**Minutes of a meeting of the**

**Social and Ecological Justice Commission**

**Tuesday, October 22, 2024**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on October 22, 2024 via Zoom at 1:00 p.m.

**Members Present**

Susan Eagle (Chairperson), Lois Brown, Alexa Gilmour, Jennifer (Jay) Gordon, Don Ford, Irene Green.

Staff: Shawn Redden, Celio de Andrade Santos

Regrets: Esther Collier, Kim Uyede-Kai (on sabbatical).

**Welcome**

The chairperson constituted the meeting at 1:05pm and welcomed everyone. Susan Eagle offered an opening reflection with a reading from Embers by Richard Wagamese, followed by prayer. She offered an acknowledgement of the land, and stated our commitment to being a safe place for all.

There was a time of check-in.

**Quorum**

The chairperson noted there was quorum for the meeting. Don advised he would be late joining the meeting.

**Agenda**

**MOTION** by Alexa Gilmour/Jay Gordon **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-01**

that the agenda be approved as circulated.

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Minutes**

**MOTION** by Alexa Gilmour/Jay Gordon **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-02**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held September 17, 2024 be adopted as circulated.

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Business Arising from Minutes and Updates**

* **Gun Violence follow-up from meeting: draft statement Appendix 1**

Alexa Gilmour provided a summary of the conversation from the minutes and presented the draft letter (Appendix 1).

**MOTION** by Alexa Gilmour/Jay Gordon **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-03**

that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission ask the president to sign the letter on behalf of the region, and that this letter be sent to the Premier of Ontario, the GTHA mayors, the Toronto City Councilors, and the Shinning Waters Region Communities of Faith.

**MOTION CARRIED**

* **Microgrant application from Temperenceville** (Irene)

Irene will now send a response based on the feedback from September meeting.

* **Community Ministry Workshop follow-up** (Susan)

Susan consulted with Agnie Hocking. Angie is developing some educational materials with congregations, and would come to our commission for presentation and discussion. The commission decided to extend the invitation to Tina and Lorraine, who are part of the other two community ministries, to join the discussion.

Don Ford joined the meeting at 1:40pm.

* **Ad hoc committee priorities** (Susan)

Susan said she will send a document outlining the commission priorities to the Shining Waters Regional Council.

* **Community Ministries funding committee** (Irene)

Irene reported that the committee is setting up meetings between the consultants and the Community Ministries. The are asking the question, how do we reach community ministries beyond the GTA? People like Susan Eagle will be asked for some input.

* **Representatives to SJNORC – Nov 21** (Susan)

Each Regional Council is eligible to have two representatives plus a staff person on the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regional Councils. Brian McIntosh was our representative until his retirement in June. Susan attends the meetings on behalf of ISARC but also covers for Shining Waters. Currently Shining Waters has no official representatives. Alexa Gilmour is interested in serving.

**MOTION** by Don Ford/Irene Green **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-04**

that Alexa Gilmour be appointed as a representative to SJNORC for Shining Waters Region.

**MOTION CARRIED**

* **Annual Meeting Proposal on Housing** (Susan) **Appendix 2 & 3**

The Executive has referred the Proposal (SW2024-04: Reducing Homelessness in Canada Proposal) back to SEJC for action. Susan suggested that we draft letters based on the content and actions requested in the proposal. The Commission agreed and Susan volunteered to write the letters.

**Other Business**

**Microgrants**

* **Leading from the Heart** (Jay)

Ad promotion for Leading from the Heart during Thanksgiving, runs for 10 days, until October 19, and costs $250, and will run on Facebook and Instagram. Celio reported there were 30 clicks on the links and 1600 people reached during the 10-day campaigns.

* **Environmental and Social Justice** – no applications received

**Reports from sub-committees:**

* **Homelessness & Poverty/Income Inequality** (Susan, Irene, Alexa)
1. **GLI Update** (Irene)

Irene Green emphasized the importance of continuing advocacy efforts with Members of Parliament (MPs) and noted that significant attention is currently being directed toward advancing a project in Prince Edward Island. She mentioned Shawn Redden’s involvement in a recent meeting, and Shawn confirmed she is now on the notification list and was able to participate.

Susan expressed disappointment that, despite the Liberal party's policy supporting Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI), which was established four years ago, many Liberal MPs still voted against it.

