

# STREAMS OF JUSTICE

Let justice flow down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24)

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## In this Edition

A Faithful Response to Poverty	2
General Assembly 2019 continued	2
KAIROS Gatherings	3
Fighting Climate Change at Camp	4
Responses to the Opioid Crisis	5
Justice Webinars	5
Review: <i>Journeys to Justice</i>	6



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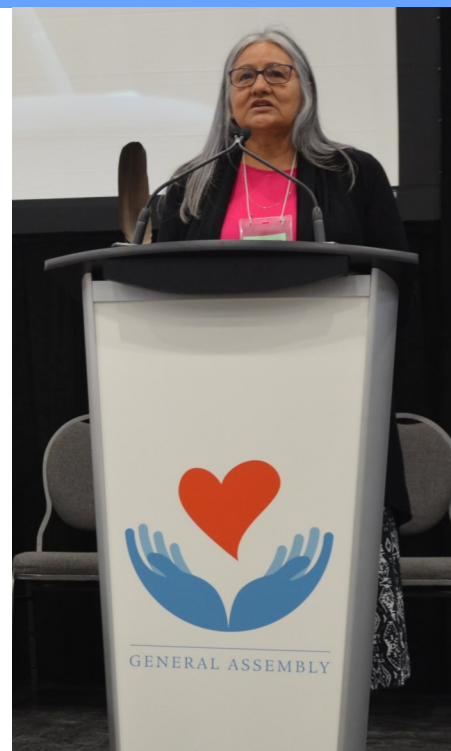
## General Assembly 2019

*By Allyson Carr, Justice Ministries Program Coordinator.*

This year's General Assembly marked several important discussions and decisions with significant justice implications. One of the first of these was our recommitment to the 1994 Confession acknowledging the deeply scarring intergenerational impacts of the residential school system in which The Presbyterian Church in Canada participated. We heard from residential school Survivor Terri Brown and had time for discussion at the tables about what healing and reconciliation entails. The Rev. Dr. Stewart Folster (Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry) offered a very powerful song written by his brother about the impacts of residential schools and colonialism on families and communities. Each commissioner received a pocket-sized booklet containing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These booklets may be ordered for free at [presbyterian.ca/resources](http://presbyterian.ca/resources).

The conversations around recommitting to the Confession were made all the more timely by some of the recommendations before Assembly this year: specifically, whether the church would repudiate the concepts known as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*. These concepts had been previously identified by the TRC's Call to Action 46 ii as harmful means that were used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, and the TRC called upon the churches to repudiate them. General Assembly heard a brief history of the concepts and the harm they created, and voted overwhelmingly in favour of repudiating them, as well as rejecting any policies based on racism. Commissioners also voted to encourage members and courts to learn more about the ongoing effects of the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*. Justice Ministries will be developing a study guide and other resource material that will be available soon. In the meantime, the report and other resources are available at [presbyterian.ca/justice/doctrine-of-discovery](http://presbyterian.ca/justice/doctrine-of-discovery).

The repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, done in the presence of the National Indigenous Ministries Council who sat as witness to the event, was a deeply important and emotional moment of justice representing a vital step on the path to healing and reconciliation. There were other emotional moments at Assembly this year as well, many of them around other justice issues. The Assembly also approved and remitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act two statements having to do with sexuality. These statements are currently going through the remit process, and there is a chance to give feedback either in person, by phone or mail, or through a JotForm submission. The text of the remits and a link to the JotForm can be found at [presbyterian.ca/sexuality](http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality).



Terri Brown addressing the General Assembly.

Continued on page 2.

# A Faithful Response to Poverty

*By the Rev. Marty Molengraaf, Unionville Presbyterian Church, Ontario.*

There are more references to caring for those who live with poverty in both the Old and New Testaments than we could count. From the words in Deuteronomy 15 encouraging us to not be tight fisted towards those who are poor, to the wisdom literature inviting us in Proverbs 22 to not exploit the poor, to the cries for justice in the prophets including Isaiah 58 exhorting us to share what we have with those who are in need, and the words of Jesus himself who said “blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the kingdom of God”, poverty is a prominent theme in scripture.

Indeed, it could be said that to be Christian is to be a person who cares for people who are impoverished and for poverty reduction in our societies.

