

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

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## Refugee Health Care Fully Restored

By Rachel DeBruyn

The federal government will fully restore the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) to all refugees starting April 1, 2016.

“Canadians from many walks of life, from premiers to front-line health care professionals to Canadians who privately sponsor refugees, spoke with one voice in rejecting the changes made to the Interim Federal Health Program in 2012,” said John McCallum, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. “We have listened, and coverage will be restored.”

Citizens for Public Justice is celebrating, and across Canada refugees and their sponsors are sighing in relief—they no longer need to worry about how they will pay for their health needs.

The IFHP cuts removed supplemental benefits (including prescription medication, eye care, emergency dental care, prosthetics, and counselling) for privately-sponsored refugees. They also completely removed health care coverage for rejected claimants and claimants from Designated Countries of Origin – countries that don’t produce many refugees and that respect human rights.

Refugees that fell into these categories either had to find a way to pay for their health care, or go without.

CPJ released a report in 2014 entitled *Private Sponsorship and Public Policy*. It stated that roughly one-third of church-connected refugee sponsorship agreement holders had groups decrease or end their involvement in sponsoring refugees because of the liability created by lack of refugee health coverage.

Health care coverage needed to be restored, so CPJ and a wealth of other organizations spoke out. The Proud to Protect Refugees Campaign, launched by the Canadian Council for Refugees with the support of CPJ, called for organizations to make a public declaration of their support for refugees in Canada. CPJ sent two letters to then-Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, calling for the cuts to be rescinded.

CPJ also assisted in organizing a statement on Human Rights Day in 2013, demanding that the government reverse the cuts. The heads of the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Lutheran churches in Canada signed on.

Doug Gruner, an assistant professor at the University of Ottawa, has been deeply involved with the Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care. When he spoke at CPJ’s 2014 Annual General Meeting, he raised numerous concerns over the cuts.

Gruner was confident that the government would follow through with their commitment to fully reinstate refugee health coverage. However, before McCallum’s announcement was released, he noted that the timing of their action was becoming crucial.

“Both providers and patients are still confused as to whether a certain type of refugee can claim coverage,” Gruner stated at the time.

In November, the government gave coverage to all Syrian refugees. Now that the government has committed to completely reverse the cuts, privately-sponsored refugees and claimants from countries other than Syria will finally receive coverage.

It appears that Gruner’s concerns will soon be resolved. He remains optimistic that practitioners, clinics, and policy-makers can work together to improve the system.

CPJ rejoices that its voice – and the voice of many concerned citizens and organizations – was heard, changes were made, and justice is being restored.

Rachel DeBruyn is the Communications Intern at Citizens for Public Justice.

## In Review

### CPJ on the Hill

CPJ presented our *Call for Climate Action* to **Catherine McKenna**, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The petition called on the federal government to develop an ambitious Canadian greenhouse gas emissions reduction target.



In February, CPJ submitted our pre-budget brief, *Making Real Change for the Common Good*, to the House of Commons Finance Committee. It identified key commitments made by this government that would advance public justice in Canada, including measures the federal government could take towards eradicating poverty in Canada and limiting global warming to 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels.

**Joe Gunn** presented at the Ontario Government's Pre-Budget Consultations in Ottawa on behalf of the Inter-Faith Social Assistance Reform Coalition. The brief, *Making the Best Investment Possible: People*, noted that budgets reflect what we truly value. ISARC proposed that our governments and societies can always find the resources they need for their priorities and can therefore afford to do more to help people living in poverty.

### CRA Audits of Charities

CPJ welcomed news in January that the federal government will end its program of auditing charities for their political activity. CPJ raised concerns about this program in our *2015 Election Bulletin* and recently spoke with CBC News and the Canadian Press about what this new policy means for charities going forward.



### Welcome Chris and Rachel

CPJ is very excited to have two new interns join us this spring!

**Chris Hynes**, our Social Work Intern, is completing a BSW at Carleton University. He is working with CPJ on the Dignity for All campaign and assisting us in our anti-poverty work.

**Rachel DeBruyn** is our Communications Intern. She is currently a student at Redeemer University College and is in Ottawa as part of the Laurentian Leadership Centre. Rachel will be assisting CPJ in our outreach to churches and schools as well as conducting research and writing on refugee rights.

