

STREAMS OF JUSTICE

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

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A Christmas Message from Justice Ministries

By Allyson Carr, Associate Secretary, Justice Ministries

Recently, I was putting together a reflection for the Commission on Justice and Peace, an ecumenical group I sit on with the Canadian Council of Churches. I began the reflection with the peace prayer attributed to saint Francis:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy. Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love..."

As I looked at that prayer, its words really resonated with me. At Christmas time, we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, and this prayer beautifully lays out what being an instrument of Christ's peace can look like. Reflecting on the prayer gave me pause to consider how I can sow love, how I can work for joy, for hope, for faith. But of course, the more I reflected on how to do those things, the more fully I saw the difficulties involved in truly being an instrument of Christ's peace in the world today.

Among other work related to issues like climate change, racism, and the situation in Palestine and Israel, we've spent the past several months reading through the lengthy final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The report gives a finding of genocide and notes that the Christian church was complicit in developing and supporting the structures and social practices that led to such intense and ongoing harm. How then can we work to be instruments of peace when we, collectively, have a history that includes sowing a great deal of harm? Can we still bring joy and love and faith and hope? How does one celebrate Christmas in a climate emergency while reflecting on genocide and the other issues this newsletter touches on?

Christmas is not a time for easy answers, but lucky for us, embodying a practice of love doesn't have to come easily; it just has to come. While we often forget its purpose, the season of Advent is supposed to be an entire period devoted to preparation for the miracle expressed at Christmas. Advent is a reminder that it takes time, work, and readiness to welcome the Peace that came embodied in a small baby born in a manger in Bethlehem—a baby who almost immediately became a refugee, whose family had to flee for their lives to protect this so fragilely embodied peace.



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Christmas Message

Since taking up the position as Associate Secretary in September, the more I have learned about the issues we look at in Justice Ministries, the more I have come to appreciate Saint Francis' prayer, which puts the onus of learning and then action on the speaker. It reminds those who pray it that working to be an instrument of God's peace involves service of others; to work, for example, to understand others rather than prioritizing being understood ourselves. It teaches listening and caring.

Reading through the articles in this newsletter, we can see different ways that we in the PCC have worked and continue to

work to be instruments of peace and justice. And, if I could wager an answer to the question I posed earlier about how to celebrate Christmas in the context we find ourselves in today, I would say that it is in loving service to the Prince of Peace, and all he came to save.

Christ, you came into this world bringing hope and love and peace. As we celebrate your birth, help us to live justly, being instruments of your peace.

Facing Fears and Hopes in a Time of Climate Crisis

By Carragh Erhardt, Program Assistant, Justice Ministries

Over the past year, a new wave of activists for climate justice has emerged. Youth around the world have been organizing school strikes to draw attention to the urgent need for politicians to take aggressive steps to slow the human impacts on climate change. These young activists have heard the alarms raised by the recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Their message is clear: if we do not change the ways that humans live, we will continue to put all living beings in danger.

In many of my recent conversations with friends about these reports, we've shared feelings of underlying anxiety about climate change. What if it's too late? What if people continue to use and abuse creation without regard for the cost? In times like this, finding community can be a salve and a source of hope.

During the climate strike on September 27, I joined with friends from KAIROS among thousands who marched in downtown Toronto. One of the strengths of the climate strike was that it was a chance for participants to be reminded that none of us have to do the work of activism or advocacy alone. Not only was I surrounded by people from across generations, but those of us who were striking in Toronto were also connected to all of the people who took part in local strikes across the globe. A global strike has the power to remind us that the cost of our actions – and our inactions – is not just local. We are inextricably connected to the rest of God's creation, human and non-human. Our wellbeing depends on how we care and work for the wellbeing of the rest of creation, and vice versa.

While I was at the strike, Allyson led a teach-in for staff back at the PCC's national office about the origins of the current climate justice movements, why churches should care and how they can have a positive impact. Since then, she has also recorded the teach-in as a webinar (youtu.be/KJCgl_EqUQs). Consider hosting a climate conversation with

members of your congregation where you watch the webinar and discuss ways to address climate change in your community. What fears or hopes do you share about the future of climate justice?

The conversations we will have in the coming months about our hopes and fears for our shared future will determine how well we can adapt our behaviours to have a chance at slowing the rate of climate change. Before the march in Toronto, the youth who spoke issued an important reminder that we especially need to listen to those who experience the affects of climate change first, and the hardest: Indigenous peoples, migrant workers and climate refugees. A future that involves a just approach to climate change must also seek to redress social and economic injustices.



