
2015 Federal Election Kit



The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

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Introduction

What do you care about? Is it climate change? Peace? Refugee rights? Regardless of which issues matter most in your life, the 2015 elections will have an enormous impact on them. Now more than ever, all faith voices need to be heard in the political process. It is our right and duty to participate in forming a government that reflects the will of its people.

Your vote will make a difference. Matters such as Aboriginal rights, health care, and poverty are concerns for every community in our country. The more we know about how our faith and values can influence government policies, the better chance we will have to transform our own and others' lives for the common good. We witness to our faith in a just and life-giving God in the public arena by advocating for justice and peace. This is our faith and our vote.

“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isaiah 58:1)

The United Church has been active in the public arena—including elections—since its earliest days. The founders of this church believed that ours is a living faith and a witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ that is expressed in active, thoughtful involvement in society. It is important for people of faith to bring forward the consistent message that every individual, and Earth itself, must be cherished and respected. Our combined voices have greater impact when we work together.

Our non-partisan strategy aims to raise awareness about these issues and to build relationships for justice with politicians in communities across Canada. This kit provides information based on United Church policies and the church's ongoing work with Canadian and global partners.

Share what you and your congregation decide to do in this election season by e-mailing the national United Church General Council Office c/o Barbara Lloyd, Program Coordinator for Public Witness (blloyd@united-church.ca).

The 2015 Federal Election A Moment of Hope and Decision

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

“You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)

“They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” (Micah 4:4)

The 2015 federal election is a time for both hope and decision. If we are to continue to imagine and build a just society and a caring world, we must decide which leaders, and their parties, will help us to make that happen.

If we are to save this planet and its flora and fauna from climate change brought on by our own self-destructive choices, we must act now.

If we are to lead with integrity in the international community, we must reflect on the principled, moral, and humanitarian stances we have taken on many issues in the past.

If we are to hold up our heads as committed Christians and as fair, just, generous, hospitable, and humane people, serious questions about policies and practices need to be asked. Questions about

- abusive treatment and discrimination against immigrants, migrants, and refugees
- sexism, misogyny, and violence against women
- the failure to respect and uphold Aboriginal rights and seriously address Aboriginal issues, such as treaty obligations and murdered and missing women
- the exploitation of Indigenous people and Earth
- the lack of serious commitments to address climate change
- the lack of accountability (except to their shareholders) by Canadian resource extraction companies working in Canada and around the world
- efforts by transnational agribusinesses, with support of the Canadian government, to erode farmers’ rights to save, reuse, sell, and exchange the seed they produce
- the erosion of universal health care
- the socially corrosive effects of poverty and the failure to address root issues that underlie much impoverishment, crime, and violence
- the rise of militarism in Canada and the over-reliance on military solutions abroad
- the bias toward corporate profit-driven solutions for social and global development challenges
- Canada’s failure to respect and implement international UN agreements that set standards for the welfare of people and Earth (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, Arms Trade Treaty, Kyoto Accord)

Many of these issues are interwoven—climate change, poverty, Aboriginal rights, peace. Looking deeper into these connections enhances our capacity to effectively address any one.

So, too, we must ask questions about the present health of our democracy as lived out through the policy-making functions of our Parliament and government. What do we believe about the role of government in working for the well-being of all? What could be done to better support the efforts of Members of

Parliament to shape and implement policies that uplift principles of human rights, of peace-making, of care for creation, and the building up of the social well-being of our communities and our world? Whose interests are MPs serving? Which voices are heard in civil and political discussion and debate? Is anyone being silenced? How and why? Do our democratic structures serve the common good?

One of the roles of government is to collect and use taxes to provide for the safety, care, and development of its citizens. Governments serve at the behest of citizens and fund initiatives and programs with the taxes we pay. As Alex and Jordan Himelfarb wrote in the *Toronto Star*, “taxes are the way we pay for the things we do together that we could not do at all or as well alone”—such as health care, education, and public transit.¹

Over the last several years, there have been incidents involving the suppression of civil dissent, the de-funding of advocacy, research, and support programs, and the persistent challenging of charities regarding their charitable status. These incidents have limited our freedom of speech and eroded constructive collaboration between the government and civil society, which was once more prevalent.