### CPJ in the Community

In early March, **Karri Munn-Venn** was at Redeemer University College in **Ancaster, Ont.** She presented to a third-year sociology class and talked about CPJ's involvement, as a faith-based organization, in the environmental justice movement.



In March, CPJ co-hosted *Climate Action after Paris*, an event in Ottawa that focused on responses to the Paris Agreement. **Dennis Gruending** interviewed **Mardi Tindal** (former moderator of The United Church of Canada) about her experience attending COP21. **Karri Munn-Venn** (above) led a discussion of next steps for Canadian communities of faith with **Graham Saul** (Ecology Ottawa), and **Tony Clarke** (Polaris Institute).

CPJ's **Darlene O'Leary**, along with **Megan Hooft** of Canada Without Poverty, presented a webinar entitled *Charity to Justice* for the United Church of Canada.



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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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Cover image: Doug Gruner speaks at the National Day of Action on Parliament Hill.

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# COP21: Three Next Steps for Churches

By Miriam Mahaffy

Last year saw climate change become a mainstream issue. International leaders gathered to negotiate the Paris Agreement at the COP21 climate negotiations. The Pope delivered his encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, and the Canadian Council of Churches released a statement, *On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada*. Faith leaders have declared that climate change is a moral issue requiring concrete action.

However, brave words in legal documents or religious declarations alone won't achieve climate justice. It requires countries, communities, and individuals to courageously embody these intentions. As our world continues to heat up, here are three ways Canadian Christians can turn bold words into meaningful action on climate change.

## Pray: Incorporate Climate Justice Into Worship

Climate themes can be incorporated into worship in many different ways—big and small. (On page 4, you'll find a few examples of how faith communities used CPJ's *Prayers for COP21 in Paris* resources during the climate negotiations.)

By using prayers and readings focused on creation, churches can invite individuals to engage with the complexities of this global issue at a personal level. This can help diverse congregations find common ground and facilitate conversations about creation care. In this way, our worship can be an invitation to—not a demand for—a greater awareness of the problem of climate change.

Through sermons and small group studies, Christians can learn about the causes and consequences of our environmental crisis. Through meditation, prayer, song, and discussion, churches can foster a spirit of willingness to change habits and extend generous compassion to those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of a warming planet.

## Act: "Green" Your Church

"Now more than ever, especially since the Pope's encyclical (which recognizes that climate is a common good for all), climate action is being framed as a moral imperative," says Beatrice Ekoko, who animates the Hamilton, Ont. chapter of Greening Sacred Spaces. As a program of Faith and the Common Good (FCG), it helps churches with the practical and spiritual dimensions of making their community operations more eco-friendly.

Churches can be centres for climate action. But where to start?

First, check your current impact. Ekoko notes that action "can be as simple as looking at your own consumption."

How does your food come from? How do you get to worship? Make it a fun competition between members or churches to reduce energy consumption.



CPJ and faith groups join the 100% Possible March for Climate Solutions and Justice in Ottawa on November 29, 2015.

Next, build partnerships. Ekoko says that often only one or two members of a congregation will take on ecological justice work. It's important to work together to build momentum, capacity, and excitement for change.

Finally, view your church infrastructure and community as an asset. FCG's *Mission per Square Foot* program helps faith groups rejuvenate church buildings to meet community needs in a sustainable manner.

For a congregation that is just beginning to look at church greening, Ekoko recommends starting small

and simple, based on the interests and excitement of those involved.

## Advocate: Call for Policy Change

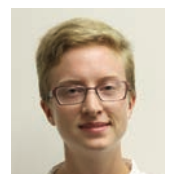
As seekers of justice, churches have the opportunity and responsibility to hear and amplify the call for action coming from those most affected by climate change. Church greening is an important part of national action on climate change, but to see climate justice realized, we need far-reaching systemic changes.

This means international coordination, as well as policy change and action across levels of government—including an ambitious federal greenhouse gas emissions reduction target and a concrete climate action plan.

