

JUSTICE, MISSION & OUTREACH COMMITTEE

In our United Church creed, we say we are called to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil. Our Justice, Mission & Outreach Committee strives to do these things. We work in partnership with the Justice, Mission & Outreach Committee of Regional Council 15. A lot of the projects we have undertaken have been in operation for many years. The work toward justice takes a long time. We often do not see instant results. Below are some of the highlights of our work in 2021:

Ecological Justice Working Group

We continue to promote the Faithful Footprints program of the United Church. We encourage communities of faith to share the things they have been doing to conserve energy in their church buildings. We have been active in resisting the use of small modular nuclear reactors, and have also asked that the government of New Brunswick to stop using nuclear energy. Instead, there should be more use of renewable energy such as wind and solar power.

Just Peace for Palestine and Israel Working Group

In October, the Israeli government falsely designated six leading Palestinian NGOs as "terrorist" groups. This puts the work and safety of human rights defenders in danger, makes it more difficult to hold Israel to account for its human rights abuses, and effectively criminalizes these respected organizations. It allows Israeli forces to shut down the offices in the West Bank, to confiscate their property, and to arrest and prosecute their staff. One of these NGOs, DCIP, is a United Church partner in mission. Many supporters have written to the Prime Minister and MPs asking them to speak up in support of the six human rights organizations.

The cross Canada campaign, "Canada, Stand Up for Palestinian Children's Rights" co-sponsored a webinar in October on the military detention and mistreatment of Palestinian children. In November, in Halifax, a group of United Church, Palestinian and other volunteers organized an outdoor public witness to the Israeli military treatment of Palestinian children and support for Canada to appoint a Special Envoy to monitor and protect these children. 2021 was the deadliest year for Palestinian children since the bombing of Gaza in 2014. Over 80 people signed letters to Foreign Affairs Minister Joly with copies to their own MP.

Through Advent and Christmas, Zatoum olive oil and other products were sold through churches. We learned that the actual cost for getting these quality, Fair Trade products to Canada is much higher than we realized. The price will be increased beginning with the spring shipment.

Refugee Matters Working Group

This has been a year of transition for the Refugee Matters Working Group. The previous Coordinator, Lenora Timmons, had to step away from the role. We welcomed a new Coordinator, Patricia (Trish) Betts in the fall. Over the past few months, Trish has been busy going to meetings and getting information to understand the Refugee Process, and how she can best work with our regional councils.

Indigenous Concerns and Relations

This group has been less active this past year. We have promoted some webinars on Indigenous rights and treaties. We will be taking steps to reconnect with the Indigenous members of the working group, and will take direction for advocacy from them.

Guaranteed Livable Income Network

This network works with other groups across the country. A book study was held in January on Hugh Segal's "Bootstraps Need Boots." There is much interest in seeing how a guaranteed livable income might be implemented in Prince Edward Island.

Anti-Racism Network

Members of the network offered "Beyond Words: a summer anti-racism film series" in July. The goal was to start conversations about racism. The network plans to offer monthly webinars in 2022.

Partnerships

Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network

This network has been in existence for over 30 years. Every year, our committee gives a financial award to a youth group working for justice in Guatemala. It is called the Topacio Reynoso award, and is in memory of Topacio Renoso, a 16-year-old girl who, as a member of her Diocesan youth group, resisted Canadian company, Tahoe Resources, for the imposition of the Escobal Mine without the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples. The network continues to the Breaking the Silence label of Just Us! Fair Trade Coffee. This provides financial support to the Highlands Committee of Small Farmers.

Other Partnerships

Conversations are ongoing with other partners and groups, such as Canadian Foodgrains Bank NS and the Faith Formation and Leadership Development committees of our regional councils, regarding possible collaborative activities and mutual efforts.

This past year, we said goodbye to our Staff Resource: Laura Hunter. She left her position at the end of June 2021. In March 2022, we welcomed Shepherd Munikwa.

I am indebted to Anne Hoganson, Chair of the Justice, Mission & Outreach Committee of Regional Council 15. Most of the information in this report was gleaned from the report she gave to Regional Council 15. Both Anne and I will be stepping down from our roles as co-chairs of this committee after our regional councils have their annual meetings in 2022.

Respectfully submitted by
Kent Gibbons
Chair