- More than 50 organizations have been partially or completely de-funded, including KAIROS, Development and Peace, National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Native Council of Canada, Court Challenge Program, Rights and Democracy, Canadian Arab Federation, Oxfam²
- Many organizations that are strong advocates on climate change have been subjected to an audit process, making them reluctant to critique official government policy when they feel critique is warranted—David Suzuki Foundation, Tides Canada, West Coast Environmental Law, Pembina Foundation, Environmental Defence, Équiterre, Ecology Action Centre

The vibrant, open democracy we want, and for which people in other parts of the world risk their lives, includes vigorous discussion, broad policy debates, principled stands taken on world issues, and defence of human rights. Such aspirations require continuous efforts at transparency, accountability, integrity, and humility.

Engaged citizenship is part of Christian discipleship. How then, as citizens, can we bring our faith and gospel values into political discourse and debate? This 2015 Federal Election Kit offers background material and questions for candidates on key issues facing Canadians and United Church members. You may want to read through the kit to learn more about where the United Church stands on these issues. You may be ready to take action by organizing an all candidates meeting or informal gathering to learn more about the people who are running for political office in your riding.

We are challenged to journey, in the words of theologian Walter Brueggemann, “from the world of commodity to the world of communion,”³ leaving the threat, fear, and competition of empire behind. You are invited to embrace the values of the gospel—love, caring, kindness, and generosity. You are called to recommit to a discipleship of justice and love for the sake of this broken world. You are urged to bring the good news and prophetic vision of Jesus to this moment of hope and decision.

¹ Alex and Jordan Himelfarb, “The Year Taxes Made a Comeback in Canada,” *Toronto Star*, www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/12/29/the_year_taxes_made_a_comeback_in_canada.html, Dec. 29, 2014.

² Voices-Voix Coalition, <http://voices-voix.ca>.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 89.

Prayer

Dear God

As we think of Jesus

We think not just of prayer and quiet retreat

But of a life of action, of tables overturned, of lives touched and heal,

Endless walks through arid deserts to the next place of hurt and need.

And as we consider our troubled, torn planet,

Even now on the brink of yet more

Death and destruction,

Stir us, we pray, to work, and to work

For the transforming of this beautiful world.

And for justice for those oppressed by tyrants.

And for justice for those whose lives, even now,

Are blighted by endless forgotten wars.

Give us wisdom, guide our actions.

Make us fearless and passionate

For the Earth

And all its suffering people.

*Amen.*⁴

⁴ Neil Paynter and Helen Boothroyd, *Holy Ground: Liturgies and Worship Resources for an Engaged Spirituality* (Glasgow, Scotland: Wild Goose Publications, 2005), p. 267. Reprinted with permission from Wild Goose Publications (www.ionabooks.com).

Making Election Connections

a) Worship

The United Church of Canada was built on the assumption that faith communities had a role to play in shaping society and developing the common good. The measure is the same in the congregation and in the world: the discipleship of Jesus Christ—love of God and neighbour. In today's pluralistic Canadian society, the public square is represented by a variety of interests: business, labour, the media, and civil society organizations, all engaged in a civil discourse to shape the common good. Faith communities, whether they choose to participate or not, are part of this public space.

The Western principle of the separation of church and state is usually misunderstood. Freedom of religion prevents the state from favouring one religion over another. It was never meant to deny religion a voice in a public forum. In the same way, our witness can never be used on behalf of or in opposition to any specific candidate or party platform. The church cannot be a chaplain for one party or a cheerleader for a specific candidate. *We must be political, but not partisan; principled, but not ideological.*

The public, non-partisan witness of the church in asking questions of all candidates, and in preaching sermons at the time of an election, is an appropriate and indeed integral aspect of the role of the church in society. Faithful public witness gives concrete expression to Christ's way of love and justice.

Preaching is a challenging business. It is no easy task to form congregations that remain committed to Christian discipleship rather than preoccupied by party politics during an election. So there may be no more risky time than preaching during an election to fulfill the church's role in encouraging questions and challenging narrow-minded ideological views. Generally, it is always helpful to remind people of global concerns that are forgotten during a national election, or domestic concerns that have little public profile. It's always a challenge to question policy proposals that we might benefit from, like the call for lower taxes.