Christians can and should reach out to those who can influence policy decisions. Charles Hodgson, a volunteer with Ecology Ottawa, suggests that "of the many things a person might do, the most effective and actually the easiest is to tell their politicians they support action on climate change." Churches can, for example, arrange a meeting with their MP, have congregants write an email to their political leaders, or collect signatures on a petition.

Joe Gunn, CPJ's executive director, highlights that "by mobilizing to pray, act, and advocate for climate justice, faith communities are revealing how crucial and relevant their witness is as humanity faces such a major global challenge."

Together, churches can work towards the reconciliation of all creation in the face of climate change.



Miriam Mahaffy is the Climate Policy Intern at Citizens for Public Justice. A similar version of this article was published by ChristianWeek.

# Stories from *Prayers for COP21 in Paris*

In the lead-up to the COP21 climate negotiations last December, Citizens for Public Justice produced resources to support faithful worship, action, and reflection on climate change. CPJ also coordinated a national prayer chain. Canadians were praying for climate justice for 296 consecutive hours during the climate negotiations.

As world leaders gathered at COP21 to draft the Paris Agreement, here are a few ways that people of faith across Canada were using CPJ's resources to engage climate justice in the pews.

In December 2015, people of faith gathered in Nelson, B.C. for a climate prayer vigil each day throughout COP21.

"Beginning with the Pope's speech on climate change in September, we gathered in Nelson, B.C. with over 70 people of various faiths for a six-week discussion. At each week's gathering, hosted by a different faith community, we discussed one of the six chapters of the Pope's encyclical, *Laudato si'*."



With growing momentum from this weekly discussion series, we decided to organize a daily vigil throughout the two weeks of the Paris climate negotiations. Beginning with a community climate march on November 29th, different faith traditions took turns hosting an hour or two

each day. At the vigils, we participated in a diversity of ways, including chants, meditation, songs, prayer, and worship. We finished the two weeks with a candlelight vigil and march around Nelson's downtown, stopping to pray at various places and ending at Nelson United Church for hot chocolate and cookies.

Looking forward, we're hoping to create some new opportunities for sharing information, discussion, and political action. Montana Burgess, a community organizer with the West Kootenay EcoSociety, spearheaded these inter-faith events. Ecosociety is working to create a broad-based leadership coalition that can address climate from a variety of perspectives. And faith communities have something important to contribute! In the past, people of faith have often felt only tolerated at public events, so it's good both to get together with a group of like-minded folks from different faiths and to talk about the power of spirituality. It's given us a bigger voice in society and brings a different perspective to public action. In this way, those who don't identify as activists, but who would identify under a faith umbrella, can participate.

When you look outside of your walls, you find a lot of people who are also looking for others to be in partnership. The work that we do is only strengthened by seeking out others in a larger circle!"

—The Reverend David Boyd,  
Minister at Nelson United Church in Nelson, B.C.

On Friday, December 4, 2015, Karen Tjaden invited her community to join in an outdoor prayer vigil as part of CPJ's prayer chain throughout the Paris climate negotiations.



"This event was wonderful for me. It was not chilly at all, but we still had snow to enjoy and ice to skate on. I felt blessed by the day and the outdoor rest it provided for me. Nine other people joined me. I especially appreciated the opportunity to be quiet and reflective, praying about climate justice while walking the labyrinth in the snow, skating on the outdoor ice, talking to people who stopped in, sharing CPJ's prayers each hour, and reading the Pope's encyclical on the environment as well as a wonderful new book written and illustrated by Bob Haverluk, *When God Was Flesh and Wild: Stories in Defense of the Earth.*"

—Karen Tjaden,  
Minister at Carman United Church in Carman, Man.



On Monday, November 30, 2015 at noon, the national office of the Anglican Church of Canada gathered to hold a special service of prayer of Holy Eucharist for COP21 in Paris.

This photo was taken after the service, in front of a symbolic bowl of melting ice. Along with national office staff, gathered in the photo include Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada (centre), Alyson Barnett-Cowan, President of the Canadian Council of Churches (front row, first left), Henriette Thompson, Director of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice at the Anglican Church of Canada (back row, first right), and Adele Finney, Executive Director of Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (front row, first right).

—Sonia Hsiung,  
Program Associate, Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice at the Anglican Church of Canada.