Those who are well versed in poverty reduction work recognize the need for systemic change—poverty is not a personal problem, it is a systems problem. The economic systems at work in the world today are not working to address poverty, even though some would argue that they were intended to do so. Neo-liberalism—the dominant economic theory over the last thirty years—has resulted in the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor both globally and regionally.

So, we are called by scriptures and through the word of God revealed through Jesus Christ to speak out against the systems that keep poor people poor. A faithful response to poverty and inequality can include calling on governments for:

- Fair trade not free trade,
- Re-distribution of wealth,

- The dismantling of the oil and gas sector in favour of green energy initiatives to create jobs,
- Expansion not reduction of basic income programs,
- And an end to the labelling or scapegoating of people who experience poverty as the ‘problem’.

As crucial as this work is, we must also do more. We must be involved in actions that address the immediate concerns for people living in poverty.

Such work includes the age old and powerful concept of stewardship. I once heard a lecture about the success of the McDonald’s empire. The speaker said that the financial success of McDonald’s had nothing to do with their menu. Indeed, it had nothing to do with food. It had to do with land, real estate. Just think about all the property the empire has – and the dollar value of that property.

It is said that there are more McDonalds than churches in Canada. Whether that is actually true or not, I don’t know. What I do know is that churches—including congregations in The Presbyterian Church in Canada—have land from coast to coast. What are we doing with this resource from a stewardship point of view with respect to poverty reduction?

A number of churches have taken the bold step to use their land for low income housing, intentional community housing, affordable seniors housing and other such initiatives, while still ensuring a place to witness to the power of God’s love as we experience it in Christ.

Can this become a national movement? Only if we prayerfully decide to make it so.

## General Assembly 2019—International Affairs Committee

Commissioners approved several important recommendations from the International Affairs Committee (IAC) around issues of violence and climate change. The Assembly voted to endorse the No Way to Treat a Child campaign, which highlights abuses in the apprehension and military trial of Palestinian children, in contravention of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

The IAC also highlighted the problem of religious persecution around the world; a resource on praying for an end to religious persecution is available now (see page 5). The resource includes summaries of human rights abuses in 31 countries and prayers for worship, Bible study or personal reflection. Recommendations condemning violence and requesting government aid for Rohingya facing genocide in Myanmar were also passed, as were recommendations meant to seek a resolution for conflict in Cameroon.

Another section of the report detailing the harmful effects of plastic in oceans and waterways, with recommendations to reduce the use of plastics and raise the issue of plastic recycling and reduction was considered and passed.



L to R: The Rev. Dale Henry (former IAC convener), Theophilus Anyam, with Justice Ministries staff: Dr. Allyson Carr and Carragh Erhardt.



## KAIROS Gatherings Invigorate Participants Coast-and-Coast

*By Shannon Neufeldt, KAIROS Member Relations and Network Coordinator.*

KAIROS gathered, at opposite ends of the country, just one week apart. April 26-27 was the KAIROS BC-Yukon Network Gathering with the theme: *No Passengers on Planet Earth*. May 2-5 was *Streams of Justice*, the KAIROS Atlantic Gathering for 2019. Both Gatherings were full, rich places of connection, learning and renewal – made possible by so many small and large contributions from so many people.

Bob Worcester began the BC-Yukon Gathering with several stories, including one about a hummingbird who is putting drops of water on a forest fire – over and over again. The other animals ask her what she is doing. Her response is “I am doing what I can.” The animals are inspired to each contribute their own unique offering and together they save their forest home.

The Gatherings were a bit like the hummingbird and her friends coming together – each one bringing what they can with a conviction that is important and will make a difference. Andrew Larigakis epitomized this in his Ted Talk style presentation in Vancouver. A few years ago, he would have never thought he would be leading a large, vibrant chapter of a climate change organization – Vancouver 350.org – but a series of “yeses” that felt right at the moment led him to deeper and deeper involvement and commitment to the movement. He taught the crowd, “just say ‘Yes!’”.



The largest ever KAIROS Blanket Exercise in Atlantic Canada.