Shawn provided an update from the Atlantic working group, which she can forward by email. They are asking people to write letters to their MP urging support and inclusion in the federal budget. Alexa suggested that we include this in Daring Justice and consider writing a letter of support as well.

**MOTION** by Irene Green / Alexa Gilmour **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-05**

that the Social and Ecological Justice Commission write a letter as requested by the PEI GLI working group for the President of the Region to sign and to promote the request in Daring Justice

**MOTION CARRIED**

1. **Homelessness**
2. Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Oct 29-31

Susan registered for this event and will be attending.

1. Safe Consumption Advocacy (Alexa)

Alexa Gilmour reported on the successful “Save Our Sites” rally at Queen’s Park, where several NDP MPPs showed support for safe consumption sites, and highlighted the potential for local mayors to advocate with Premier Ford to keep these sites open until treatment centers are built. She also suggested amplifying a supportive sign from College Street United Church on social media to encourage people to contact their city councillors, creating a grassroots push for the preservation of these vital sites.

1. Encampment Advocacy (Susan) **Appendix 4**

Susan reported that the Mayor of Barrie published a controversial opinion piece in the National Post advocating for measures like compulsory treatment and expanded police powers to address homelessness. The Ontario Big City Mayors group, representing 29 municipalities, met and endorsed many of his ideas, electing him as vice chair. Despite hopes that the London Mayor, a Liberal, would oppose these policies, he appeared to support them. The "Solve the Crisis" campaign they promoted frames increased policing and criminalization of vulnerable populations as compassionate, while critics like Jeffrey Schlemmer argue that the issue lies in a lack of supportive housing rather than insufficient powers to detain people.

Alexa Gilmour shared a link to Diane Chan McNally’s post, which critiques policies that may appear benign but are harmful to vulnerable individuals in encampments (<https://x.com/Diana_C_McNally/status/1848475581186511338>). The conversation highlights the disappointment that 29 mayors supported policies that criminalize poverty, marginalize the homeless, and potentially use the "notwithstanding clause" to override human rights decisions, which could erode Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Susan, Alexa, and the subcommittee on homelessness and poverty are strategizing ways to engage mayors and influential figures like Olivia Chow to bring awareness to these issues and encourage a more compassionate policy approach. The subcommittee will meet following the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference and discuss any suggested actions.

1. **Refugee update** (Alexa)

Alexa Gilmour provided an update on the growing challenges surrounding refugees in shelters, with a significant portion being newcomers who are dispersed from larger cities like Toronto and Montreal to smaller communities in Ontario. These communities often lack adequate support services and are experiencing issues of racism and mental health struggles among refugees awaiting housing in hotels. Anti-immigrant sentiment, fueled by political rhetoric, is on the rise, and Black-led organizations in Toronto have been actively addressing newcomer issues in areas like mental health, housing, and education. Although there are no immediate calls to action, Alexa emphasized the importance of coalition-building and supporting refugee and immigrant communities, particularly under the leadership of those most affected

1. **Poverty**

Susan advised the commission that ISARC Religious Leader’s Forum will be held November 20. Theme: A Broken Ontario

Susan will follow-up with Irene and Alexa about scheduling a sub-committee meeting for Homelessness & Poverty/Income Inequality.

* **Ecological Subcommittee** (Esther, Don, Jennifer, Susan)

Don Ford confirmed that November 6 is the correct date for the Near Net Zero workshop, with the session scheduled for 7 p.m. Discussion about honoraria for presenters. Susan asked Don to clarify with Esther about the policy around honorarium for guests for these webinars, and whether anything was discussed with these guests.

* **Right Relations Subcommittee** *(Lois)*

Report on Spirit Garden Opening Brian McIntosh **Appendix 5**

The suggestion from Brian about liaising with the Restoring Relations Working Group was noted and discussion will be delayed until Kim returns from sabbatical.