# Faith Perspectives Matter in Seeking Justice

By Darlene O'Leary

At a recent event in Ottawa on income inequality, the moderator, *The Hill Times* publisher Jim Creskey, opened the discussion with the following quote:

“Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.”

It was a bit of a surprise to some that the statement comes from Pope Francis. The quote from *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) is direct and uncompromising in its criticism of the global economic system. It also affirms the need for justice and confirmed, to me at least, that faith communities have an important voice in this conversation.

Income inequality is increasing globally and in Canada. The recently released Oxfam report, *An Economy for the 1%*, highlights the incredible finding that 62 of the world's richest people own as much wealth as the 3.6 billion poorest. This trend is closely accompanied by a concentration of political power and voice as well as the declining influence of workers and unions.

In Canada, the gap might not seem as drastic, but it's there. The Institute for Research on Public Policy's new book, *Income Inequality: The Canadian Story*, indicates that there has been a decline of the middle class in Canada. This is in part because of changes to the tax and transfer system in the mid-1990s. Even marginal increases for some demographics have not countered the overall rise in living costs, the public deficit in underfunded infrastructure, and the erosion of social supports. And so, poverty persists in Canada. Indigenous people, recent immigrants and refugees, single parents, and children bear much of the burden of failed and inadequate policy measures.

Perhaps we don't need much convincing that there is a problem, even a crisis. The gap between those who have and those who do not seems to be ever-widening. We have diagnosed the problem and the impacts of income inequality. But we also need to

identify a way of looking at economic change and improving policy directions.

We tend to look first for solutions by redistributive measures through the tax and transfer system. Certainly, governments should take important income redistribution measures, including the federal government's new Canada Child Benefit. This will provide an income-tested supplement to families and potentially raise significant numbers of children out of poverty.

But more broadly, we need to understand what makes market systems more just and fair. This means finding new ways to live our economic lives together. We could enact policies such as living wages and fair compensation. We can also work with models that faith communities have long supported in Canada and elsewhere, such as co-operative movements and social economy networks.

We must consider those things we share in common as social goods. This includes affordable social housing, childcare, and healthcare, which need ongoing investment and support.

In *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis states that “the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.”

A faith perspective places human dignity, the common good, and the integrity of creation at the centre of economic life. Faith communities are calling for public justice. We want to see Canada's public policy decisions reflect this understanding of what living together as a *beloved community* means.

Increasing income inequality reflects a systemic flight from that deeper understanding.

Our leaders have the difficult task of developing strong policy that responds to the needs of everyone. It is essential that they are guided by sound knowledge of how these structures and systems work.

Faith communities must ensure that what is most important in our lives together – care for each other and the earth – claims a space at the centre of our social, political, and economic lives.



Photo: US Papal Visit/Flickr



Darlene O'Leary is the Socio-Economic Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

# The Earth Is Our Mother

By Michelle Nieviadomy



The earth provides everything we need: food, water, clothing, and shelter. For Indigenous peoples, she provides cultural and spiritual fulfillment as well. The earth is our source, not a resource. Creator gave her as a gift to all humanity to live well, live in harmony, and live in balance with her and all her inhabitants. Yet we are living in a time where our earth is in crisis. As we search for solutions, answers, and justice, the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples brings great wisdom and teachings in how to care for our earth.

In my office sits a dry and discolored braid of sweetgrass. (Sweetgrass is one of the medicines harvested from the earth for Cree ceremonies.) An elder came into my office one day, and as she picked up this braid she said, “you took too much.” I knew exactly what she meant: I could not use the medicine for ceremony any longer now that it had dried out. Our teachings tell us to take only what we need. This braid of sweetgrass now sits as an ornament of sorts, which was never its intention. It is a reminder that Indigenous teachings show a way of living that respects, honours, and protects the earth.

As strong advocates for climate justice, allies for the earth’s livelihood, and protectors of her resources, Indigenous peoples have a deep connection with the earth. Climate change is threatening the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and communities. So it was no surprise to see Indigenous peoples from around our vast global village at the COP21 climate negotiations. We were hopeful but disheartened to realize that here too we must battle to make our voices heard, especially since Indigenous peoples have so much to contribute and offer around climate change.

