJ to coordinate a workshop!



The group at St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church. From left: Philomena Daly, Hazel Sweeney, Pauline Southwood, Elizabeth Morelli, Mary Jean Folinsbee, Pam McBride, Joanne Plaenksken, and Wayne Nyomtato.

## Facing the Challenge

"Lent is for searching," said Father Wesley in one of his homilies. What is better than a book study?

But which book?

The Development and Peace committee of St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church in Cayuga, ON organized a three week, one hour discussion of the book, *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis* by CPJ.

We all quite liked the book for many reasons. It is a good mix of reflections, prayers, Biblical passages, and activities. There is an emphasis on action with many suggestions as to ways for personal greening, church related activities, and advocacy with the government.

Here are some quotes from the participants:

"I was impressed with the number of contributors to the book. Everything from Mennonites to nuns and energy consultants to conservationists."

"After reading this book I am encouraged to write to the government to express my thoughts."

"When we know that climate change is here and now, we often feel hopelessly inadequate as to how to address this very serious problem. This book gives thought provoking ideas to put into action."

"I realize that by sharing our concerns and reading this book, we are connected spiritually and conscientiously."

"I feel privileged to have been part of a well-informed and conscientious group."

"For me the most valuable experience was the follow up discussions after the readings. These discussions broadened my horizons."

We also followed up with an outdoor Mass, "Celebrating All of God's Creation," at a parishioner's farm surrounded by corn fields, vegetable garden, barns, and wind-blown trees. Father Wesley incorporated many themes expressed in our book study. We opened with the *Prayer for Creation*, from page 23, and closed with the *Benediction* on page 122.

**Elizabeth Morelli**  
St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church

## Parish Study Group

I'm a parish priest in Toronto with a tradition in the summer weeks of running a backyard study group with an environmental focus. We meet in each other's backyards, enjoy some simple hospitality, and use a book as a focus for study and discussion.

This past summer we used *Living Ecological Justice*, and found it an excellent resource. At each session we used a reading and one of the suggested activities. It was a good combination of reflection and hands-on learning. *Map Your Meal* (p. 34), for example, was a memorable exercise. Thank you for producing this very fine little book, and making it so usable.

**Lucy Reid**  
Church of St. Aidan

Email Karri Munn-Venn  
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Copies of *Living Ecological Justice*  
can be ordered at [www.cpj.ca/lej](http://www.cpj.ca/lej).  
Cost is \$15 for one copy, or \$63 for  
five copies (pricing includes  
shipping).

# CRA Audits: Six Questions

By Kathy Vandergrift

The prevention of poverty is not a charitable cause, but the alleviation of poverty is, according to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). That ruling, which required Oxfam Canada to change its purpose statement from prevention to alleviation, was added to a growing list of decisions that raise concern about the interpretation of charity laws by the current federal government. Another ruling now requires a small non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) to translate all memos received from its Latin American, Spanish-speaking partners into English or French.

These and many other stories have emerged from the \$13 million program to audit advocacy work by NGOs. Under the program, if an NGO's advocacy work is deemed to be political, based on a fine line between allowable and restricted activity, it loses its charitable status.

As citizens, there are deeper questions to ask about what is being done in our name, supposedly to protect our tax dollars. At least six questions deserve serious consideration:

## 1. What ethical or legal principle justifies excluding prevention of poverty as a charitable purpose?

The negative health, economic, and social effects of poverty are now well-documented. Preventing it seems more charitable than just helping out after damage is done, by any definition of charity.

## 2. One stated rationale for these audits is value for tax credits, but which is a better value, a donation to an NGO or one to a political party?

Consider the following: If I donate \$400 to a political party, the money can be used for negative, personal attack ads or robocalls, and I get a 75 per cent (\$300) tax credit. If I, instead, donate \$400 to an NGO, the money can only be used for research and proposals to solve societal problems and I get a 15 per cent (\$75) tax credit.

Citizens, including Christians, who want to support informed discussion of societal issues will get better value from NGOs than our current political parties. If value for tax dollars is the goal, then revision of the current tax credit policies makes more sense than spending millions to investigate NGOs who contribute to public debate on important issues.

## 3. Is it fair that for-profit organizations are allowed to deduct the costs of lobbying governments as a business expense, with few restrictions, while non-profit organizations are severely restricted in what they may do?