Over 150 people gathered on the ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq for the largest KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE) so far in Atlantic Canada. Donna Augustine shared how the spiritual teachings of the Indigenous people from the coast were taken west for preservation when colonization began in the east. She knew and believed as a child that the old ways were not lost. Her contribution was to share a small piece of that story of resilience and to share a moment of spiritual welcome with all who gathered.

"People found the Blanket Exercise very moving and appreciated the local content, especially honouring residential school survivor Nora Bernard for her role in bringing about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, says Katy Quinn, KAIROS' KBE Education Coordinator who hopes the event helped strengthen the KBE movement in Atlantic Canada. "Lots of people who attended were experiencing the Blanket Exercise for the first time. I hope it gave them new insights that they can share with family and friends so that the awareness spreads."

Kelly Campo represented the KAIROS partner Organización Feminina Popular (OFP) from Colombia at the Atlantic Gathering. In addition to the stories of women's struggles and resilience in the Women of Courage stream, she shared with everyone the stories and images of youth activism and the arts in Colombia. Canadian examples of this were present at both Gatherings, ranging from Rebecca Hamilton – a 16-year-old climate activist in Vancouver sharing her passion and conviction – to everyone joining the Sackville Youth Climate Coalition in their May 3rd climate strike in downtown Sackville with a small group from the KAIROS children's stream guiding our participation.

So many drops making the streams of justice flow on both ends of the country: banners and blankets created, friendships sparked or renewed, stories shared and lessons learned about ecological justice, Indigenous rights, justice for migrants and the Women of Courage who resist extractive industry and create peace around the world. Workshops led on topics as diverse as meeting our multi-faith neighbours to learning from the youth movement at the international climate change gatherings. All grounded by the sacred fire and the morning chapel worship services in the east and wrapped up by an optional outdoor wild church service in the west. The image of the altar from that closing worship decorated with the beauty of creation collected by many hands is one more memory of each small contribution coming together into a stream that has refreshed and invigorated the movement for justice in both coastal regions.



Outdoor wild church service at the KAIROS BC-Yukon Gathering.

Full article: [kairoscanada.org/kairos-gatherings-invigorates-coast-coast](http://kairoscanada.org/kairos-gatherings-invigorates-coast-coast)

# Fighting Climate Change at Camp Kintail

*By Shelagh O'Neill, Director of Outdoor Education, Camp Kintail, Goderich, Ontario and a PCC representative on the KAIROS Ecological Justice Circle.*

The most recent annual gathering of the Presbyterian Church Camps and Conference Association (PCCCA) included an exciting opportunity. The 156 PCC and PCUSA affiliated retreat, camp and conference centres had the chance to make a commitment to operating more sustainable organizations within the Church by signing the 2018 Climate Change Declaration for Affirmation. The declaration was created by the PCCCA in response to the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on our global environment (IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers), which acknowledges that the average global temperature has risen and will continue to do so, and that this is directly linked to human activity.

Camps are particularly well-placed to witness the effects of our changing climate. Rising global temperatures are altering the earth's climate system, causing environmental, economic and public health challenges. Recognizing that we are all responsible for caring for the earth to the best of our ability, organizations and individuals who signed the PCCCA's 2018 Climate Change Declaration for Affirmation committed to the following:

- Reducing meat consumption. Livestock agriculture accounts for approximately 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans.<sup>1</sup>
- Completely eliminating the use of Styrofoam products and committing to a reduction and/or elimination of single-use plastics in programs, meals and practices. The production of these single use products creates gases and chemicals that are damaging to the earth.
- Informing others about actions that were taken. Empowering others to reduce their environmental impact by sharing and educating.

Camp Kintail, located in Goderich, Ont., was one of the centres that signed the declaration. As a Presbyterian summer camp and year-round retreat centre, Camp Kintail has always recognized its unique role and responsibility to protect God's creation and maintain places where people



can come to experience God. Kintail is committed to actively taking steps to conserve energy and water in as many ways as possible. Other steps that Camp Kintail takes to be more environmentally responsible include recycling, composting waste and promoting the consumption of locally grown food. Prior to the conference, Kintail had already been serving local dairy products and predominantly local meat products.



