

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

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

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on March 16, 2021 by video conference. The meeting began at 1:00 p.m.

Members Present

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

Staff: Bri-anne Swan, Jeffrey Dale, Kim Uyede-Kai

Regrets: Eleanor Scarlett

Welcome, check-in and prayer

The Chairperson welcomed everyone. Lois Brown 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.

Agenda

MOTION by Elizabeth Cunningham / Tina Conlon that the agenda, be approved as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Minutes

MOTION by Moon-Ja Park / Lois Brown that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held February 16, 2021 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

March 16, 2021

Business Arising

Vote to endorse letter re: cessation of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Benefits

On March 10th, the Commission voted via email to:

Endorse the attached letter from the Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough asking the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to update their policy regarding social assistance recipients and their collection of the Canadian Recovery Benefit.

Forward the letter with an endorsement to MCCSS, the Premier and leaders of the opposition parties.

The Commission had conducted an email vote endorsing a letter of concern regarding the cessation of benefits to OW and ODSP recipients by the Ontario government. Before the end of the voting process, the government backtracked on its plans. The Commission accepts the vote and is placing it in the minutes as part of their official record. There is concern that the Ontario government merely postponed the removal of benefits until the fall.

Letter to Executive re: Community Ministries

A letter expressing the Commission's concern about the closing of Davenport Perth and Jane Finch Community ministries was written and presented to the Commission for review. Susan Eagle has had a conversation with Peter Hartmans regarding the Community Ministries and has requested time on the next Executive meeting agenda. There will be a conversation with the Communities of Faith Commission to talk about how communication happens between the two groups and how the commissions resolve challenges that arise. The Community Ministries Board has made it clear that it is a lack of secure funding, rather than the energy to keep going, which has led to the decision to close the ministries.

MOTION by Cameron Watts / Elizabeth Cunningham that a letter expressing the concern of the Social and Ecological Justice Commission regarding the closure of Community Ministries be forwarded to both the Executive Minister and Regional Executive of Shining Waters Regional Council with a request for time on the agenda at their next meeting.

MOTION

CARRIED

Tina Conlon abstained from the vote due to a conflict of interest.

Update from Jeffrey Dale re: Harm Reduction

Seven Regional Councils, in addition to United-in-Learning, are now co-sponsoring the Seeking to Reduce Harm series of workshops. Bri-anne Swan is working on advertising materials and will offer tech support at the gatherings. Guest speakers are coming both from within and beyond Shining Waters Regional Council.

April 14: Karen Orlandi, Evan Smith, Sackville United Church

April 21: Gordon Casey, app for illicit drug use, mental health crisis

Report from Bri-anne Swan

Bri-anne has recently returned after a leave to care for her father and has taken on the lead role for communications within the Region.

Highlights within her Social & Ecological Justice portfolio have been:

- developing an Action Page where people can go to customize and sign letters/petitions to their MPs or MPPs. To the right of the action is a list of everybody who has signed or taken action using the portal. It is meant to streamline how petitions and letters can be sent.
- continuing to release *do justice. the podcast*. Lent has featured interviews conducted by Rev. Alexa Gilmour.
- working with Peter Hartmans to create a directory for the Regional Council
- creating a Regional Council media list
- supporting Jeffrey Dale with Seeking to Reduce Harm and the subcommittee working on Good Friday worship materials re: homelessness

Reports/Updates from sub-committees

Anti-Racism (Eleanor, Elizabeth, Moon-Ja, Lois)

The subcommittee has not yet met as an entire group. Moon Ja Park has been part of a Korean language group talking about anti-racism work and microaggressions.

A short conversation took place about books members of the Commission have found helpful. Bri-anne Swan will place them on the Regional Council website.

Poverty/Income Inequality (Susan, Moon-Ja, Tina, Elizabeth)

On April 8th, on the eve of the Liberal National Convention, General Council Office will be holding a cross-country campaign in support of a Guaranteed Livable Income. In-person vigils are being limited to five people each. There will be a vigil outside Finance Minister Cynthia Freeland's office in Toronto. Those who are not able to meet in person will be able to participate by lighting a candle at 12:30pm and posting the photo to social media.

Homelessness (Elizabeth, Eleanor, Cameron, Susan)

The subgroup has been working on a Good Friday liturgical resource centred around homelessness. Bri-anne Swan will be posting the resources to the Regional Council website. Jeffrey Dale has completed video interviews with a number of UCC ministers engaged with Community Ministry.

Israel / Palestine (Tina, Lois)

Palnet has requested a list of the communities of faith who have indicated (via the December 2019 survey) their interest in issues related to Palestine/Israel. Bri-anne Swan will compile a list and forward it on.

March 16, 2021

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission Israel/Palestine subgroup will continue to offer support to Palnet and also extend their support to other similar groups within the Regional Council as they emerge.