* **Anti-Racism Subcommittee**
* **Israel / Palestine**

Report from PalNet-SW **Appendix 6**

**Staff Report - Shawn**

Daring Justice: Reviewed items identified during the meeting for Daring Justice, which will be prepared once we have items completed:

1. Net Zero Webinar Reminder (reminder sent separately because time sensitive)
2. Reprofile the microgrants
3. Statement on Gun Violence – once letters are completed and sent
4. GLI – letter request (Shawn and Susan based on ask from the Maritime working group)
5. Safe consumption rally and update on actions related to closure of safe consumption sites; Alexa to provide an article and photos.
6. Update on proposal from AGM and letters (Susan)
7. New members for the Commission and requesting Communities of Faith to let us know about justice actions they are taking like writing letters. (Susan to prepare)

**New Business**

Contagious Hope (Alexa) **Appendix 7**

Alexa Gilmour discussed a project aimed at engaging individuals in faith communities who are passionate about social justice topics like poverty, environment, and anti-racism. This proposal provides a mechanism for the Commission to respond to our question about how do we engage Communities of Faith and individuals in justice issues and connect them with others. She collaborated with ChurchX to develop a searchable database where users can find nearby volunteer, educational, or advocacy opportunities related to specific causes within a defined radius. Users can create personalized profiles to receive targeted event notifications, enhancing engagement and alignment with their interests. Alexa previewed the database on ChurchX with us and how the search tool functions. An AI tool, costing an additional $5,000, could automate the process by scraping relevant event data from various sources, expanding the database’s scope beyond Toronto to the entire Shining Waters region. Funding request for $3000 toward the AI tool. Other partners include ChurchX and the United Church Foundation. Eventually, a small subscription fee, which could support staffing and operational needs may be helpful for sustainability. This tool aims to simplify and broaden involvement in social justice initiatives across the community.

Susan requested that we respond to the funding request at our November meeting. We would need to clarify the logistics about who would receive the funding (i.e. ChurchX). Shawn will clarify how any funding requests need to be handled in terms of payment. Susan asked members to forward additional questions to Alexa.

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, November 19, 2024**

Opening Prayer/Reflection: Alexa

**Closing Prayer**

Susan offered a closing prayer.

**Adjournment**

**MOTION** by Irene Green / Don Ford **SW-SEJC-2024-10-22-06**

That the SEJC meeting is adjourned.

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Appendix 1**

This is a statement of concern that was drafted using the United Church of Canada's past statements and resources.

**Draft Statement of Concern (from Alexa)**

We at the Shining Waters Regional Council of the United Church of Canada are deeply troubled by the alarming rise in gun and youth violence in our communities across the GTA. Recent reports indicate a stark increase in gun violence incidents, with a 74% rise this year, many of which involve our youth ([Global News](https://globalnews.ca/news/8557675/toronto-gun-violence-rise-2024/%29)). This trend not only shatters lives but also the fabric of our communities which thrive on peace and mutual respect.

Our faith calls us to advocate for justice and peace, and to support initiatives that foster community well-being. The rise in such violence contradicts these tenets and requires a concerted, immediate response from all sectors of society. It is especially concerning that the youth, who are not only our future but also among the most vulnerable, are increasingly involved either as victims or perpetrators of this violence ([Global News](https://globalnews.ca/news/8567932/toronto-youth-gun-violence-increase-2024/)).

Reflecting our ongoing commitment to social justice, we draw upon our foundational beliefs and past declarations, such as our stance that [Black Lives Matter](https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/gce_03_gce_statement_that_black_lives_matter.pdf). This commitment underpins our urgent call to action against the systemic issues contributing to this surge in violence.

Additionally, our engagement in initiatives such as the United Church of Canada’s [40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism](https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/anti-racism/40-days-engagement-anti-racism) underscores our dedication to addressing systemic racism, which often intersects with the factors leading to violence. We reiterate our call to community leaders, government officials, and all stakeholders to come together to address the root causes of this violence. It is imperative that we implement comprehensive strategies that include education, community support, and policy reforms to ensure the safety and well-being of all our community members.

We also call upon our congregations and community partners to engage actively in advocacy and support programs aimed at combating violence and supporting our youth. Let us all strive to create spaces of safety and nurturing, where every individual can thrive away from the shadow of violence.

Together, let us renew our efforts to build a community grounded in respect, justice, and peace.