Here are some questions and suggestions that you might want to use within a worship service. They reflect principles and values from the ministry and teaching of Jesus:

1. What are the responsibilities of families, community organizations, markets, and government? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for the Earth, and overcome injustice?
2. In evaluating the promises of the various parties there are three things to consider. Are they economically just? Are they inclusive—who is left out? Are they environmentally sustainable?
3. Encourage everyone to vote. Ensure transportation for the elderly and follow suggestions below for the participation of youth and children.
4. Invite the neighbourhood association and other faith communities to jointly sponsor an all candidates meeting. Ensure the attendance of candidates by joining with other civic-minded groups in your community and starting the process early. For more suggestions for organizing an all candidates meeting, please see page 9 in this election kit.
5. Include people seeking public office in the prayers of the people every week. When we share our hopes and desires in prayer, we are speaking from the heart about the society we want to build.

Of course, the prophetic ministry outlined above is not just for election time. Our cause is justice for the marginalized; peace, by defending everyone's human dignity; and respect for the Earth, not a particular party or candidate. As disciples of Christ, we are called to carry these values into the public arena and all debates and choices over the values, vision, and leaders that will guide our country.

b) Study Groups

You can use this election kit as a resource for two or three study sessions during the election period. By studying the Questions for Candidates section (perhaps two or three areas of local interest per session), participants will learn more about current issues in which the United Church and its partners are engaged. Participants will also become familiar with the United Church social policies that undergird public statements, actions, and advocacy campaigns. This can be a rich time for discussion and consideration of different points of view.

c) Youth and Children's Ministries

Just because some youth are not old enough to vote doesn't mean they can't be involved in an election. Throughout history, politicians have looked to the voices of youth as a source of inspiration. Youth groups can get together to engage their congregation and community in the issues that are important to them.

Youth can be involved by

- organizing a documentary film series at your church that deals with important issues for youth
- participating in and helping organize an all candidates meeting at your church
- volunteering to provide child care or walk people's dogs while they vote
- watching televised debates together and discussing issues of faith and the common good

Youth leaders and Sunday school teachers can lead their group or class in a discussion about the importance of elections.

Sample questions:

- Why is voting important? Why do you think some people don't vote?
- Who is running for office and what do you think they stand for?
- What do people need to live a good life? How can governments respond to some of these needs?
- How do the teachings of Jesus help us to think about the issues being discussed in this election?

All Candidates Meetings

Organizing an All Candidates Meetings

One of the best ways for a congregation to promote an engaged democracy is to organize an all candidates meeting. By doing so, the church sends the community the message that public debate matters and that the church has an interest in the issues discussed. It is an opportunity for the church to take leadership in the public arena.

Many churches organize and hold all candidates meetings during election campaigns. These are non-partisan events where all the candidates in a riding are invited to share their views and answer questions from the audience. This provides helpful information to church members and the local community about where the local candidates stand on issues of concern. Here are the steps to organizing an all candidates meeting:

1. Form a planning team and start early to make sure you have the candidates committed to your event.
2. Consider partnering with other churches, faith groups, and community organizations. Co-operating to host an all candidates meeting allows you to share costs, access a broader group of voters, and build partnerships.
3. Choose a place, possible dates, and a time for the meeting. Give the candidates a range of dates so that you can schedule for a day that works for everyone.
4. Plan the format of your meeting:
 - Decide how long each candidate will have for their opening remarks (usually 5 minutes). Choose the order in which candidates will speak (e.g., alphabetical order by last name).
 - Decide how long the question and answer period will be (such as one hour), and how long to give for each question (whether asked by the moderator or directly from the audience) and answer (e.g., 30 seconds for each question, one minute for the answer).
 - Plan how much time the candidates will be given for closing remarks (usually 3 minutes). Choose the order in which the candidates will give their closing remarks (such as in reverse order from the opening remarks).
5. Choose an interesting and engaging debate moderator. You might ask the audience to submit questions to the moderator in advance. The moderator introduces the candidates and moderates questions from the audience. This person explains the guidelines and schedule for the meeting and makes sure the rules are followed. The moderator must remain neutral and not get involved in the questions or answers. No personal attacks are allowed.
6. Choose a time-keeper to monitor and notify the candidates and questioners of the time limits. This person has a stopwatch and gavel or bell. The time-keeper notifies candidates one minute before the end of the time limit for opening and closing remarks.
7. Send an invitation to the candidates, asking them to participate. Send them the guidelines and format for the evening. Ask them to provide a short biography to help the moderator introduce them. Let them know there will be tables available for their literature. (If a candidate says no or does not return calls, consider having an empty chair or name card on display, and ask the moderator to note the candidate's absence.)

