

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.

November 6, 2019

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

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Wednesday, November 6, 2019**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on Wednesday, November 6, 2019 by video conference. The meeting began at 10:30 a.m.

Members Present

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

Staff: Jody Maltby

Regrets: Susie Henderson, Ren Ito, Eleanor Scarlett

Welcome, check in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone, and opened with Keri Wehlander's poem Micah's Invitation. She acknowledged that we are all on holy 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 as circulated.

Minutes

MOTION by Cameron Watt/Tina Conlon that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held October 9, 2019 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Correspondence

- Request from Brian McIntosh regarding regional representation with partners. This request came through Ren Ito and relates specifically to Brian's involvement with the TRC Legacy Project that he has participated in on behalf of the Living Into Right Relations Circle. We will defer this to the next meeting when it is hoped Ren can speak to it, but we acknowledge that this is one piece of a larger conversation about how the region will be represented and connected with partners, both those that exist currently and those that may emerge at a grassroots level.

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The commission brainstormed some of the current partners with whom we may want to be connected, noting that others may arise as well:

- Ontario Health Coalition
- Kairos
- ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition)
- Faith and the Common Good
- Faith in the City
- SJNOR (Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions)
- UNJPPI (United Network for Justice & Peace in Palestine & Israel)

- Funding requests - Compassionate Justice Speakers
- Walking Together, Sharing the Land

The commission has received the above two grant requests but does not yet have a plan for funding projects. There was good discussion about the role of the commission and whether it is in our mandate to be a funding body or whether we might refer requests to the Grants Review Committee. The time and energy it takes to consider grant requests might take away from other important work of this commission. At the same time, it is important that our granting process is aligned with areas where we want to give priority. Donna Lang is developing a list of criteria that could be used to assess grant requests. Jody Maltby shared that the Grants Review Committee will be looking for wisdom from the wider region to help determine granting priorities.

The commission deferred this conversation to a future meeting, but there was strong support for partnering with the Grants Review Committee.

- Email from the Executive regarding the Covenant Proposal with the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions (SJNOR)

This will be considered by the commission at our next meeting.

Business Arising

- Survey of Communities of Faith
The commission discussed the draft survey that was circulated by Cameron Watts. The survey is intended to be completed easily and can be completed by more than one person in each congregation. It will be sent out by email with a covering letter reminding people that this is intended as a snap shot of what is happening in congregations so the commission can get a sense of what issues are important across the region.

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In the survey, congregations will be asked to identify a contact person with contact information. In the body of the email, they will be invited to include names of other committee members if appropriate.

Susan Eagle and Cameron will do a final edit of the survey and it will be sent out to communities of faith through the regional office. We may want to hire a contract staff person to do follow up and to create a mail chimp list including these contacts and the group that gathered in the spring at Richmond Hill. This will be part of our budget request to the Executive.

- Identifying lenses for the work of the commission
The commission identified key lenses for our work: anti-racism, being an intercultural church, lived poverty, greening and ecological lens, sense of future and younger generation who have to bear the burden.

How will we use these lenses in an intentional way in doing our work? They could inform the evaluative questions we ask ourselves each time we meet.

- Short-term budget

The commission reviewed the justice budget items that had been identified by the former presbyteries in 2018. It was noted that much of their budgets went to support the work of partners, some doing advocacy and some for local projects.

The commission hopes to focus energy on providing tools for communities of faith to help energize, revitalize and animate their justice work. This could include workshops, resources and programming. The survey of communities of faith will help us to identify the areas where tools might be helpful. We might want to focus on a particular theme area and develop a program that runs over several years building capacity in our congregations. We might want to have an annual regional justice gathering, possibly connected to the celebration of ministries service on May 23rd or at the October Regional Meeting.

As the work of the commission becomes clearer, it will be easier to create a budget in the fall for the next year. At this time, the commission is still very new and is in the process of identifying priorities.

