

October 9, 2019

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA  
SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a meeting of the  
Social and Ecological Justice Commission  
Wednesday, October 9, 2019**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met by video conference on Wednesday, October 9, 2019. The meeting began at 10:00 a.m.

**Members Present**

Lois Brown, Tina Conlon, Susan Eagle (Chairperson), Donna Lang, Alana Martin, Eleanor Scarlett, Cameron Watts

Staff: Ren Ito, Jody Maltby

Regrets: Moon-Ja Park, Susie Henderson (staff)

**Welcome, check in and prayer**

The chairperson welcomed the members of the commission and opened with a reading by Walter Bruggeman and with prayer. She also gave an acknowledgement of the land and acknowledged our commitment to being a safe place for all people to gather and participate in our region.

**Agenda**

The commission agreed by consensus that the agenda for this meeting be approved as circulated.

**Correspondence**

The chair acknowledged correspondence received by email regarding Toronto City Hall and the Church Street actions. On the first matter, a letter was sent to City Hall on behalf of the region and on the second, information went to all Affirming Communities in the region.

**Introductions, Greeting and Check-In**

The chairperson invited members of the commission to introduce themselves, identifying their passions, hopes and dreams for the commission and also perhaps gaps in the commission.

Members identified the following passions:

- Environmental concerns
- Transitional work with congregations

- Social and ecological justice – how it ties together and can evolve and how we can make a difference not just within the region but throughout Canada and world-wide
- Seeing how the poverty, homelessness and hunger in my small area is actually connected to issues around the world
- After raising awareness and telling stories – what are the next steps? How do we engage in both resistance and celebration through these stories?
- Canadian immigration and work visa policies and food production concerns.
- Working with children and youth and helping them to engage in social and ecological justice
- Climate crises
- Relationships in the community and with Indigenous neighbours
- Encouraging congregation to become Affirming
- Concern about poverty and street youth, and care for children living in poverty
- Racially and economically diverse neighbourhood, learning from children and youth leading in activism
- How to make linkages between people in faith communities to engage in justice work
- Climate change and anti-hate work
- Climate justice work is a big one, racial justice, justice and education and community building around gender and sexual diversity and LGBTQ people in the church
- Right relations, people living in poverty and marginalization, access to justice being access to what we need to survive and thrive
- Right relations and provision of supports including immediate needs and long-term justice.
- Political activism and engaging with candidates around justice issues and particularly the environment
- Concern that in spite of our work, the gap between rich and poor is growing and the climate chaos is getting worse
- Engage, motivate and mobilize communities in our region to become more active
- Environmental racism – how we deal with disposing of our waste which is often based on racism.
- Donna Rutz has created a mail chimp database of areas of passion that people said they wanted to address when folks gathered in Richmond Hill. She will share that with the commission.

### **Reviewing the Commission Mandate**

The chairperson reviewed the mandate of the commission and in particular the eight areas of responsibility. The mandate is broad and intended to give focus and flexibility to the work of the commission. The Executive is looking to the commission to identify the priorities for the region in social and ecological justice work.

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Ren Ito drew attention to Moon Ja Park's email highlighting the additions to the mandate focusing the commission on anti-racism and being intercultural.

The commission considered some of the questions provided on the agenda.

Focusing the Work:

If ministry personnel want to sign a petition as individuals, they can do so. If they want to sign representing their congregation or an organization, they need to have approval of the governing body of the congregation or the organization.

As a region, will we speak to or endorse only things that are region-wide or will we endorse local initiatives? Is there a difference between issues endorsed by the UCC and those that might be more controversial?

The commission agreed to consider by email endorsement requests received between meetings. The process is to send requests to Rachael Howes who will consult with the chairperson and follow the process outlined in the Appendix to The Manual (2019). The members agreed that their email addresses may be shared with other members of the commission. There may be a short turn around on these requests and members are asked to respond in a timely manner.

Only the President can make public statements on behalf of the region. This commission has authority to make decisions on behalf of the region. It is important to make statements in such a way that people across the region support our statement.

The commission acknowledged that it would be helpful to have an understanding of the work that is happening in communities of faith but it may be difficult to gain and maintain. The intent is not to create an inventory of outreach or justice committees across the region.

Cameron Watts offered to put together a draft survey that we could send out to congregations introducing the commission and seeking information. The survey will not be anonymous. We need to know who is responding and we may want to ask for email contact and permission to share. Someone may have to follow up with congregations to get responses.

It was noted that we can get helpful information from congregational annual reports.

We are a member of the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions (SJNOR). Susan Eagle is part of the network through ISARC. There were two or three people from the former Toronto Conference connected with the network. The commission will consider how we want to connect with the network and with

other regions across the country – how we share resources and learn from the work others are doing.

Ren Ito has been the staff person of SJNOR. He and Tina Conlon will attend the next meeting on November 25-26 while we consider the ongoing relationship.

**Commission Structure:**

There may be a need for ad hoc groups for time-limited projects and a committee structure to support core work. There could be a youth and young adult sub-committee to speak to the work of the commission.

It will be helpful to have a conversation about the core work of this commission and the region and that might inform structure. It could also be helpful to identify lenses, which could include a lens of anti-racism and an intercultural lens. Rather than having separate sub-committees, these should inform everything we do. We need to pay attention to who is present at the table and who is absent. What voices are missing? It could be a standard agenda item to ask that question at every meeting.

The commission has no representation from Indigenous communities or from youth.

**Budget:**

While recognizing that we need to understand our work in order to create a budget, there was a sense that we need a working budget in the short-term while we develop a plan. Ren Ito and Jody Maltby will have conversation with Susan Eagle about a working budget for 6 months.

**Frequency of meetings:**

The commission will meet monthly at least initially. It is a better use of time to use video conference so we do not spend time in travel. Generally, Wednesdays are good.

If the hope is to have a young person participate, daytime meetings during the week are hard to manage.

**Closing:**

The chairperson offered a blessing and the meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

**Next Meeting:**

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 10:30 a.m. via Zoom.