Tina Conlon

President, Shining Waters Regional Council, United Church of Canada

*This statement integrates the Council's past engagements with societal issues and their specific stances on matters like racism and violence, reinforcing the message with calls to action based on established commitments and initiatives. For further details on these initiatives and to view the full statements, please visit the United Church of Canada's official website or specific program pages like the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism.*

Here are the links to the referenced sources used for drafting the statement of concern:

 1. Increase in Gun Violence (74%):

 - Global News Article: [Gun violence up 74% in Toronto following ‘unusually’ low year for shootings]( https://globalnews.ca/news/8557675/toronto-gun-violence-rise-2024/)

2. Rise in Youth Gun Violence:

 - Global News Article: [Toronto sees ‘troubling’ rise in youth gun violence, fatal shootings]( https://globalnews.ca/news/8567932/toronto-youth-gun-violence-increase-2024/)

3. Detailed Incident Reporting:

 - CityNews Article: [Toronto shooting incidents up 140% over last year: police data](<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2024/02/21/toronto-shooting-increase-2024/>)

 - CP24 article [Cop in hospital after being shot in midtown Toronto, shooter in custody

<https://www.cp24.com/local/toronto/2024/10/03/cop-in-hospital-after-being-shot-in-midtown-toronto-shooter-in-custody/>]

# City News Article: [Man and woman dead, 2 others injured in overnight Scarborough shooting, https://toronto.citynews.ca/2024/07/24/scarborough-shooting-injuries-toronto-police/]

 4. United Church of Canada's Stance on Black Lives Matter:

 - United Church of Canada's Statement on Black Lives Matter: [Black Lives Matter statement]( https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/gce\_03\_gce\_statement\_that\_black\_lives\_matter.pdf)

5. 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism:

 - United Church of Canada's 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism: [40 days engagement with anti-racism](https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/anti-racism/40-days-engagement-anti-racism)

These sources provide context for the data on gun violence and the United Church of Canada's established positions on related social issues, which are used to draft the statement of concern.

**Background Notes from Shawn: Progress on Gun Violence Statement**

Shawn took the issue to the IDC Chair, Amy Lee, the evening of our September meeting. Amy did not choose to add this to their agenda. As she noted, the mandate of the IDC Commission is not dealing with these justice issues as much as it is about the mandate of becoming an Inter-cultural church. (*PURPOSE The Intercultural Diversity Commission will encourage and engage Shining Waters Regional Council, its Executive and Commissions, and its Communities of Faith in honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry.)*Anti-racism (as well as Right Relations) remain part of SEJC mandate, which is also why Kim Uyede-Kai continues to attend SEJC meetings and we have those sub-committees. Anything we draft is actually done on behalf of the Region, and the statement is signed by the President.

Following our September meeting, Adele Halliday clarified that she could review what we draft but could not assist in drafting a statement. Once we had the video available of Adele’s presentation at our September meeting, and Alexa had opportunity to review the conversation, Shawn and Alexa met. Alexa took lead to draft a statement, and we are presently seeking feedback from Adele Halliday before circulating to the SEJC members.

**Appendix 2**

**SW2024-04: Reducing Homelessness in Canada Proposal**

**Origin: Social and Ecological Justice Commission**

1. **What is the issue?**

**Background:**

Research shows that 35,000 Canadians are homeless right now and 36% of Canadians have been homeless or know someone who has been homeless. Furthermore, statistics show that 1.7 million Canadian households live in precarious housing that is either unaffordable, overcrowded and/or needs major repairs,

Organizations such as the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC), the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) and others have been advocating for decades for policies at all levels of government which would help to significantly reduce homelessness in Canada.

Bringing together representatives of the interfaith community, ISARC has participated in Government consultations on affordable housing among other social justice issues affecting people living on the margins. They urge the Provincial and Federal Governments to work together to create more affordable housing and to introduce a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit to stop growing homelessness in Canada.

**2. Why is this issue important?**

The gospel calls us to love our neighbour, especially our neighbour in need. Jesus reminded his disciples that whatever you do to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do to me. Justice, equity, compassion and care for neighbour are at the heart of the Christian gospels and Christian theology.

**3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitment on equity?**

One only needs to look at the demographic of those in poverty to see that disproportionately it is composed of those who are victims of inequity: people with disabilities, immigrants, women, people of colour, the sick, the elderly and those seeking to escape the trauma of abuse and violence. Impoverished people are far more likely to be inadequately housed, or to suffer chronic or intermittent homelessness, than those whose incomes are above the poverty line. Ontario is in the midst of a housing affordability crisis. Small and large communities identify lack of housing, particularly lack of affordable housing as a major issue in their municipalities.

