

May 27, 2020

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

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Wednesday, May 27, 2020**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on May 27, 2020 by video conference. The meeting began at 11:00 a.m.

Members Present

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

Staff: Bri-anne Swan, Minister, Social & Ecological Justice

Regrets: Donna Lang

Welcome, check in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone, opened with prayer, 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.

The chairperson constituted the meeting in the name of Jesus Christ.

There was a time of check-in.

An ask to hold up *Holy Manners* was made; that the Commission commit to leaving space to speak for those who are quieter or are taking time to form their thoughts in order to share with the group, and that one person be able to speak without others cutting them off. While there was no vote, the Commission agreed to center conversation around values of *Holy Manners*.

Agenda

The circulated draft agenda was approved by consensus.

Minutes

MOTION by Eleanor Scarlett / Tina Conlon that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held April 29, 2020 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Email votes

The Commission voted by email in favour of the following:

- Endorsed a letter drafted by the Steering Committee of Campaign 2000 to the Prime Minister of Canada and members of Canada's COVID-19 Cabinet Committee on ensuring marginalized children have first call on federal resources in pandemic response and recovery.
- Endorsed sending a letter to the Premier of Ontario from the President of Shining Waters Regional Council in response to the May 11, 2020 letter of Rev. Rock and Rev Boot to the Premier discussing the re-opening of Ontario Churches; agreeing to disseminate the letter to all congregations in Shining Waters Regional Council, to creating and distributing a media release on the topic, and to distributing the letter to our ecumenical and interfaith partners for information.

Business Arising

- Follow-up on letter to Premier re: church openings

Bri-anne Swan and Susan Eagle updated the Commission on the distribution of the letter signed by David Leyton-Brown. It had be circulated to all Communities of Faith (lay and clergy), as well as via social media channels. Bri-anne had not yet sent out a press release, but stated she intended to soon. A question was made about the list of media the release would be sent to — does the Regional Council have a list of media? Bri-anne explained that she has a media list from a previous campaign she was a part of, and that there would be an ask made to Ministers to send the release and letter to their local media.

It was suggested that the Regional Council should maintain a list of media contacts for future campaigns. **Bri-anne will follow up with Susie Henderson about this.**

- Update on Survey follow-up – *Susan Eagle & Bri-anne Swan*

At the last Commission meeting, it was suggested that the Commission hire somebody to contact those Communities of Faith who had not yet responded to the survey sent out in December. Through further conversation, Bri-anne and Susan now feel that contacting the Communities of Faith ourselves would help strengthen relationships with congregations. A list of Communities of Faith who have not responded to the survey has been divided between Bri-anne, Susan and Cameron Watts. It is hoped that out of these conversations will come some direction about priorities for the Commission. **Bri-anne, Susan and Cameron will have an update for the next meeting.**

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- Wet'suwet'en letter

There has been one negative response to the letter. Susan Eagle did not feel the Commission needed to respond, outside of thanking the member for writing. There was discussion about the Commission being able to see the correspondence that comes in response to public statements. **Bri-anne Swan will keep a compilation to share at meetings.**

- Finances

A conversation about finances was deferred to the Visioning section of the agenda. The Commission has already asked for \$10,000 to complete their survey work. With Bri-anne Swan, Cameron Watts and Susan Eagle doing the work themselves, can this money be spent in new and creative ways?

- Workshop – June 2020? – *Susan Eagle, Cameron Watts, Bri-anne Swan*

There was understanding that a workshop should come out of the Commission's named priorities, so this conversation is deferred until after the visioning process. COVID-19 has brought up many issues related to racism that have already been sitting on the surface. There is interest in a workshop digging into racial justice, an already named Regional priority. Cameron Watts, Susan Eagle and Bri-anne Swan will speak further after further conversations with the Communities of Faith who have not yet completed the survey.

