SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission will encourage, support, and initiate justice work within Shining Waters Regional Council, viewing and acting on issues through the lenses of racial, social, ecological justice and economic equality

In 2026, the socio-economic/ecological issues facing Canada and the global community remain on red alert! It is a time when our Christian witness for peace, justice, and a renewed symbiotic and deeply spiritual relationship with the earth needs to heard. The question for our Commission is how to assist The United Church of Canada through our Region's congregations in lifting up Jesus' call for the kin(g)dom of God on earth in today's world? As a denomination we no longer speak from a mainstream.perspective so what does it mean for us to stand on the margins in solidarity with our many, many, allies seeking a common good for all, not just the 1%?

The Commission has sought to reassess how the Region's congregations can be proactive in this Christian mission. A few challenges stand in our way.

1. According to the Region's 2024 report on ministry and funding priorities, social and ecological justice-seeking has become a lesser priority for congregations. Congregations and communities of faith want support from the region for the social justice work happening in local congregations and communities.
2. There is interest expressed in strengthening right relations with Indigenous peoples, especially support for exploring what it means to live in right relations at a local level.
3. The Commission acknowledges that the form of advocacy we have pursued for many years of writing politicians and sending petitions have very little impact in these times. In the last four years, we have received virtually no response from the politicians we've written to. Not even a form letter acknowledging receipt of the letter.
4. In seeking to reassess how the SEJC could be helpful to congregations we reflected on four typical ways the UCC has exercised its social witness and hands-on engagement. Here is a summary of those four ways:

Four UCC Ways to Address Inequities and Socio-economic/Ecological Injustices

1. Continue providing "stopgap" charitable help (charitable anti-poverty responses, greening initiatives –food banks, Out of the Cold, Supportive Housing, Food Pantries…)
2. Democratic lobbying governments to increase the Universal Wellbeing of Planet and People via letters/petitions/research/consultations to increase financial

assistance and social-benefit institutions –education, health, daycare, etc. – to benefit all.

3. Joining with Others to Express Anger and Outrage: Organize with others to protest societal inequalities and the need for urgent action to limit the inequality, stop environmental degradation, and support citizen/others wellbeing and sustainable economic future. (Palestinian Solidarity, Arab Spring, Iran/Syria/Hungary, No Kings, etc.)
4. Support Alternative "Commons-based Wellbeing Economy" (Earth4All: Club of Rome, Regenerative, Circular, Donut, Cooperative, Commoning…) Using buildings as land trusts to facilitate housing, community-based initiatives, CSAs, social enterprises, etc..

Assessing how SEJC can help congregations

Commission members can point to some examples of how congregations have engaged in these four strategies but the reality is that we don't have a clear picture of what congregations are doing. Without the closer contact of Presbytery we are only guessing at the mission.work of congregations. The SEJC would like to delve deeper into what is actually going on and how we might relate and be helpful to focus of congregational life.

In the fall of 2026 and winter/spring 2027 the SEJC is seeking to meet with groupings of congregations in particular geographic areas of our Region to ask about what congregations are doing, what we might be doing more of, and how the Commission can relate to this work. If there are existing clusters.or leader gatherings we'd like to get on the agenda to have an initial conversation with these groups. If no group exists in particular areas, the SEJC will be inviting leaders to a coffee or lunch gathering to discuss these questions. Staff support, Celio de Andrade, will be arranging these meetings and one or two Commission members will go to the gatherings.

Further SEJC Commission Engagement

A few of our commission members continue to be active in the national GLI (Guaranteed Liveable Income) network, as well as ecological justice initiatives. Our staff leads, Shawn Redden (Justice Minister) and Kim Uyede-Kai (Right Relations and anti-racism), provide regular updates to the commission on action requests from UCC justice networks and current justice initiatives within the UCC. Staff also respond to inquiries for information and support from individual communities of faith.

The Commission connects regularly with Shining Waters Palestine Network, facilitated by staff lead Shawn Redden, and SEJC has supported several of their education events this past year from our budget. SEJC and IDC (Intercultural Diversity Commission) supported the 'Here from the Beginning' exhibit (https://herefromthebeginning.ca/), showcasing the

contributions and experiences of Black people within the church. The two commissions partnered with four congregations to host the exhibit: Trinity-St. Paul's, Islington, St. Mattew's in Toronto and Grace United in Barrie.

SEJC continues to publish Daring Justice newsletter, curated by our staff leads, following our monthly meetings. We would like to include stories about local justice initiatives, so please contact our justice staff if you have a story to share.

One way that SEJC supports new justice initiatives and events at the local level is through our Microgrant program. A microgrant is a small amount of money ($400) accessed through a simple application process for Social Justice and Ecological Justice initiatives. We also encourage youth and young adult led justice initiatives with our 'Leading from the Heart' microgrant ($500). There is no deadline; applications are considered at each meeting as they are received. Learn more or apply here: https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/justice/social-and-ecological-justice-commission/sejc-microgrants/

In closing the SEJC Commission members would like to thank Kim, Shawn, and Celio, for their ongoing support of the Commission's work. In particular, we are sad to see Shawn leave but offer our blessing to her new ministry leadership work at the Atlantic School of Theology.

The Commission is uncertain how it will effectively continue its work with only the minimal assistance of Celio de Andrade to arrange meetings and do some communications work. Kim is already fully engaged supporting her other Commission work. So, it is a time of transition as we seek to know more about how to support congregations in their socio-economic and ecological justice work with the very limited volunteer time of Commission members? The Commission looks forward to further assessment of this work with the Region's leadership as we seek fulfill our Christian calling to "act justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with Creator."

Submitted by:
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On behalf of commission members:
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