The commission will advise the Executive that we hope to engage someone to do some contract work around the survey, conduct a face-to-face meeting and plan a spring event. We will ask to bring them a budget request as this work becomes clearer. The Executive also wants to hear about the staffing needs of the commission. It will then be the work of the Executive Minister to determine if and how those needs can be met.

November 6, 2019

Core Work and Structure of the Commission

The commission will wait for information from survey to inform this conversation. Commission members will also be asked to complete the survey and identify personal priorities.

Staff Report

Susie Henderson's report was received for information. The chair explained that we want to make it a standard practice for program staff to provide accountability reports to the commission.

When referencing congregations it is helpful to include the name of the community where they are located. We can help to feed information to staff when we know what work they are doing. We need to show leadership as a commission in prioritizing our tasks and then we can see how it fits with staff work.

The commission asked to see the position descriptions of the staff.

What voices have been missing in the conversation that should be included?

- As we identify our partners, perhaps we could invite them to have time on our agenda to share their work. Ask them to provide written background information ahead so they don't have to spend time introducing themselves
- As we work with congregations around being an Intercultural ministry, it will be helpful to know what resources they are using and perhaps to recommend resources. This is for Sunday School, youth programs and adult education. If we say this is a priority, how will we encourage congregations to be active in this work?
- The how is important after we know the who and the what.

Closing

The Chairperson closed the meeting with a prayer and the meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 3, 2019, 2 – 3:30 p.m. via Zoom. Tina Conlon will open with a prayer or reflection.

December 3, 2019

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

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Tuesday, December 3, 2019**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on Tuesday, December 3, 2019 by video conference. The meeting began at 10:00 a.m.

Members Present

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

Staff: Susie Henderson, Ren Ito, Jody Maltby, ,

Regrets: Eleanor Scarlett

Welcome, check in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone. Tina Conlon opened with a reading from Walter Brueggemann's *Celebrating Abundance* and with prayer. She gave an acknowledgement of the land.

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

Agenda

The chairperson added a conversation about partnerships to the agenda.

It was agreed by consensus that the agenda be approved, as amended.

Minutes

MOTION by Tina Conlon/Moon Ja Park that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held November 6, 2019 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Correspondence

Email from Tina Conlon about extraction industries.

Tina spoke about the importance of this work to people she meets, particularly newcomers and refugees. She spoke of the work of the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network and Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability.

Susie Henderson noted that we have participated in this work at the national level with Christie Neufeldt and through Kairos. She also shared the link for MERE, a hub for Mother Earth and Resource Extraction, Women Defending Land and Water:

<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/mere-hub/index>

If this commission sets this work as a priority there could be a role for us to help engage congregations and build partnerships/relationships.

Jody Maltby, Susie Henderson, and Ren Ito will have conversation about how we can strengthen our relationship with General Council justice staff and possibly invite a national staff person to join a future meeting.

The commission will leave it to individual members to respond to the petition if desired.

Email regarding SJNOR (Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions) requesting the region to formalize a covenantal relationship.

The Executive is asking the commission for a recommendation about whether the region wants to participate in the network. Tina Conlon, Susan Eagle and Ren Ito attended the most recent SJNOR meeting. The commission discussed the request and the overall sense was that we should participate. Comments included:

- It takes us to a place beyond our own region.
- It is a valuable network when we seek to have a bigger voice.
- It helps ensure that we speak with one voice and do not contradict or undermine one another, or repeat one another's work.
- The network only meets twice a year; and so there are limits to what that group can do but it is a place for regions to come together to update one another and see if there is a way to share work.
- It can also be effective when bringing things forward to General Council – it may fail in one region but move forward in another.
- Staffing component has been helpful to facilitate the work.
- SJNOR makes provincial appointments where only one UCC person is requested – like ISARC and the Health Coalition.
- While it is good to take collective action where appropriate, being in SJNOR does not prevent any single region from taking a position.

SJNOR meets in Toronto to have access to General Council staff and sometimes Kairos staff. Our financial support ensures equal participation of all regions because some live farther away.

MOTION by Cam Watts/Moon Ja Park that Shining Waters Regional Council enter into the covenant with other Ontario regions as part of the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions.