Healing and Reconciliation: A Year in Review

By Carragh Erhardt, Program Assistant, Justice Ministries

With the end to another year fast approaching, I've been spending some time reflecting on the work of the PCC's involvement in reconciliation and Indigenous rights—what we have been doing, and where we are heading.

One of the hopes Justice Ministries had for the year was to see the General Assembly repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery (TRC Call to Action No. 49). Many hours went into drafting the report and preparing other resources to help commissioners understand why it was necessary for the PCC to take that step and General Assembly did vote to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. This was vital forward movement for the PCC's journey of reconciliation. There is more work to be done to live out the repudiation—new resources will continue to be added to presbyterian.ca/justice/doctrine-of-discovery/ to support congregations and presbyteries in learning more about the Doctrine of Discovery and how they can respond.

While we were at General Assembly, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls released its final report, calling all Canadians to recognize that the violence described in the report amounts to thousands of acts of genocide against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people. The report is not easy reading, but it is necessary reading. As the commissioners have shared, "the fact that this National Inquiry is happening now doesn't mean that Indigenous Peoples waited this long to speak up; it means it took this long for Canada to listen."¹ Especially for non-Indigenous Canadians, we need to accept the Inquiry's call to pay attention and hold the government accountable to creating a National Action Plan.

Justice Ministries and members of the National Indigenous Ministry Council's executive are studying the Inquiry's final report together and will present a report to General Assembly in 2020 with recommendations for action. My encouragement right now is to start reading the report if you haven't already. Ask friends or family to read with you

so you can support each other.

The National Inquiry echoed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in calling for the full adoption and implementation of the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Throughout the first half of 2019, those of us who had been advocating for Bill C-262 were hopeful that the bill might receive Royal Assent before the federal election. Unfortunately, it died on the order paper in Senate in June. This was a great disappointment and we still await proposed legislation that would be comparable or stronger than Bill C-262 at outlining a plan to ensure that Canada's laws and policies reflect the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples. At the provincial level, British Columbia introduced new legislation in November that aims to implement UNDRIP. This bill received royal assent on November 28, setting a hopeful precedent that other jurisdictions across the country will follow suit.

Another important moment this year was the release of the National Student Memorial Register on September 30 in Gatineau, Quebec. The register names over 2,800 children who died or went missing from Indian Residential Schools; there are at least 1,600 records of children whose names are unknown and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation expects to continue adding names as their research continues. As I watched and listened during the ceremony, I was struck once more by the profound cost of the residential schools for Indigenous families and communities. There was a deep sadness in the room as we honoured the children who were lost, but also a feeling that by shedding light on the truth, we might come closer to healing.

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise continues to be a platform for honest conversations about the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. This year, Justice Ministries had the opportunity to bring the Blanket Exercise to eight Presbyterian groups ranging from Leamington in southwestern Ontario to Montreal. Every Blanket Exercise is a bit different because of the participants but every time, I'm struck by a sense of gratitude that I'm able to carry and share the truths that the exercise conveys. In September, Allyson and I participated in facilitator training with KAIROS to try the 5th Edition of the Blanket Exercise and talk with other facilitators about best practices.

As we look to the future of the program, we want to hear from you! We would appreciate your feedback on the Healing and Reconciliation program. Let us know what kind of resources or supports you would be interested in by filling out our short survey at form.jotform.com/Presby/Local-Leader-Survey-2019. If you would prefer to share your thoughts another way, you can email healing@presbyterian.ca or call 1-800-619-7301 ext. 278.



Members of the NIMC met in Winnipeg in October.

From L to R: Yvonne Bearbull, Rev. Mary Fontaine, Rev. Amanda Currie, Faye Blaney, Dr. Allyson Carr, Jen de Combe, Rev. Dr. Margaret Mullin.