As an observer during the negotiations, I realized rather quickly that Indigenous peoples did not have a formal voice at the table of this international summit. What’s more, Indigenous rights were on the chopping block from the draft text of the agreement. Fortunately, Canada’s position valued Indigenous peoples as Prime Minister Trudeau said during the negotiations:

**“I have instructed Canada’s chief negotiator for climate change and her team to strongly advocate for the inclu-**

**sion in the Paris Agreement of language that reflects the importance of respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. We have also highlighted the importance of considering Indigenous traditional knowledge alongside scientific analysis.”**

Despite the Prime Minister’s appeal, Indigenous rights failed to stay in the final text of the Paris Agreement. It was a somber moment. For someone who has invested my mind, body, and soul in Indigenous justice, it was a moment of lamentation. From my Cree perspective, Indigenous and climate justice work together. When those who carry inherent teachings of the earth were not heard, it felt like defeat. It was a stark reminder: there is much work to be done for the sake of justice.

I am just a strand in the web of life. But one strand in such a strong diverse global community! Creator does magnificent work in weaving all the strands of people together to pursue justice for his earth and his people. COP21 gathered people from all walks of life with different worldviews to play their part, to use their voice and to advocate in their way for the sake of the earth and her justice. We all have a part to play.

The Christian Reformed Church is playing a powerful role by lending their voice through the Climate Witness Project. This unique project is stirring church communities and members within the denomination to awareness, advocacy, and action. The synergy in this project is inspiring to say the least. Over 30 church congregations have already signed on.

With vision, partnership, and solidarity it is possible to live well, live in harmony, and live in balance with the gift Creator has given to us: the earth. As she continues to provide for our needs, may we live in such a way that preserves and protects her.



Michelle Nieviadomy works at the Edmonton Native Healing Centre. She was a member of the Christian Reformed Church’s delegation to the COP21 climate talks in Paris.

# A Chance to End Child Poverty for Good

By Anita Khanna

With the election of a new federal government, Canada must seize the opportunity for overdue transformation of its shameful poverty record. In a recent letter to Jean-Yves Duclos, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Prime Minister Trudeau committed the federal government to creating a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to end child and family poverty for good. Important commitments in the areas of housing, childcare, good jobs, and income security need both investment and action in order to turn the tide for families living in poverty.



In the meantime, the government will send a new, bolstered child benefit to families starting this July. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) will deliver \$6,400 per child each year for children up to age six and \$5,400 per child each year for children ages 6-17. Both will be indexed to inflation. The CCB will go to families in low- and middle-income brackets. The amounts they receive will vary depending on their incomes—the more families earn, the lower the benefit.

Campaign 2000 has long argued that parents with dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers need the necessary supports to achieve a situation of decency and dignity for their families. Labour markets do not distinguish between workers who are parents and those who are not. So public policies that recognize the value of child-rearing and help to reduce poverty can make a significant difference. Campaign 2000 has called for a redesign of Canada's child benefits. Now, we recognize parts of our proposal, first made in 2012, in the new CCB.

The government hopes to lift 315,000 children out of poverty with this policy. Meanwhile Campaign 2000 has called for a more ambitious goal: for Canada to reduce child poverty by 50 per cent over the next five years.

The CCB is a strong and effective social policy tool. Yet in order for it to meet either of these goals, it must be funded for the long-term. It also needs to be delivered to all low-income families in Canada, including those on social assistance. Since the payment of the child benefit is calculated based on each family's income, it's critical that the government treat all types of income equally. Families that receive some of their income from social assistance and income support programs must not have clawbacks or deductions taken off of their benefit payments.

We have written to Minister Duclos, asking him to enter into agreements with the provinces and territories to make sure that this doesn't happen. Our provincial partners have also sent this

message to social services ministers in their provinces. All children must be treated equally regardless of the source of their parents' income.

In 1989, a resolution to end child and family poverty by the year 2000 was unanimously passed in the House of Commons. After that, our national coalition was formed and began calling for action plans and commitments from government. Campaign 2000 has been beating the drum for political action against child and family poverty since 1991.

The year 2000 has come and gone and a generation has been raised in the shadow of the 1989 commitment. Despite Canada's failure, the hunger for political action to end child poverty remains strong. Our coalition works with partners across Canada, including Citizens for Public Justice, to push for supports for families.