If reducing regulatory red tape is a good thing in the for-profit sector, then adding a heavy regulatory burden to the non-profit sector makes little sense.

A healthy democracy requires a variety of voices to ensure that the needs of those without power are addressed and that important issues that may not be profitable also receive attention. Often called the third sector, NGOs fulfill that function, as well as providing direct services for people.

## 4. If protecting tax dollars is the goal, would it not make more sense to spend this \$13 million to investigate international tax evaders?

Recently, the government acknowledged that Canada loses millions of tax dollars through such evasion, yet it had few resources to pursue this. So far, the money spent investigating NGOs has brought in almost no revenue. What's more, these exhausting, detailed audits, which can include examination of individual emails, drain scarce resources within NGOs.

## 5. What happened to the "Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector," adopted with fanfare in 2001?

A core principle of the accord states that "Advocacy is inherent to debate and change in a democratic society and, subject to the above principles [accountability and independence], it should not affect any funding relationship that might exist."

The accord, which also recognizes the right of voluntary organizations to challenge public policies, has not been officially revoked. Political leaders love to talk about their support for charities. Yet this only seems to apply to those that fill gaps in services and do not dare question policies that create social problems.

## 6. Will enough citizens become so upset about what is happening to the charitable sector that updating Canada's antiquated charity laws will finally become a political priority?

A robust, independent non-profit sector that can freely engage in public debate about the challenges facing our society is vital for a healthy democracy. Faith-based organizations are a significant part of the charitable sector and protect our own interests. It may be time to speak out for the important role of the whole sector in building a more just society.

"A robust, independent non-profit sector that can freely engage in public debate... is vital for a healthy democracy."

Kathy Vandergrift is the former chair of Citizens for Public Justice's Board of Directors. She is a policy analyst who has worked for both non-governmental organizations and elected leaders in a lifetime search for practical steps to advance public justice.





# The Heart of God

By Thomas Coldwell

We respond in a variety of ways to the mention of “politics.” Some people feel pride, others become angry, and several fall asleep.

However, whether we are impatient, apathetic, or just busy, political decisions have real consequences for us as individuals, families, and communities. If we want these decisions to have long-term, positive impacts and if we desire more effective and ethical governance, we must be involved in the political process.

We have all heard the saying, “Give someone a fish and you’ll feed them for a day. Teach someone to fish and you’ll feed them for a lifetime.” While there is some truth to this, there are many other considerations. What if the fishing gear is too expensive? What if access to the water source is too restricted? What if the waters are polluted and the fish are all dead?

While it is important to increase individual capacity, it is also necessary to advocate for the economic, social, and environmental conditions necessary for people to reach their potential.

But who is responsible for keeping these considerations in mind? Ideally, within our democratic society, they would always be in the minds of elected representatives. However, as we know, this is not always the case. It is, therefore, up to citizens to hold government accountable.

God wants us to be inspired and influenced by his own spirit of justice. The Bible is full of psalms, parables, and letters that describe the heart of God. With over 2,000 verses dealing with poverty and justice, clearly God cares about the world’s poor. Multiple verses about caring for creation enforce his desire for a flourishing earth.

Genesis 1 tells us that all human beings are created in God’s image with inherent worthy and dignity. But it did not take long before sin contaminated God’s creation. Cain posed a rhetorical question when he asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” But God’s response is “yes.” We are expected to be each other’s keepers. This is the heart of God.

The world will never be without corruption, greed, or lust for power, but we can influence circumstances by bringing the heart of God into our political sphere. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, it says that “we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.” As ambassadors of Christ, Christians must become more involved in politics. For Christians, disengaging from politics means withholding the heart of God from processes that impact our neighbours—especially the poor and disenfranchised. Instead, we should be amplifying the voices of those who suffer injustice and who



have difficulty being heard. Advocating for policies that will contribute to the well-being of others is part of the command to love others that we read about in Matthew 22:36-40.

Political advocacy will look different for different people. Becoming involved in politics doesn’t mean running for office (though some might choose this avenue). For those who have never been politically active, learning about Canada’s political system is a good place to start. For many of us, being politically active will mean staying informed about specific policy debates and government actions. We are also called to pray for our government leaders and “all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:2).

Most of all, it is extremely important to exercise our right to vote as we carefully consider who to vote for. As Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing.”