Not only are mortgage costs extremely high but rents have reached levels that place people at risk of homelessness. It is nor enough to build additional units. Attention needs to be given to existing affordable units being lost due to vacancy decontrol and demolition to build more expensive rental units. These inequitable situations in Canada must be rectified with bold steps to reverse homelessness with affordable housing and with homelessness prevention supports.

**4. How might Shining Waters Regional Council respond to this issue?**

The Regional Council might:

• Commend the Federal Government for the bold initiative of promising $8.1 billion in new spending on housing, complemented by as much as $55 billion in financing;

• Call on the Federal Government to implement a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit as a necessary tool to stop growing homelessness while more housing is created and housing affordability is restored. This benefit would provide direct support to assist with paying real rents and assisting those who are unhoused to find affordable rents. (HPHB) would provide immediate rental relief to up to 385,000 households at imminent risk of homelessness, help over 50,000 people leave homelessness and reduce pressure on Canada’s overwhelmed homeless systems.

• Call on the Federal Government to ensure that the promised new funding includes both an Encampment Response Program to rapidly respond to people living in encampments to assist with finding appropriate, safe and secure housing and a comprehensive Refugee and Asylum Seeker Resettlement Program that ensures those fleeing from their own countries are not placed in municipal homeless shelter systems.

• Call on the Provincial Government to take steps to preserve existing and new housing at affordable rents by:

1. Restoring rent control to all rental housing, and applying vacancy control.

The decision to remove the HST on new apartment buildings and the Federal Government's recent decision to increase the amount of low-interest financing for new apartments is enough of an incentive for new apartment construction. There is no justification for vacancy decontrol or for new apartments not to be covered by rent control;

2. Insuring above guideline rent increases are limited to the period needed to recover the

costs of renovations, and rents then returned to previous levels;

3. stemming the conversion of long-term housing into short-term vacation units (AirBnbs). *Groups like Fairbnb have called for provinces to set up short-term rental registries and allow municipalities access to collected data;*

4. limiting short-term rentals to principal residences, and hold platforms like AirBnB accountable for the properties they advertise.

**APPENDIX 3 – Letter from Executive referring Proposal to SEJC**

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**APPENDIX 4 – Encampment Advocacy**

***Copy of letter for discussion:***

**Alex Nuttall: Municipalities need the power to clean up public parks**

*We cannot continue to allow spaces intended for children to be taken over by drug addicts and homelessness*

Author of the article: **Alex Nuttall,**[**Special to National Post**](https://nationalpost.com/author/specialnp/)

Published Oct 16, 2024  •  Last updated 1 day ago  •  3 minute read

Injections sites, “safe supply” of drugs, unregulated encampments, tolerance of broken laws, lack of prosecution, a revolving-door justice system and a liberal interpretation of drug laws by the courts have all led to where we are today, a society that is lawless and biased toward those who break the law.

We’ve reached a very sad day in North American society when we are putting the priorities of traumatized adults over the innocence of children. Places designed for kids to play are being taken over by homeless encampments, with many being home to unruly behaviour, open drug use and, in some cases, violence.

When did the focus shift from creating spaces that are safe for kids to play, to creating places that are dedicated and “safe” for using hard drugs?

Let me be very clear: we absolutely must help those suffering with addictions, deteriorating mental health and homelessness. We need proper services that are actually assisting with the betterment of the lives of those dealing with these major issues, not just warehousing individuals and preventing them from succeeding in life.

I applaud the Ontario government for prioritizing hubs that provide rehabilitative services, counselling and referrals for housing. These are long-term objectives that should have been the priority for all levels of government since Day 1 of this crisis.

Ontario’s ministers of health and mental health are correct: Ontario does need a lot more capacity for rehab and treatment services. Let’s work towards rectifying this problem.

At the same time, our municipalities are shackled by court decisions, and we are lacking the power to enforce our own laws. Numerous court cases have undermined the ability of municipalities to maintain clean and safe environments.

Threats of charges under human rights laws are being felt by municipal leaders.

Inaction on encampments has resulted in the proliferation of encampments. Not just in Barrie, Ont., where I serve as mayor, or in Canada, but throughout North America.

Municipalities are working together. Its time for provinces to work together, as well. Its time for provincial and federal governments to step up and weigh in on court cases that have resulted in an increase in crime and a decrease in public safety.