December 3, 2019

MOTION

CARRIED

MOTION by Moon Ja/Lois that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council approve a budget of up to \$2,000 for 2020 for the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions.

MOTION

CARRIED

We can have two representatives to the network. Tina Conlon has been our interim representative and is comfortable continuing but she would like others to have the opportunity to participate. The commission agreed to defer a decision on representation to allow people to consider if they would be willing to serve in this way. Tina will continue for now.

Business Arising

- Funding criteria circulated by Donna Lang

Donna provided a starting point for funding criteria after conferring with Deborah Hart who has been involved in approving Mission Support Grants. She explained that points could receive different weight in different circumstances. There could be a threshold number of points needed, i.e. 7/10, so a project does not need to hit every point.

There was agreement that we are developing these criteria to pass to the Grants Review Committee. We want a fair distribution of funds to legacy projects and new initiatives, long-term projects and one-time events, urban and rural projects across the entire geography of the region.

Staff will follow up on United Church priorities and the commission will identify regional priorities after the survey has been completed.

Further conversation was deferred pending a larger regional conversation about funding priorities that is to occur early in the new year.

- Survey Follow up

The survey went to every community of faith, lay representative and ministry personnel. We have received 30 responses so far. We agreed to send out the survey again in early January with a closing date two weeks farther on. If possible, we will not re-send the survey to those who have already responded. We will also consider sending it out a third time, depending on the response.

- Partnerships

Staff will create a list of partnerships the region already has with other faith groups, community groups and coalitions.

Staff Report

Ren Ito provided an update on his work.

Living Into Right Relations Circle—gathering held at Rama United Church, October 19, 2019

- developing relationships with indigenous communities in geographical area of Shining Waters Regional Council
 - o still waiting on outcomes of August's National Spiritual Gathering
- next gathering to be held concurrently with Shining Waters Executive
 - o members of Circle expressed desire to be in relationship with regional leadership
- does Social and Ecological Justice Commission want a relationship with the LIRR Circle?

Teaching Just Faith: Christian Education project—in development with Jeffrey Dale (SWRC)

- developing resources, educational opportunities, etc. in four areas:
 - o sex, gender, and physical health
 - o mental health and wellness
 - o anti-racism and being intercultural
 - o indigenous histories and justice

Facing Queerphobia: Panel discussion on facing anti-LGBTQ+ hate—November 22, 2019

- three panelists: Jenn Hind-Urquhart (Emmanuel UC, Waterloo), Keith Murray (Hillhurst UC, Calgary), Michiko Bown-Kai (East End UC, Toronto / AUSE)
- video will be posted and distributed online

2S/LGBTQ+ Community Day—January 25, 2020

- day-long gathering to build community for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in SWRC
- facilitators, leadership to emerge “from the floor”

Other upcoming projects:

- racism awareness campaign: #SpeakingTruthInLove (early 2020)
- racial justice workshops with regional communities of faith (February 2020)
- teaching free online course: Social Justice, Faith, and Theology (beginning early 2020)

Susie Henderson reported that Brian McIntosh went to the donor appreciation night held by the Anishinaabe Health Centre where we received a lovely blanket with a river design to honour the generous gift of Toronto Conference.

The region is currently updating our website and will be ready to add program pages if people want to think about what could be on social and ecological justice page.

December 3, 2019

Kingsway Lambton United Church has started a short, contemporary justice service at 8:30 on a Sunday morning and it has a significant congregation.

Jody Maltby provided an update on staffing. Three permanent full-time positions will be posted in the new year. Staff who are currently completing contracts will be encouraged to apply if interested.

Other Business

Next meeting – we will do a doodle poll in January to find a date for our next meeting, which will be by Zoom and will occur after we have had more responses to the survey. Wednesdays seem to be good for many members. After the survey has closed and we have had the meeting on funding priorities, we will look for a date for an in-person meeting.

The commission offered thanks to Susan Eagle for a well-run meeting.

Closing

The Chairperson closed the meeting with a prayer and the meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.