Since the conference, Camp Kintail is working towards serving three meatless meals a week and continues to supplement with fruits and vegetables grown in the Camp's own garden. The garden itself is an opportunity for awareness about our environment and how to care well for it, since it is tended by campers and staff. Additionally, Camp Kintail has been working towards creating as little food garbage as possible by eliminating single-use plastics and ordering in bulk. Through nature sessions, garden sessions, Bible studies, signage and announcements, Camp Kintail shares with campers and guests several ways to reduce their carbon footprint with ideas for how sustainability can be practiced at home.

In the book of Genesis, we learn God created Earth and that it is our responsibility as Christians to care for all that is on it. Collectively as humans, our use of natural resources is not fulfilling our responsibility, and instead we are hurting the earth. PCC churches, retreats, camps, conference centres and other organizations are in a position to embody sustainable practices and educate congregation members and visitors about the ecological benefits of even small changes like:

- Using public transportation and carpooling when traveling to meetings or events
- Eating locally produced food
- Eliminating the use of single-use plastics and foam
- Switching to energy-saving elements, such as motion-sensor lights and faucets

Together, we can better serve God through caring for creation and changing some of our daily habits in order to support a sustainable future for the earth.

<sup>1</sup> [fao.org/news/story/en/item/197623/icode/](https://fao.org/news/story/en/item/197623/icode/)



# Government Responses to the Opioid Crisis

By Carragh Erhardt, Justice Ministries Program Assistant.

On June 13, the co-chairs of the federal, provincial, and territorial Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses released a statement in response to new data about the impact of the opioid crisis, which reported that 11,577 people died of an apparent opioid-related overdose in Canada between January 2016 and December 2018.<sup>1</sup>

Following a recommendation from General Assembly in 2018, the Moderator wrote to the federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Health affirming decisions to approve safe consumption/injection sites as a life-saving measure in the opioid crisis and inquiring about their plans to improve access to and funding for addiction treatment services.

Responses have been received from the Minister of Health from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. All responses indicated concern regarding the opioid crisis and included references to steps they were taking to develop and implement strategies to address the crisis. Many wrote about working on channels for people to access recovery programs. A few mentioned programs for making naloxone kits available.

As the Special Advisory Committee emphasized, "The epidemic of opioid overdoses continues to be the most challenging public health crisis in recent decades, and the devastating impacts of the crisis continue to be felt in many parts of the country, from Canada's largest cities to rural and remote communities." While the crisis is still a major problem, the Special Advisory Committee wrote that they have witnessed a combination of harm reduction measures—including supervised consumption sites, naloxone, and evidence-based treatments—saving lives.<sup>2</sup>

In order to put an end to the opioid crisis, we need to build on these measures and continue seeking ways to address the root causes including stigma, mental health, and social and economic factors.

The Government of Canada has compiled an interactive map of prevention and harm reduction, treatment and enforcement programs that are addressing the opioid crisis. It is available at [health.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/opioids/responding-canada-opioid-crisis/map.html](http://health.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/opioids/responding-canada-opioid-crisis/map.html). The map may be a helpful tool for congregations to learn about programs and services near them, and to identify gaps where advocacy is needed in order to put more efforts in place to address the crisis.

<sup>1</sup>[tinyurl.com/gcopioid0919](http://tinyurl.com/gcopioid0919)

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

## New Prayer Resource on Religious Persecution



A new prayer resource from the International Affairs Committee is available that discusses religious persecution, a reality touching the lives of far too many people around the world. *Praying for 31 Countries Around the World Where Religious Persecution is High* begins with a reflection on why prayer is important and why we should pray for people of all faiths, who face persecution for their beliefs. It includes a selection of prayers for those affected by religious persecution, and then highlights the situation of those persecuted for their faith in 31 countries around the world—one for each day of the month.

Download your free copy at  
[presbyterian.ca/2019/05/23/religious-persecution/](http://presbyterian.ca/2019/05/23/religious-persecution/).

## Justice Ministries Webinars

Over the past few months, Justice Ministries has hosted the following webinars which are available at [presbyterian.ca/webinars/previous-webinars/](http://presbyterian.ca/webinars/previous-webinars/):

### Learn more about the Doctrine of Discovery Report for General Assembly

During this webinar, Justice Ministries staff answered questions about the Doctrine of Discovery, its influence on The Presbyterian Church in Canada's ministry with Indigenous people, and what repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery means. Share this webinar with your congregation to help them understand why the General Assembly voted to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

### Applying to the Healing and Reconciliation Seed Fund

The next deadline for grant applications is *Friday, September 27, 2019*. The webinar includes advice on how to begin building relationships with Indigenous people in your community and tips for different stages in the Seed Fund's application and reporting process.