What would Canada look like if our political sphere reflected the heart of God? How would our communities change if we all committed to being each other’s keeper? I cannot say for sure, but I think we would all want to be awake for that.

*CPJ’s Advocacy Toolkit is a great resource to help citizens engage Canadian politics. This guide includes information about advocating at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. It has been recently updated with sections about using social media and including younger generations in advocacy. You can find our Advocacy Toolkit at [www.cpj.ca/advocacy-toolkit](http://www.cpj.ca/advocacy-toolkit).*



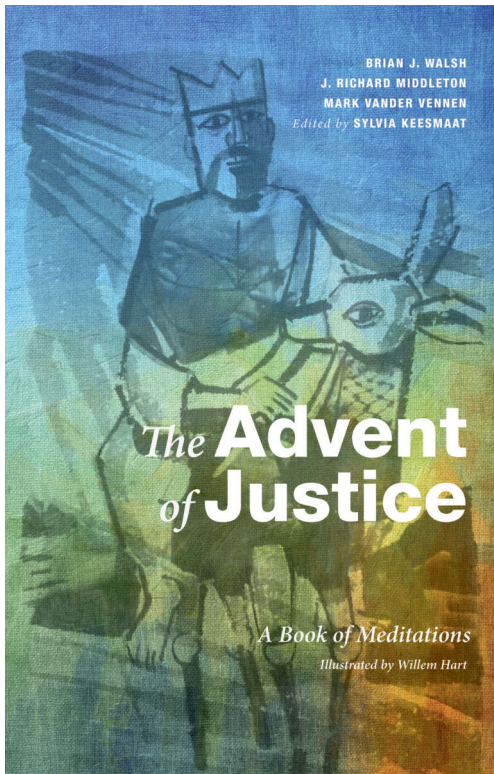
Thomas Coldwell was Citizens for Public Justice’s Summer 2014 Communications Assistant.

## The Advent of Justice... Again

By Brian Walsh

“There is a time and place in the ceaseless human endeavor to change the world, when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change. I believe we are precisely at such a moment.”

So wrote David Harvey in his 1989 book *Spaces of Hope*. If you want to change the world and if you want to shape political forces for good, then you will need to foster alternative visions “no matter how fantastic.”



Writing some 25 years ago, Harvey noted that most of the institutions we would look to for such vision (political parties, academics, the arts, etc.) had been so brow-beaten into submission by the cultural forces of the day that there was little alternative vision to be found.

Except for one institution. Harvey said that the church was the most notable exception. This was quite the observation for a neo-Marxist to make.

The church, of course, finds its vision in the deep wells of biblical tradition. Christians know that without a vision, people will die. And Christians also know that without a vision constantly renewed, deepened, and expanded through engagement with scripture, they too will die. This insight has been at the heart of CPJ from the beginning.

And so, in 1993, a few years after Harvey had made this observation about vision and the church, a group of friends gathered to celebrate CPJ's 30th anniversary by publishing a book of advent meditations called *The Advent of Justice*. Sylvia Keesmaat, J. Richard Middleton, Mark Vander Vennen, and myself invited our readers to enter deeply into the prophetic vision of Isaiah precisely as a place where an alternative vision for justice might be born, sustained, and renewed.

Taking their cue from Isaiah's bold and sometimes disturbing vision, these meditations gave expression to an eyes-wide-open spirituality that would not avert our gaze from the injustice, violence, deceit, and disappointments of our lives. But it is in the face of such grief that hope is born.

*The Advent of Justice* is available at [www.cpj.ca/adventofjustice](http://www.cpj.ca/adventofjustice). All proceeds are dedicated to the ongoing work of Citizens for Public Justice to foster an alternative vision and enact justice.

Advent is often cheapened by the secular sentimentality of Christmas. This book of meditations led readers into a costly time of waiting and longing. It also bore witness to the radical hope that Isaiah proclaimed and Jesus embodied.

Illustrated by Willem Hart, the book became a treasured resource as an Advent devotional for families, schools, churches, and personal reflection.

Now, more than 20 years later, these meditations seem to resonate with our social, ecological, and political realities just as powerfully as they did when they were first published.

We are, therefore, pleased to announce the republication of *The Advent of Justice* by Wipf and Stock Publishers.



Brian Walsh is a Christian Reformed Campus Minister at the University of Toronto, where he pastors the Wine Before Breakfast community.