¹ *Reclaiming Power and Place*, Volume 1a, pg. 49

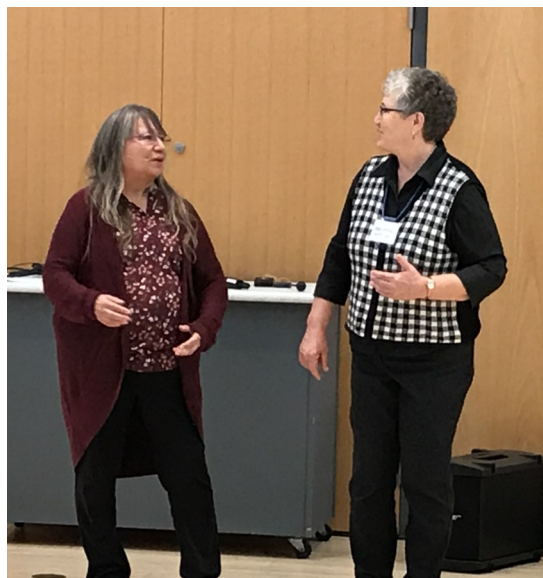
A Weekend of Learning: A Time of Hope

By Allison Dyjach

In October, my home congregation, Knox Presbyterian Church in Waterloo, committed to a weekend of listening, learning, and action through a workshop and service centered on reconciliation with Indigenous people. The weekend was organized by the newly formed "Reconciliation Initiatives" committee that felt this was the next natural step for the congregation. After sending four groups to Winnipeg Inner City Missions over the years, and inviting several Indigenous guest speakers to church, it was time for action within the local community and within our entire congregation.

Saturday morning began with guest speaker Sherlene Bomberry from the Woodland Cultural Centre, the site of the Mohawk Institute residential school in Brantford, Ontario (1885-1970). Sherlene spoke of her incredible journey navigating the grief and guilt that came with attending residential school, particularly the effects of having multiple members of her family attend residential school across generations. Although there were moments of sadness in her story, she left us with a powerful message: don't let the anger of the past win. Sherlene told us that for a long time she held on to the anger that came with her residential school experience. However, with time, support and a lot of effort she has been able to slowly let those emotions fade and let hope and optimism lead the way. She encouraged us to do the same when thinking about the history of the church and colonization—let the guilt of the past go, and instead work to move forward in a better way.

After her talk, many people approached Sherlene with questions and comments, and were met, without fail, with a warm embrace. Sherlene's resiliency and kindness were truly inspiring that morning and helped us reflect on our personal journeys with reconciliation.



Sherlene Bomberry and Rev. Linda Ashfield

"It's always easy to brush the problem off because you don't know anyone that has been affected," shared one congregation member. "Now that we can put a face to a name and remember her story, we can't just sit around and do nothing."

Later that day, about 30 members of the congregation and community participated in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise—an experiential learning activity designed to tell the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships within Canada. The Blanket Exercise talks about the effects of the Indian Act, the Indian Residential School system, Sixties Scoop and other aspects of colonization.



Following the Blanket Exercise, a time of reflection brought forth many ideas of how we can continue to make reconciliation a part of our church and community through educating ourselves and others. Several participants shared how they wanted to begin educating their own children or students that they teach about these topics through sharing books by Indigenous authors or going to events in the community. A common theme in our debriefing was the feeling of wanting to tell others about the exercise, the emotions that came along with it, and the information they learned that day. It was clear that everyone felt the messages from the day needed to be shared with others.

The weekend concluded with a church service on Sunday devoted to reconciliation and recognizing the PCC's confession regarding the church's role in residential schools. Our service began with honouring the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples followed by a prayer acknowledging the four directions and Indigenous ways of knowing. The service was interwoven with songs from *Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak*—the *Good Hearted Women Singers*—a drum circle group from Waterloo.

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A Weekend of Learning: A Time of Hope

The morning provided a time for reflection on the church's relationship with Indigenous people, past and present. 25 years ago the *Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* was presented to Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and for the first time at Knox, Waterloo the entire *Confession* was read aloud to the congregation. Creating space for the *Confession* to be read aloud and acknowledged by everyone present was an important moment. Bearing witness to the statement helped Knox to remember that there is still a lot of work to be done. The words read aloud were not solely applicable 25 years ago. They remind us of the ongoing relationship we need to continue building with Indigenous peoples and this was a message that everyone in our congregation needed to hear.

A call to action also came from guest speakers Ellie Joseph and Jay Bailey, organizers of the Two Row on the Grand, a 9-day canoe trip along the Grand River that honours the Two Row Wampum treaty and brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members together for a time of bonding and learning in nature. Their message encouraged us to seek ways to build authentic relationships with our Indigenous neighbours, and take action through events like this. Knox plans on sending several members to take part this summer.

