

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

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Tuesday, February 16, 2021**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on February 16, 2021 by video conference. The meeting began at 1:10 p.m.

Members Present

Susan Eagle (Chairperson), Lois Brown, Tina Conlon, Elizabeth Cunningham, Moon-Ja Park, Eleanor Scarlett (joined at 2:10 p.m.), Cameron Watts (joined at 1:35 p.m.)

Staff: Jeffrey Dale. Kim Uyede-Kai (notetaker).

Guest: Brian McIntosh (joined from 1:45-2:45 p.m.)

Regrets: Bri-anne Swan, Alana Martin

Absent: Donna Lang

Welcome, check in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone, Elizabeth Cunningham opened with an acknowledgement of the land, prayer, 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.

Agenda

Agenda addition: Brian McIntosh will join the meeting at 1:45 to give an update on United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI) and outreach ministries.

MOTION by Tina Conlon / Moon-Ja Park that the agenda be approved as revised.

MOTION

CARRIED

Minutes

MOTION by Elizabeth Cunningham / Lois Brown that the minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held January 19, 2021 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

There was a brief time of check in.

Business Arising

The commission chair received a request from the Executive Minister asking that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission write a letter to Mayor John Tory urging action on warming centres, shelters, encampments, and resources for the homeless population. Because of the urgency of the issue, the commission chair worked in consultation with Jeffrey Dale and drafted a letter to Mayor Tory dated January 29, 2021, which was circulated to Commission members for email approval and then forwarded to David Leyton-Brown and Peter Hartmans to be signed by the Regional Council President. (Appendix A)

Commission members agreed that urgent actions such as this could be drafted and sent by the Chair on behalf of the commission between meetings.

United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI)

Brian McIntosh was welcomed to the meeting. He spoke to the UNJPPI request for a more formalized relationship with Social and Ecological Justice Commission and the region. The request is for an organic connection to the region, advocacy for policies that government does not yet have in place, and lines of communication with the region to share resources, campaigns, information, avoid duplication, and to encourage advocacy that doesn't bear the name of UNJPPI but to speak as a regional network.

Brian noted updated wording to the request to two actions: 1. ~~Establish~~ Recognize the existing network of PALNET.; Delete 6. ~~Ensure and adequate form of Regional funding and staff assistance for this new Regional Network.~~

Anticipating that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission will potentially receive additional requests for recognition from various networks, including other networks on Palestine Israel issues, the Commission agreed to recognize this network as one network, to receive and request information and updates from them, and consider requests for action. The Commission's sub-group on Palestine Israel could connect them if other regional groups emerge doing similar work.

Brian requested a copy of the survey list of congregations who expressed interest in Palestine Israel in order to build capacity in this network/movement.

Agreed by consensus

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Community Outreach Ministries update

As a board member, Brian McIntosh reported on behalf of community ministries board which had engaged in a three-year long strategic planning process. Unable to find ways to make the two ministries financially sustainable beyond 2022 (\$200,000/year), the boards made the decision to close the ministries and develop legacy plans.

A lengthy discussion took place, noting that both ministries work with primarily non-White communities, with the poor, and are ministries that change lives. It was noted that the regional priorities need to match the budget allocations.

Cam Watts offered to write a letter on behalf of the Commission to express the Commission's concerns and to engage the Executive.

It was suggested that the Fall regional council meeting highlight outreach ministries and connect to other work such as anti-racism, housing, etc. Susan Eagle, Tina Conlon, Cameron Watts, and Lois Brown offered to form a strategy group.

The Commission thanked Brian for joining them.

Harm Reduction Update

Jeffrey Dale gave an update on harm reduction, safe consumption, decriminalization of illicit substances. Statistical data has been gathered and Moon-Ja Park asked about data and educational materials for other language groups.

Jeffrey will work on this next month before national conversations happen and bring an update to the March meeting. He will explore ways to engage other language groups. Moon-Ja offered Jeffrey the name of an Asian group working with these issues.

MOTION by Elizabeth Cunningham / Tina Conlon that the Shining Waters Regional Council publicly endorse and support organizations that work toward education and community development on harm reduction efforts.

MOTION

CARRIED

Poverty, Income Security Inequality

The chairperson reported that the Livable Income group is asking regions to help organize another vigil. The date is Saturday, April 10, the week after Easter. More details to come.