Advocacy Criteria

Criteria was put forward to be used as assessment for discerning which action requests from outside organizations to take on:

- Does the request come from a recognized UCC partner such as KAIROS or ISARC?
- Does the request fall within an identified justice priority for Shining Waters region?
- Does the request fit with national UCC theology and areas of work?
- Do we already have a policy position?

If the request is outside established United Church policy, the Commission felt the best course of action is to discuss items at meetings.

In addition, any request for endorsement or action needs to come from the source of the letter with an ask to endorse their position. There needs to be clarity on what is the actual request.

As we move through discerning justice priorities, the Commission was reminded that Racial Justice and Ecological Justice are named Regional priorities. These are lenses through which other justice work is approached.

A conversation took place about how there are few racialized clergy in the GTA other than in named ethnic ministries. What is the Commission's role in addressing this? It was noted that GC43 was a stark reminder that "we have our own house to put in order" while highlighting instances of racial injustice occurring outside the church.

ISARC & Ontario Health Coalition Letter

ISARC has asked the Shining Waters Regional Council to endorse a letter calling for an inquiry or Commission regarding long-term care homes in the province, as well as a letter from the Ontario Health Coalition.

Regarding the ISARC letter, Commission members noted that the ask should be the very first thing in the letter. As it stands, the letter does not mention how the cuts, as early as last year, had affected some of the issues we're seeing in the long-term care and health facilities.

The Commission was prepared to provide the following feedback to ISARC:

- The Commission is supportive of the letter, but would like it worded more strongly.
- Funding for long-term care homes has been a crisis for 25 years, and that radical cuts that have happened to care (over multiple governments) have brought us to this place.
- There needs to be more of a historical comment on how things have become so bad for so many people.

Options:

- Ask ISARC to make the language of the letter stronger
- Write the additions
- Write our own letter
- Ignore it altogether

The Commission wondered if ISARC would be open to receiving edits. Susan Eagle thought they would be. There was discussion about endorsing the ISARC letter and then adding another letter from Shining Waters Regional Council.

MOTION by Moon Ja Park / Cameron Watts that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council endorses both letters, from ISARC and the Ontario Health Coalition, calling for an Inquiry or Commission regarding long-term care homes in the province, with an attached letter detailing additional concerns regarding recent provincial healthcare cuts.

MOTION

CARRIED

Cameron Watts and Eleanor Scarlett will write the attached letter.

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SJNOR Report – Tina Conlon

Tina gave a brief report on the SJNOR virtual meeting from May 6th. All Ontario regions were represented. Tina reported to SJNOR on the activities of the Commission, including the Wet'suwet'en letter and the surveys to congregations. She also reported that Shining Waters now has a full time person working on the Social Justice portfolio (Bri-anne Swan).

Other regions presented their own reports. There has been an ask that members of the SJNOR stop referring to Regions, but rather, Regional Councils.

There are outstanding questions about how the SJNOR will continue to be funded. The SJNOR has interest in meeting monthly. The next meeting will be June 26th.

Staff Reports

Bri-anne Swan gave an update on the letter re: re-opening Church buildings. She is working to get connected to other staff from across Regional Councils who share similar work, including connecting with GCO to strengthen the relationship between the work of the Commission and General Council. **Bri-anne will connect with Michael Blair as soon as possible and report at the next meeting.**

Ren Ito's contract will be ending in mid-June. The Commission thanks Ren for all the work he has done over the years. Susan Eagle will send him a note of gratitude and well wishes.

Visioning

It was decided that visioning should be its own meeting of the SEJC, not part of a meeting where the Commission is dealing with business.

Bri-anne Swan's job description was shared with the Commission for information. The Commission asked to also see Kim Uyede-Kai's job description as well, since a portion of her work relates to racial justice and Intercultural ministries. Bri-anne will have this for the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Closing

The Chairperson closed the meeting with a prayer and the meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Next meeting: The Commission will meet June 10th at 11:00 a.m. for visioning and July 15th at 11 a.m. for a regular meeting.