The conclusion of our service was a special moment. Before the final song, one of the leaders of *Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak* said, "I heard about hope today...I heard about relationships, and I heard about action." She then invited everyone to join them up at the front and play along with drums and shakers as we sang the Mohawk Friendship Song, a traditional round dance song. As we felt the pulse of the song and played along I couldn't help but smile and close my eyes. This service *was* about relationships. Through listening and sharing—stories, experiences, and music—our congregation was able to gain a new level of understanding and gain a different perspective.

Reconciliation is a big word that sometimes seems impossible to make come true. When I opened my eyes to sing the final verse of the song, I was filled with emotion. I looked to the far left aisle in the sanctuary to see a group of about five congregation members holding hands, moving side-to-side, toe tapping around the sanctuary. As they moved past each of the pews, folks slipped out and join their hands together, joining in the traditional round dance that was meant to accompany this song. This was reconciliation in action. Memories were being made, relationships being formed, and a commitment being made. This was a step in the right direction.

The PCC Endorses *No Way to Treat a Child* Campaign

This year, one of the topics that the International Affairs Committee chose to address in their report to General Assembly was the practice of Palestinian children being tried as adults in Israeli military courts. *No Way to Treat a Child* is a campaign started by Defense for Children International – Palestine and staff from the American Friends Service Committee to raise awareness about the widespread and systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system.

Since 1967, Israel has operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlers are subject to the civilian and criminal legal system whereas Palestinians live under military law. Palestinian children in the West Bank, like adults, face arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment under an Israeli military detention system that denies them basic rights. Israel is the only country in the world that automatically prosecutes children in military courts that lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections.

In 1991, Israel ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires that children should only be deprived of their liberty as a measure of last resort, must not be unlawfully or arbitrarily detained, and must not be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Despite this, according

to affidavits collected from 739 West Bank children detained between 2013 and 2018, 73% of Palestinian children experienced physical violence following arrest. Many also faced verbal abuse. In 96% of the cases, children had no parent present during the interrogation. Israeli police also did not properly inform them of their rights in 74% of the cases.¹

Despite sustained engagement by UNICEF and repeated calls to end night arrests and ill treatment and torture of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention, Israeli authorities have persistently failed to implement practical changes to stop violence against child detainees. By drawing attention to these human rights abuses, the *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign is committed to securing a just and viable future for Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and envisions a world where all children attain rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Commissioners at the 2019 General Assembly voted for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to endorse *No Way to Treat a Child*. You can learn more about the campaign and how you can help at nwttac.canada.dci-palestine.org/.

¹ nwttac.dci-palestine.org/hr4391_factsheet_military_detention

Responding to the Opioid Crisis: Learning about Naloxone

By the Rev. Meg Patterson, St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Ottawa

At General Assembly in 2018, Justice Ministries presented a report called "Defining the Opioid Crisis in Canada." In the Presbytery of Ottawa, the report was referred to the committee of Worship and Witness for review and report back to Presbytery. This committee includes ministers from urban and rural congregations in Ottawa, and several members had seen firsthand the impact of opioids in their neighbourhoods. We were heartbroken by the way these drugs have destroyed lives and families.

One intervention aimed at reducing opioid-related deaths is the use of naloxone, a medication used to block the effects of opioids. Most of our committee had a lack of understanding on the basics of naloxone kits, such as how to use them, when to give someone the medication, and how to obtain a kit. When reporting back to Presbytery, we tried to gauge the interest of presbyters on some basic training on naloxone kits. We found enough interest that presbytery approved a recommendation to host a first aid instructor who would provide an introduction to the opioid crisis and the use of naloxone kits.

At our September 2019 meeting, we welcomed Jennifer Chalmers, a first aid instructor and member of St. Stephen's Church in Ottawa. Over 20 minutes, she spoke about the opioid epidemic, provided guidance on basic steps to follow should someone be found unconscious on the street and shared helpful information on how naloxone kits are used. We found out how easy it is to get a naloxone kit in Ontario: anyone with an OHIP card can go to a pharmacy and receive one for free. I was surprised to learn that in Ontario, all naloxone kits are nasal sprays, so there is no worry

about giving someone a needle. Some of the early kits used a syringe, but they found that the kits were both more expensive to produce and required more training to use properly. One of the most important facts I learned was that naloxone has no effect on someone not suffering from an overdose.

As a result of the introduction to naloxone kits at Presbytery, at least one church got their own naloxone kit, and another church enquired about doing more extensive training for leaders in their congregation. Please consider speaking with your local public health organization about a short information session for your Presbytery! It might lead to a saved life down the line!



Jen Chalmers (left) and Rev. Meg Patterson with a Naloxone kit.

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