

February 27, 2020

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

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Thursday, February 27, 2020**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on February 27, 2020 by video conference. The meeting began at 10:00 a.m.

Members Present

Susan Eagle (Chairperson), Lois Brown, Tina Conlon, Alana Martin, Moon-Ja Park, Cameron Watts

Staff: Jody Maltby, Ren Ito, Susie Henderson

Regrets: Eleanor Scarlett, Donna Lang,

Welcome, check in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone. Cam opened with a reading from Wendell Berry: Given, 2005, “Original Sin” followed by a meditation, and acknowledgement of the land.

The chairperson constituted the meeting in the name of Jesus Christ. There was a time of check-in.

Agenda

The commission agreed by consensus that the agenda, be approved with addition of Brian McIntosh joining at 12:00 to fill the commission in on his work with the Living into Right Relations Circle (LIRR), a response to the Wet’suwet’en crisis, and conversation about poverty and the teachers’ strike.

Minutes

MOTION by Tina Conlon/Moon Ja Park that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held December 3, 2019 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Correspondence

It was agreed that anything that comes from outside the commission will be considered correspondence. Anything coming from commission members will be considered agenda items.

The Commission was asked to hold Beth Baskin in our prayers as she steps away from her work with the General Council Office.

Business Arising

- Survey of Communities of Faith

The commission offered thanks to Cameron Watts for having done the work to put the survey together. Lois Brown noted that Unity's response was not included. Jody Maltby will follow up with Rachael Howes to see if any were missed.

It will be important to follow up with congregations that did not respond. Commission members are encouraged to promote the survey through their clusters and networks. We can share general information about the responses received but not information that is specific to congregations, as we do not have their permission, particularly with respect to contact information.

Rachael Howes will send a blank copy of the survey to commission members so that they can share it within networks. Completed surveys can be returned by email to Rachael: rhowes@united-church.ca.

Some congregations responded before Christmas. Susan will create a simple thank you email to send to respondents indicating that the commission is reviewing the surveys and starting to consider priorities. Rachael will send the thank you email to respondents.

Ren Ito will start to create networks around three of the topics: climate/eco justice, racial justice, and being intercultural. Commission members will be included in the invitation, along with those from the surveys and other people and/or groups that might be connected.

The commission wants to gather further information from congregations that have responded and those that have not. Of particular importance is a contact person who can help us network with that community of faith.

MOTION by Moon Ja Park/Lois Brown that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission ask the Regional Council to provide up to \$10,000 so that a contract person can be hired and ask staff to explore the possibility of hiring that person through EDGE.

MOTION

CARRIED

- Relationship to GCO staff - Ren Ito

Ren Ito reported that he reached out to several staff at the General Council Office (GCO) seeking clarity about the relationship of this commission/regional council to GCO justice staff. Beth Baskin would have been the key person to connect with but she is stepping away. Ren will connect with Michael Blair and report further at the next commission meeting.

Ren will serve as the formal conduit for information between the commission and the GCO, particularly around any item requiring a decision or action by the commission. This does not prevent individual members of the commission from engaging in national initiatives.

- Identification of United Church of Canada justice priorities

The commission considered whether to issue a response to the Wet'suwet'en crisis, and whether to engage in action relating to the teachers' strike or recent changes by the Ontario Government to how employment services are provided to people living on social assistance.

The commission asked staff to help facilitate a response around the Wet'suwet'en crisis and the increased vulnerability of people living on social assistance in response to recent government actions and cutbacks. We will use this as a test of how we want to do our work going forward. Ren will set up conversation with those on the commission who want to be part of this work.

Order of the Day: Brian McIntosh

The chair welcomed Brian McIntosh to the meeting to provide an update on the Living Into Right Relations (LIRR) Circle and Indigenous justice work that is happening in the region. The circle has had a number of meetings including a meeting with the Regional Executive in January where there was good conversation about status of the circle within the region and their role in building right relations. Part of the ongoing conversation will be how the circle relates to all three commissions and the Executive, although the primary relationship may be to the Executive. Both the circle and Executive are seeking to be guided by the Calls to the Church from Indigenous Elders.

Brian has drafted a mandate statement and circulated to Executive and circle with the hope that it will be approved in the spring. Included in this proposed mandate are education and the ability to animate statements about Indigenous concerns and support to Indigenous communities within the region, including funding.