Police need the ability to police our neighbourhoods. Prosecutors need to be able to prosecute. Judges need to be given the proper direction and tools to enforce the laws.

As mayor, I, alongside many other mayors, are calling on both senior levels of government to:

1. seek intervenor status in any court case restricting municipal regulation of encampments in public parks;
2. advocate for the principle endorsed by United States Supreme Court (City of Grants Pass v. Johnson) that courts should not be dictating homelessness policy;
3. develop a compassionate and compulsory treatment plan for addicts;
4. use of the notwithstanding clause where necessary to meet the objectives above;
5. create diversion courts as a compassionate alternative to the bogged-down court system;
6. permit police officers to arrest people without a warrant who commit acts of repetitive trespass after having been directed by a police officer not to engage in such activity; and
7. allow charges of repetitive trespass to be refereed to a diversion court.

Governments cannot sit on the sidelines while the courts write legislation. The notwithstanding clause is a tool that is available to restore municipal governments’ ability to maintain order and safety. This will not solve all problems, but will at least give mayors the opportunity to move forward and protect our most innocent and vulnerable citizens.

In Barrie, all options are on the table to ensure our children walking to school are safe in each and every park, especially those near elementary schools. We ask other levels of government to do the same. Consider every option available to restore safe parks and safe neighbourhoods, while helping those who have lost their way.

National Post

Alex Nuttall is mayor of Barrie, Ont.

**APPENDIX 5**

**Report on Spirit Garden Opening - from Brian McIntosh**

SWRC LIRR Circle and SEJC friends -

It was an awe-inspiring joy to be present for the opening of the Spirit Garden yesterday, along with so many people who came to be in solidarity with the survivors of Residential Schools who were present.  The symbols of the turtle, the canoe, the Inukshuk, and the healing lodge, as well as the three sisters garden, the two-row wampum walkway, and the other special features, were all spectacular, and it was a beautiful and humbling experience for those of us in attendance, some of whom you can see in the six pics I've attached here.

Now that the Garden is open to the public, it's my fervent hope that we'll encourage UC people to visit and reflect, and to, as the Spirit Garden is intended, make it a space of healing, teaching, learning, and sharing for all of us.  Council Fire intends to put in place a programming plan for the space, as well as a maintenance plan that's already in the works, with the City of Toronto as a key partner of course.  The group that I've just withdrawn from, the Restoring Relations Working Group, is the main multi-faith partner that has embodied solidarity and support for many years with Council Fire, the last 8 of those years being dedicated to the raising of funds and the promotion of the Spirit Garden project, in addition to networking, information sharing, and other activities.  Two UC people, Ronny Yaron and Hazel Boyle, have actively come on board in the last two years, and liaison with them, as a Circle and a Commission, might be a good way to continue to keep the Garden and the RRWG's ongoing work on our Region's agenda.  I've taken the liberty of copying them on this note, as I am now withdrawing from this particular work.

I will forever be grateful for having been a part of this reconciliation and right relations work of the Great Spirit in us and all things!

Brian

**APPENDIX 6**

**Report to the Social and Ecological Justice Commission, Shining Waters Region**

**from Palestine Network, Shining Waters Region**

Oct. 15, 2024

PalNet SW met on Sept. 24, 2024. 13 members were in attendance. The following areas were discussed, and actions proposed:

* **Raising our Voices Divestment Process**

Robin Wardlaw and Barbara Lloyd are working to engage several congregations in Shining Waters as beta sites for the process of divesting from companies that profit from the occupation. Robin Wardlaw has created a Responsible Investing Guide to assist in the process. Feedback from these congregations will help us refine the process before we roll it out to all congregations in Shining Water.

George Bartlett reminded the group that a recent UN decision calls on all states to prevent trade or investment that assists the occupation. This is not a fringe concern. Institutions within Canada must comply.

* **Education re: Palestine and the Occupation**

Barbara Lloyd and Adele Boy reported that they are hoping to offer a pared down version of a Mennonite course titled “From the Bible to Gaza” in the spring.

* **GC44 and GC45**

GC44 Commissioners Barbara Lloyd and Ken McEvoy will attend an educational session on Oct. 9, 2024, and a meeting of GC44 on Oct. 19, 2024. It appears that the Palestine proposal put forward by PalNet SW at CG44 in July, 2024 will be brought forward again. Depending on the outcome of the meeting on Oct. 19, PalNet SW may bring forward a new proposal for GC45. Robin Wardlaw will investigate what the Presbyterian Church in the United States is proposing in their work for justice in Palestine.