8. Advertise your meeting. Use the local print media, social media, e-mail lists, websites, networks, and partners. Send out the information more than once. Remind the media directly. Give the date, time, and location of the meeting, and the names and party affiliation of the candidates. Inform your congregation of the meeting through a bulletin insert, e-mail, and/or announcement.
9. Set up for your meeting:
 - Tables, chairs, and microphones should be set up at the front of the room for the candidates and moderator, with clearly visible signs indicating their name and political party. Provide water for the candidates.
 - Have at least one floor microphone for the audience.
 - Provide tables in the hall or foyer for each candidate's literature.
10. After the meeting:
 - Team debriefing—review and assess the successes and challenges and how your efforts could be improved next time.
 - Prepare a follow-up media release. Include quotations and a media contact.
 - Send thank-you letters to candidates, organizers, partners, and any other contributors.

Attending an All Candidates Meeting

The sample questions that follow are based on immediate public policy concerns of The United Church of Canada. They reflect the holistic mission of the United Church to build sustainable and just communities, locally and globally. If you wish to raise questions such as these at candidates meetings, choose a topic you personally feel passionate about. Write out your question ahead of time to stay focused and on point. Ask all candidates to respond to your concern.

Before the meeting begins, look for the location of the floor microphones and sit as close to one as possible. When question period is announced, people will move quickly toward the microphones. Often you will only have one opportunity to ask a question. If you can ask two, you might ask about a local concern and a global concern.

If you are attending an all candidates meeting as a member of a group, such as a congregational social justice committee, plan your strategy beforehand. Divide key questions among different members of your group according to your interests, and consider assigning follow-up questions to different group members.

Always be polite. The goal is not to embarrass the candidates, but to raise specific peace and justice concerns and get them on the political agenda. Bring easy-to-read literature about your issue along to distribute to all the candidates and audience members.

Questions for Candidates

Aboriginal Peoples: Working for Justice and Reconciliation

In June 2015, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada will set out a series of recommendations, or calls to action, which will form a long-term program of reconciliation initiatives for all Canadians.

Faced with the full history and profound impact of Indian Residential Schools, both Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians have become increasingly aware of the need for healing in our broken relationship. As Christians, we believe that everyone is invited to a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). Reconciliation requires both truth-telling about the past and concrete initiatives to dramatically and substantively improve the current realities of Indigenous communities, especially for the most vulnerable members, women and children.

It is vital that all Canadians seize the opportunity provided by the TRC's recommendations to commit to travel the road of reconciliation by finding meaningful ways to restore just and right relations with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. Here are some ways to meet this objective:

- **Meeting the basic needs of all**
Ensure that clean water, adequate and safe housing, good primary and public health care, quality education, child care, and other basic services are adequately funded and sufficiently available to Aboriginal communities in all parts of Canada.
- **A genuine education for all**
Ensure that First Nations and Inuit students have control of, and equitable and sufficient funding support for, a good quality education. Encourage an Indigenous perspective on history in North America in all public education in Canada.
- **Justice for the most vulnerable**
Ensure that the tragic and continuing reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is effectively addressed by all communities and governments who have the capacity to respond. In particular, the federal government must fully accept its legal responsibility to do all within its power in working with Aboriginal groups to end this egregious perpetuation of violence.
- **Resolving land claims and broken promises**
Ensure the removal of obstacles that prevent fair and satisfactory negotiations on land claims; and ensure full compliance with treaty rights and obligations.
- **Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
Ensure that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples becomes a foundation for relations with Indigenous peoples and with one another. Require federal and provincial governments to make regular accounts on its implementation.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party respond to the continuing reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls?
2. How will you and your party work to provide basic needs, including education, for all Aboriginal people?
3. Describe the plans your party has for responding to Aboriginal land claims and treaty obligations.

Climate Justice: A Call to Action

Referring to the September 2014 UN Climate Summit, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu identified the present as “a moment that demands unprecedented collective action”¹ in the struggle to maintain God’s Earth. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has warned that decisive actions to get greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) under control must be in place by 2017.