### How Congregations can Care for the Environment

Hosted in partnership with Canadian Ministries, this webinar provided advice on how to begin or expand greening efforts in your congregation, including presentations from Gregory Lynch (Director, Green Churches Network) and Elizabeth Churcher (Environmental Team Chair, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Tweed, Ont.).

# A Review of Journeys to Justice

*By the Rev. Jeff Lackie, St. John's Presbyterian Church in Medicine Hat, Alberta.*

*Journeys to Justice: Reflections on Canadian Christian Activism*

Written by Joe Gunn  
Novalis Publishing, 2018

Joe Gunn's engaging and very personal introduction sets an instructive tone for the selection of interviews and reminiscences that make up "Journeys to Justice." This collection offers an inside look at the development of Christian social justice activities within Canada, in what some might consider a season of uncertainty for faithful intervention in public policy and for social action. Is this work really at a low ebb? Or is it simply evolving beyond its congregational (and denominational) origins?

These are among the questions raised by this thoughtful and hopeful collection. To a Christian community in danger of losing sight of its social justice heritage, Gunn's book serves as a bracing reminder of what is possible. To a generation of socially engaged folks who have no time for "religious nonsense," these stories are a gentle and honest reminder of the lengths to which faith can carry social endeavour.

Each chapter is presented as an interview, and while some of the narratives are more focused than others, the style draws the reader into each story. The ten Canadians interviewed by Gunn tell their stories with the benefit of clear hindsight. Mistakes and gaps are acknowledged—victories are tempered by current realities.

For example, in her interview Marie Zarowny, Province Co-Leader of the Sisters of Saint Ann (Victoria, B.C.), describes a decade of work in the North trying to stem the tide of violence against women. While rejoicing that her work with the Northern Bishops has made room for important conversations about family violence, her final statement expresses the difficult truth: "The attitudes that remain towards women, especially towards Indigenous women, are still dismissive" (p. 89).

The world has changed and the names of those who are directly involved have changed, but everyone represented recognizes that justice still needs to be done. All of the initiatives covered in this book will be familiar to the read-

er—the work done by this representative group of faithful people and the organizations they represent changed things—but those who lived these stories question the lasting effect of their work.

Some of the efforts around refugee sponsorship are reflected in our current public policies—other initiatives have been smothered by economic and social changes—and in nearly every instance there is the tacit acknowledgement that the Christian church (specifically) has lost the respect of society at large, and therefore much of its power to affect social change in matters of national importance.

How might this book be useful to the church? For those who need to remember that the Christian Church once had a profound influence in social action circles—and to those who long for a return to the "good old days," when leaders in the faith communities occupied headlines for all the right reasons—this book may serve as a reminder of what is possible. For those who wonder where to start, who imagine that there is no room at the table for people of faith, this book will remind you that even the grandest triumphs must start from nothing.

For those who are engaged in justice work, this book may offer a hint of discouragement. The stories are so triumphant, and yet, there is so much still to do. Gunn's introduction lays the groundwork for those people—planting seeds of hope, and perhaps subtle reminders that most of the work must be done out of sight. The highmindedness of the social-media based social-justice warrior will be brought back to earth. Campaigns and petitions are well and good, but Gunn's subjects are masters of the persistent conversation, the grinding, tedious work of asking and asking again, for some hint of justice in some small fraction of their corner of the world.

The penultimate reflection in the collection, offered by the Rev. Christine Boyle, sums up the book nicely: "[Christians] come from stories that remind us that all sorts of miraculous transformations are possible. When we forget this... change feels impossible, because it feels like things have always been just as they are now" (p. 155).

Joe Gunn's collection of remembrances reminds us of our history. It is a history told carefully, for those telling the tale are trying to remember the best and the worst of their experiences. The honesty of Gunn's introduction and the patterns of faith revealed in this collection of memories offer practical encouragement to those of us who hunger for justice as we try to follow Jesus in our tumultuous present.