The National Indigenous Council is giving Indigenous congregations the opportunity to choose to be part of the Indigenous Council and/or a local region, through a process of dual belonging. We anticipate decisions by the summer as to how congregations will choose to relate and what these relationships will look like. In the meantime, Shining Waters Regional Council continues to build relations with local communities through the LIRR Circle and through staff, primarily Karen Hilfman Millson and Todd McDonald.

The Regional Executive has set up a Right Relations fund, which receives monies primarily through the sale of property. We are still determining how funds will be dispersed in consultation with the national Indigenous church.

The next meeting of the LIRR circle is on April 7th. The circle still struggles with finding enough Indigenous leadership.

- Regional Partnerships – Susie Henderson

Susie Henderson presented an initial list of regional partnerships. At present, this is not a directory for publication although the commission may want to work toward that. The current document is for the commission to use to talk about building relationships and partnerships around priority areas of work. It may also inform conversations about representation and funding.

Commission members are asked to review the document and see if there are any gaps, or anything more that needs to be included.

- Regional Funding Priorities – Jody Maltby

Jody Maltby reported that we are still working on a larger picture funding conversation. There is a meeting with Presbyteries of Toronto Conference Corporation (PTCC) in early April to better understand our financial picture with those funds.

Staff Reports

Susie Henderson reported on a number of events she has attended recently including:

- Homeless Memorial and presentation of petition to the Mayor to declare homelessness an emergency in Toronto;
- Annual Strawberry Ceremony in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and trans people;
- Service of welcome of Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM) to their new office space at Holy Trinity Anglican Church.

Ren Ito reported on several areas of his work:

- Living Into Right Relations Circle (LIRR)—gathered with Executive on January 20, 2020

LIRR Circle and Executive both expressed desire for closer relationship
Indigenous communities want more/better interactions with structure

Next steps:

LIRR Circle and Executive will continue meeting
LIRR to develop new mandate, organisational structure (leadership, volunteer coordination, etc.)

Does this commission want a relationship with the LIRR Circle?

- Racism awareness campaign—currently in development, preparing for release next month

Format: gather and share anonymous stories about racism in the church

To be shared in print (posters hung in churches) and via social media

Aim is to spark thought and conversation

February 27, 2020

Accompanying resources, educational opportunities will be made available
Currently soliciting contributions of stories to share
Initial plan was to launch in time for IDERD, but this may not be where the energy of the church is at the moment.

- Online course: Justice, Faith, and Theology—currently in development for April/May
Goal: to help participants connect their faith and their justice work/activism through theology
Will teach skills (critical analysis, theological reflection, communication) as well as knowledge (concepts, theories, etc.)
Likely 5~6 sessions (every other week)
Pilot—may lead to another series of sessions in June/July
- Decolonizing Christianity Canada—network of Christians of colour across Canada
First in-person retreat planned for weekend of February 28-March 2
Working somewhat parallel with “Kenosis Groups” (white Christians healing from and working against racism and white supremacy)
- Social Impact Business Challenge—EDGE event supporting social enterprise (April 4)
Proposals will be judged, then selected for further development with on-site mentors
Prize money awarded to help with start-up costs
SWRC to contribute funds for second-place prize
Would a commission member be willing to participate as a judge/report back?
- For future consideration:
Public actions/witness—how to organize quickly to take part in wider actions?
Does this commission need a wider volunteer base to support it?
How do networks connect into the work/structure of Social and Ecological Justice Commission?
Building connections between indigenous and other racialized people /communities in Shining Waters Regional Council.

Next Steps for Commission

Tina Conlon spoke about an arts centre dialogue she is engaged in. She will keep the commission advised of possibilities to be involved.

The commission agreed to offer a workshop on May 23 in conjunction with the Regional Celebration of Ministries Service. This will be an opportunity to engage more deeply with folks who responded to survey. Cameron Watts is willing to help with planning

February 27, 2020

after Easter. Other commission members are asked to consider if they can assist with this event.

We will put the event on the website with details to come. Jody Maltby to check with local arrangements about space.

Next Meeting

April 8, 2020, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. in person (tentatively at New Hope United Church).

Closing

The Chairperson closed the meeting with a Lenten blessing and the meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.