- Canada is one of the world’s most flagrant per capita emitters of greenhouse gases (emitting 14.7 tonnes per person, per year²). In 2009, the Government of Canada committed to reducing GHG emissions to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. But Environment Canada data indicates that we are less than halfway there. Canada’s failure to meet its promised GHG target is principally due to growing emissions from the tar sands.³
- The International Energy Agency warns that we can burn no more than one-third of proven fossil fuel reserves globally if we want to contain warming below 2 degrees Celsius.
- A recent study found that oil from the tar sands and the Arctic are among the most costly and least economical of oil reserves to develop globally.⁴
- The development of the Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and Energy East pipelines would all necessitate the expansion of tar sands production. Keystone and Northern Gateway pipelines together would triple GHG emissions by 2020, wiping out all the GHG reductions achieved by closing coal-fired power plants.⁵
- Canadian renewable energy sources, principally hydroelectric, only made up 16.6% of primary demand in 2012 and are projected to fall to 16.1% by 2035. Fossil fuels (oil, gas, and coal) made up 74.3% of primary demand in Canada in 2012, which is projected to rise to 76.8% by 2035.⁶

The United Church urges the federal government to *implement a moratorium* on the expansion of the tar sands and pipeline development; *create a renewable energy development strategy* to include a \$4.65 billion 10-year investment to stimulate the development of renewable energy sources, with priority on public sector owned and operated wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal power (for more information, see <http://greeneconomynet.ca/campaign/issues/>); and *implement a \$50 per tonne tax on GHG emissions* that would rise to \$200 per tonne over 10 years in order to discourage the use of fossil fuels—coal, oil, and natural gas—whose combustion causes climate change, and encourage energy conservation, investment in low-carbon technologies, and the use of renewable forms of energy that do not emit greenhouse gases.⁷

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party halt the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure, particularly the tar sands development and pipeline expansions?
2. How will you and your party act to put a price on carbon emissions through a tax or fee sufficient to keep the rise in global temperatures below two degrees Celsius?
3. How will you and your party develop a renewable energy plan for Canada?

¹ KAIROS, “People’s Climate March Spurs Hope for Climate Justice: Policy Briefing Paper 40,” www.kairoscanada.org/sustainability/climate-justice/peoples-climate-march-spurs-hope-for-climate-justice-policy-briefing-paper-40, Oct. 2014.

² The World Bank, “Data: CO₂ Emissions (Metric Tons per Capita),” <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC>.

³ Pembina Institute, “The Trouble with 2030,” blog, Jan. 10, 2014 by P.J. Partington, www.pembina.org/blog/774.

⁴ Ivan Sementiuk, “Oil Sands Must Remain Largely Unexploited to Meet Climate Target, Study Finds,” The Globe and Mail, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/study-backs-argument-keystone-would-contribute-to-climate-change/article22335591>, Jan. 7, 2015.

⁵ KAIROS, “Fate of Tar Sands Pipelines Crucial for Climate Justice,” www.kairoscanada.org/sustainability/fate-of-tar-sands-pipelines-crucial-for-climate-justice-2, Jan. 12, 2012.

⁶ KAIROS, “A Renewable Energy Plan for Canada,” fact sheet, www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Fact-sheet-on-Renewable-Energy-Plan1.pdf

⁷ KAIROS, “Putting a Price on Carbon,” fact sheet, www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Fact-sheet-re-Putting-a-Price-on-Carbon1.pdf.

Criminal Justice: Use Resources for Healing

Canada's crime rate has been declining steadily for more than 20 years.¹ Yet changes to criminal justice policy in the past decade have resulted in more people going to prison for longer periods of time. As well, other government decisions regarding the criminal justice system have raised serious concerns:

- Calls to reform the use of long-term solitary confinement in Canadian prisons have been ignored.
- Due to a shift in Canadian foreign policy, Canada will no longer fight for the lives of Canadians facing execution in “democratic countries, like the United States, where there has been a fair trial.” A double standard has now been created that could undermine efforts to protect Canadians in non-democratic countries.
- Canada will not co-sponsor the recent United Nations resolution against state executions, abandoning a decade-long leadership role on the issue.
- Following a 2014 decision, all prison farms will be shut down.

The increasing use of incarceration costs us, as families, as communities, and as taxpayers, reducing our ability to care for victims. It also means fewer resources go to other supports that have been shown to create safer communities—such as restorative justice programs, direct services for victims, and reintegration programs such as Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA).²

Incarceration is an important issue for faith communities as we consider how we respond to those who are marginalized and in need. Many inmates in Canada are serving sentences for a non-violent offence (76% of prisoners in provincial jails and 33% of those in federal penitentiaries).³ Many repeat offenders are mentally ill, cognitively challenged, and/or addicted. To become good neighbours and productive citizens, they need treatment, health services, education, housing, employment, and support.