We chronicle the impact of poverty on families faced with impossible choices between paying the rent, feeding the kids, or buying medication. We propose innovative social policies to support families through work, strong public services, and a secure social safety net. We hold the banner for change with low-income families and children at protests and on Parliament Hill.

CPJ and Canada Without Poverty are both active members of Campaign 2000's Steering Committee. In turn, we have participated in the Dignity for All campaign's summits, consultations, and the Chew on This! outreach event that happens each October.

This delivery of the CCB by the federal government is central to Campaign 2000. Its design and the direction given to the provinces is the first test of the new government's resolve in keeping its goal of reducing child poverty in the face of political turbulence – whether from the provinces and territories, the looming deficit, or falling oil prices. Even if revenue decreases, children should have the first call on resources.

To keep this commitment to reduce child poverty, we must recognize that families on social assistance live in legislated poverty throughout Canada, with incomes well below any measure of poverty. With the CCB poised to be a game-changer for low-income families, the federal government must treat all families equally as it battles child poverty. It's 2016 and it is time to end child poverty for good.



Anita Khanna is the National Coordinator of Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty.



Photo: CAFOD Photo Library/Flickr

## Faith Rooted in Migration Stories

By Naomi Kabugi

The spirit of migration permeates, and to a large extent defines, the biblical narrative. This theme is found in Genesis, the Psalms, and Revelation. The book of Genesis might as well be named *the book of migrations*. The first people, Adam and Eve, were banished from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). Cain was condemned to be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (Genesis 4:12). Many of us can recall the Sunday school stories about Noah and the Ark, with his family and a number of living creatures. The disaster they encountered echoes contemporary images of refugees travelling by boat to more secure lands. Later in the book of Genesis, God tells Abraham to “go to the land that I will show you.” These are some of the numerous stories told in the backdrop of God’s intentions to save lives amid the trauma of travel, displacement, uprootedness, and migration.

The experience and the image of a sojourner in Psalm 121 suggests that the greatest barrier to knowing God is not our displacement. Rather, it comes from a sense of security that we develop when we think that we have ‘arrived.’ At times, this feeling of security can be expressed in our doctrine and liturgy. But faith is a pilgrimage, and so our worship should reflect this. Without this perspective, we are dead to ourselves and our worship is hollow.

The relationship between human mobility and divine purpose is also reflected in the story of the Apostle John in Revelation. Because of the “word of God and the testimony of Jesus,” he was exiled on the island of Patmos where he saw a series of visions (Revelation 1:9).

Today, due to widespread changes especially precipitated by war, more people are migrating than ever before. The latest statistics show that nearly 60 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The longstanding and accelerating reality of global migration presents us with an opportunity to ground our faith in a specific social location. This emerges from the joy and hope, as well as the grief and anxiety, of many immigrants and refugees. In the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis, stories of strength and resilience have

emerged as refugees look in wonder at how they ever made it. God is still working miracles, and we can behold his glory and power. But looking at God’s mercy also leads us to think about the suffering of those who never left and the lives lost for those unable to complete the journey.

Migration is a volatile and contentious political issue. The debate around it can be confusing. But people of faith need to be grounded in the fact that immigrants and refugees are not defined by their political status. They are human beings.

Identifying migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers primarily with their political status has several negative effects. First, it leaves migrants and refugees vulnerable to control and manipulation. Being reduced to a political status creates a form of psychological colonization (a term no one wants to be identified with in the 21st century). Second, identifying migrants and refugees in terms of their political status denies them the personal and relational nature of human existence, as well as the mystery of human life as part of the mystery of God. Human beings are created in the image and the likeness of God. Our communal and individual mission of faith is to bridge the gap created by the dehumanizing experience of migration.

We are called to help those on the move discover an inner identity that fosters their own agency, rather than an imposed external identity that increases their vulnerability and subjugation. This is why people of faith need to stand in support of churches and justice organizations that promote the dignity of migrants and refugees. Individuals participating in such activities become part of the mystery of creation as they apply their calling and faith to the reality of biblical truth.



Rev. Naomi Kabugi is a Priest in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa and a member of CPJ’s Board of Directors.