Ken McEvoy will engage with General Council around the need to follow procedural rules even while using Zoom as a platform for some meetings.

* **UNJPPI Conference Nov. 1 -2, 2024**

Many PalNet SW members will attend the UNJPPI conference as well as the Palestine Land Exercise that is being held on Oct. 31, 2024 at Trinity St. Paul’s church. Members are being encouraged to billet conference attendees from out of town if possible. PalNet SW was very appreciative of the support of Shining Waters for the conference, including its $1500 contribution.

* **Web and Social Media Presence**

PalNet SW continues to try to find a way to effectively share its activities and upcoming events and make its offerings accessible. Paul Shepherd and Robin Wardlaw will work with Shining Waters to see if there is some way they might use Shining Waters’ social media presence for PalNet purposes and their web site as a spot to post recordings of our webinars and forums.

* **Daring Justice Newsletter**

PalNet SW was very positive and enthusiastic about the *Daring Justice* newsletter issued by Shining Waters. Judi McCallum passed on instructions offered by Shawn Redden for subscribing as individuals both for *Daring Justice* and *Currents.*

* **Member Actions**

The following member actions were encouraged:

* Participate in the prayer gathering and rally with the Palestinian Youth Movement in Toronto on Oct. 5, 2024, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the occupation of Palestine. Supporting faith groups include Kairos Simcoe County, Mennonite Action, Christians for Free Palestine, Christians for Just Peace.
* Sign the petition and send a letter to the Toronto District School Board expressing concern and outrage over their apology that some Toronto students were taken to the River Run march on Sept. 18, 2024 where some marchers chanted in support of Palestine.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Wardlaw, Chair

Judi McCallum Secretary

**APPENDIX 7 – CONTAGIOUS HOPE PROPOSAL**

 **Empowering Faith Communities to**

**Make A Difference**

**About Us:**

Contagious Hope collaborates with faith communities to harness their unique gifts for local needs and advocate for justice, equity, and sustainability.

**Who We Serve:**

Faith communities have unique opportunities to unite their resources and address critical social issues. However, many face significant barriers including limited volunteers, staff hours, or expertise to tackle these challenging problems and support vulnerable people. Contagious Hope empowers communities to:

Ignite positive change

**info@contagioushope.ca**

**|**

**contagioushope.ca**

***Engaging faith in justice, equity and sustainability***

Use their unique talents

Amplify collective impact

**Proposal Overview:**

Contagious Hope seeks funding to enhance our Event Database, a pivotal program in fostering connections among people of faith committed to ecological and social justice. This initiative aims to develop an AI-driven scraping tool that automatically populates the database with relevant outreach and justice opportunities across the region.

 **Current Status:**

Our current database is ready to serve as a central hub for events such as protests, public talks, educational gatherings, and volunteer outreach opportunities. With features like location mapping and advanced search options, it efficiently links likeminded individuals and organizations, bolstering our mission towards a critical intercultural church of justice.

**Project Enhancement:**

The proposed AI tool will automate the extraction of event data from various online platforms, ensuring a steady flow of updated and relevant opportunities. This development is crucial for maintaining the database's relevance and utility, encouraging more active engagement from our community.

**Funding Request:**

Total AI Project Cost: $5,000

Already Raised: $2,000

Funding Needed: $3,000

**Utilization of Funds:**

The funds will primarily cover software development costs, including the AI tool's programming and integration with the existing database system.

 **Ongoing Costs:**

***Engaging faith in justice, equity and sustainability***

Once the AI tool is built, the database will be free for all to access. A nominal monthly subscription will offer direct updates to subscribers’ inboxes and cover the yearly costs of website Maintenance and database Management.

 **Impact:**

The enhanced database will significantly increase our capacity to mobilize volunteers and promote justice initiatives, directly aligning with the commission's mandate to enact social and ecological justice within and beyond our communities.

 **Conclusion:**

Supporting this project would not only enrich our existing resources but also amplify our collective impact in championing justice and ecological awareness. We invite the Social Ecological Justice Commission to join us in this vital endeavor, propelling our shared vision forward. For further discussion or inquiries, please contact us at info@contagioushope.ca.