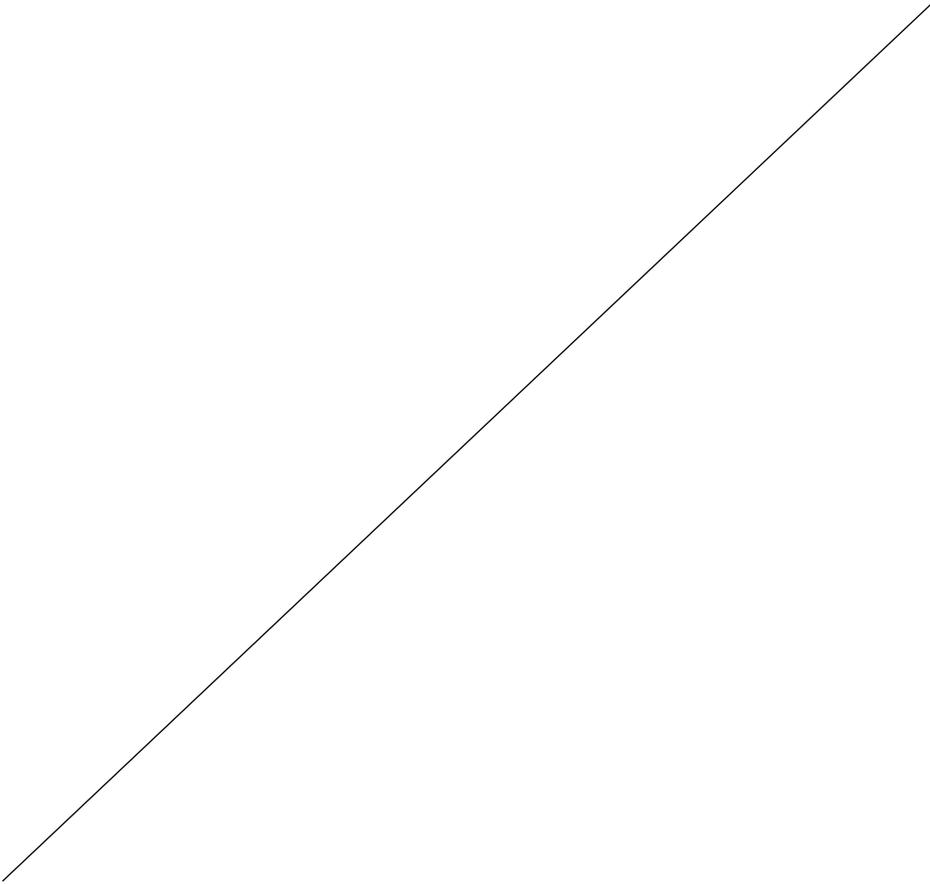
Deferred issues

Reports from sub-committees. The chairperson asked that sub-committees send their updates in writing to be attached with the Minutes.

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Closing: The meeting closed with prayer led by Cameron Watts.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 16, 2021, 1 p.m.



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Appendix A

January 29, 2021

Via: email and regular mail
Email: mayor_tory@toronto.ca

His Worship, John Tory
Mayor, City of Toronto
City Hall, 2nd Floor
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Sir:

On behalf of The United Church of Canada communities of faith in greater Toronto, I am writing to urge that more proactive initiatives be taken to support the homeless population of Toronto, particularly during this crisis time of freezing temperatures, snow and freezing rain.

The urban Toronto region for The United Church of Canada includes 83 congregations and ministries in the GTA as part of the larger Shining Waters Regional Council.

It is a scandal and a shame to us all that in a country of enormous first world affluence we have so many destitute and vulnerable citizens who rely on charity for survival. While we commend the city for actions already taken through the many shelter spaces provided and staff working to assist people in need, we know that this is not nearly enough.

We urge you to take action in the following areas:

Warming Centres

The closure of many public and commercial indoor spaces because of the pandemic has created an urgent need for more warming centres throughout the city. These centres need to be open beyond the normal times established by the cold weather alert protocols. As well, and hence the need for more centres, these need to allow for longer visiting times by those who need them. We understand that currently visiting times are limited to two hours. This is not nearly long enough for someone who literally has nowhere else to go for the remainder of the day and night.

Already front-line workers are drawing attention to the increasing cases of frost-bite because of the inadequate provision of time and space at warming centres.

Shelters

A review of recent accommodation statistics for homeless shelters, as well as conversations with front-line staff, indicates that shelters are at or near capacity each night. And some who choose not to use shelters point to overcrowding and lack of safety as ongoing issues that prevent their stay.

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There needs to be more safe space immediately created for overnight shelter stays. We write this as very cold weather descends on the city and urge that immediate action be taken

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to address this critical need before it reaches crisis proportions with fatal consequences. Already the city has a tragic death statistic for victims of homelessness.

Encampments

We hear from volunteers and front-line workers and advocates that there are currently an estimated 1,200-1,500 residents living in encampments, and that when you factor in those sleeping on crates and transit, it is closer to 2,000 people, not the 300-400 statistic that has been offered through official channels.

While we can agree with the city that “the safest place for anyone experiencing homelessness in Toronto is inside, in a shelter, hotel or, ultimately, housing,” we urge that those safe spaces be created before encampments are dismantled. We call on the city to stop dismantling tiny shelters, provide support for people living in encampments and create rapid re-housing options for people living without shelter.

This would mean more and better access to public washrooms, the provision of more hotel spaces and using a harm reduction approach for all support services.

We encourage the city to work more cooperatively with the many agency and volunteer front-line workers who have daily contact with, and are trusted by, those who live in encampments.

Resources

We concur with the recent open letter to the City of Toronto on January 15, 2021, signed by many community organizations which stated that “for \$100 million we could significantly expand homeless outreach, drop-ins and safe consumption sites, and help more homeless Torontonians make the transition to supportive and affordable housing.” We agree that this kind of pro-active initiative would, in the long run, be more successful and humane than short-term efforts to use policing to deal with the symptoms of homelessness.

We know that the pandemic has created financial challenges that will affect us and our economy for many years to come. However, the burden of cutbacks should not be borne by the most vulnerable in our community who are already in crisis.

As we believe we are called to care for our neighbour in need, we urge the city to step up its care for the marginalized with immediate implementation of supports and emergency housing. We urge you to support all citizens’ rights to self-determination, security, and dignity.

Yours truly,



David Leyton-Brown, President
Shining Waters Regional Council
The United Church of Canada