Environment (Moon-Ja, Donna)

Have not yet met.

Right Relations (Lois, Cameron, Tina)

KAIROS is holding a number of conversations and events related to Bill C-15, giving voice to the different perspectives about the bill (attached).

<https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-15/first-reading>

<https://www.kairoscanada.org/federal-bill-to-implement-un-declaration-a-welcome-step-in-the-right-direction>

Regional Council and General Council Proposals

A fuller discussion about proposals was deferred to the next meeting, although there was some initial conversation about who to let the communities of faith know about the proposal process.

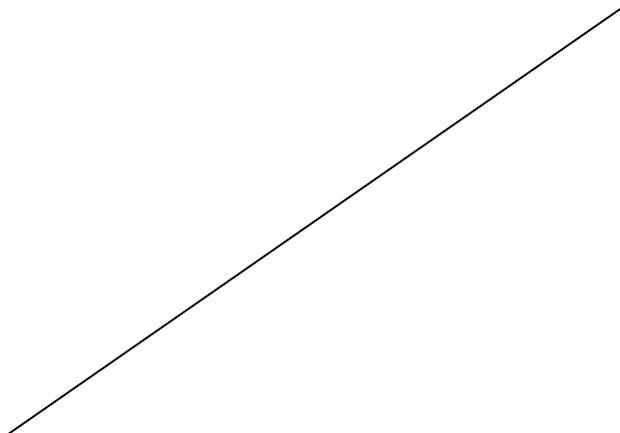
Discussion about Communication

There was a discussion about how the Commission is able to communicate with other communities of faith within the Regional Council, particularly for Toronto-specific campaigns. Bri-anne Swan will be creating a tag within the Regional Council MailChimp for congregations in Toronto.

Closing

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.

Next Meeting: April 20, 2021, 1 p.m.





DATE

ADDRESS

Dear _____:

We are the *Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough (SACS)*, a group comprised of social assistance recipients, legal and policy professionals that meet to discuss issues related to social assistance and how they impact the lives of Scarborough residents.

We write under urgent circumstances, calling on the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to update their policy regarding social assistance recipients and their collection of the Canadian Recovery Benefit (CRB). Currently, the MCCSS memorandum states:

*“...the federal government’s three new Canada Recovery Benefits will be treated as **non-exempt income** for purposes of both OW and ODSP, in keeping with the treatment of EI benefits. However, existing OW and ODSP clients (those granted prior to October 1) who become financially ineligible as a result of receiving either EI or any of the new Recovery Benefits will be issued a nominal \$2.50 entitlement so that they can retain health and other benefits. **These changes will be in effect until the end of March 2021.**”*

This policy presumes the recipients accessed the CRB sequentially and will have used up their CRB by the end of March 2021; this does not reflect the reality of when and how people are able to and do work, which is why some will receive CRB until the end of September.

The policy was likely presumed to impact a small number of recipients. However, Prime Minister Trudeau's announced on February 19, 2021 that the CRB would be extended for an additional 12 weeks. This means a significantly higher number of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients in receipt of CRB or EI beyond March 31, 2021 will be exited from the programs.

We are gravely concerned that OW and ODSP recipients who receive the CRB or EI amounts higher than their social assistance after March this year, will abruptly lose their

March 16, 2021

benefits package (See Appendix). If this happens, we are also concerned that they will have to re-apply for social assistance once their CRB or EI runs out (where their financial situation has not improved).

Exiting recipients from the programs will place an unnecessary administrative burden on staff as we expect the majority of former recipients would apply for Extended Health Benefits and Rapid Reinstatement. Both of these programs can be difficult for recipients to navigate and require a significant level of caseworker support to assess applications. Maintaining a \$2.50 benefit for eligible recipients is a way to streamline the system rather than put extra pressure on recipients and caseworkers who will have to piece together additional provisions in order to meet needs.

We need the following:

- For recipients who become financially ineligible as a result of receiving either EI or any of the new Recovery Benefits to continue to be issued a nominal \$2.50 entitlement so that they can retain health and other benefits until the end of the Recovery Benefits eligibility period.

Sincerely;

Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough (SACS)
sacs.communitygroup@gmail.com

Endorsed by:

Appendix

There are certain benefits that are paid in addition to an allowance of \$2.50. These are benefits paid under s55 of the OW regulations and s44 of the ODSP regulations and include:

- Prescription drugs under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) plan
- Dental benefits as prescribed
- Diabetic supplies
- The client contribution under the Assistive Devices Program (ADP)
- Medical transportation
- Batteries and repairs for mobility devices
- Eye exams
- Dog guides
- Employment start-up
- Up front childcare; and
- Other specified benefits under OW and ODSP (e.g. MSN)