We, as people of faith, are called to be healers and to offer voices of compassion. This election provides an opportunity to bear witness to our faith by calling on our political parties to direct our criminal justice system in ways that honour God's vision of restorative justice and respect the human dignity of all.

Questions You Can Ask

1. Canada's crime rate has been decreasing for years. Given that it is at an all-time low, how do you and your party propose to make more effective use of the resources committed to justice and corrections?
2. How will you and your party develop restorative approaches to justice that support healing for victims, offenders, and communities?
3. How will you and your party prepare and support those who are serving sentences to be good neighbours in communities upon their release?

¹ Statistics Canada, “Police-Reported Crime Statistics, 2013,” www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140723/dq140723b-eng.htm.

² For more information about CoSA, see The Church Council on Justice and Corrections, “Evaluation of CoSA National Demonstration Project,” <http://ccjc.ca/evaluation-of-cosa-national-demonstration-project>.

³ Public Safety Canada, “2012 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview,” www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2012-crs/index-eng.aspx#c15; Statistics Canada, “Adult Correctional Statistics in Canada, 2010/2011,” www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11715-eng.htm#a6.

Economic Justice: Toward an Economy of Life for All

Many members of the United Church, and many of the ecumenical organizations in which the United Church participates, share a vision of a new world order based on an “economy of life for all.”

The Economy of Life embodies God’s vision of koinonia, where healthy communities flourish in peace and harmony with one another and with God’s creation (Acts 2:42-47). It is a place where all people have a dignified, clean and safe place to live and die among family and friends who love and share life with them; where work has dignity and wages are fair and just; where justice is done, mercy is loved, and all walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8); and where the Earth’s beings...live in the integrity God has made.

Still, greed is celebrated through financial and economic systems. How might the federal election be an occasion to uphold a vision of God’s household (*oikoumene*) and the promise of abundant life for all?

“We can’t afford it” is an excuse for doing nothing about climate change, child poverty, development aid, health care, education, and housing. As Naomi Klein and others have shown, we *can* afford to make changes that will improve general well-being. In her 2014 book, *This Changes Everything* (Simon & Shuster), Klein draws on economists including Thomas Piketty and James Tobin to propose ways to tax the “concentration of wealth at the very top of the economic pyramid” to help pay costs related to climate change. Upholding a vision of God’s household might begin, then, with reconsideration of taxes. In recent decades, some political leaders have promised tax cuts rather than responsible stewardship of shared resources. But as Piketty says: “Without taxes, society has no common destiny, and collective action is impossible.”

Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press, 2014) argues for dialogue on a progressive global tax on capital. He shows how accumulated wealth grows faster than income from wages, leading to concentration of wealth and power at the top levels of societies—what the Occupy Movement called the 1%. Some options to consider:

- a low-rate financial transaction tax and a tax on currency exchanges
- a progressive global tax on capital to avoid “an endless inegalitarian spiral” and control global capital concentration
- end tax avoidance by the wealthy and transnational corporations: close foreign tax havens and enforce existing laws against stashing wealth overseas (see Canadians for Tax Fairness, www.taxfairness.ca)
- ecological taxation: a meaningful carbon tax (or user fee) and an end to fossil fuel subsidies

Questions You Can Ask

How will you and your party

1. strengthen Canadian rules against tax evasion and continue supporting progressive taxation?
2. begin international negotiations toward a tax on financial transactions and the financial transparency that would allow closure of tax havens and implementation of a global tax on wealth?
3. reform Canadian tax laws so that accumulated wealth may be taxed and inequality reduced?

Sources

World Council of Churches, *Economy of Life, An Invitation to Theological Reflection and Action*,

www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/economy-of-life-an-invitation-to-theological-reflection-and-action, Nov. 2014.

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Food Justice: A New Seed Act for Farmers

Many of Jesus' parables used seeds as a metaphor for the miracle of God's creation. Seeds are holy, sacred, because each seed is filled with awe, hope, promise, and trust. In our modern world, seeds are the very basis of our food systems, whether they are local or global in scope. Without seeds, food systems everywhere would collapse. Given the essential importance of seeds, it makes sense to regard them as part of the global commons. Yet seeds are being privatized and varieties of seeds controlled at an alarming rate. At present, more than 50% of the global commercial market for seeds is controlled by only three companies, Monsanto, DuPont, and Syngenta. These companies are given an added advantage in promoting their seeds through bilateral free trade agreements and other international conventions.

Because of the ratification by many countries of the latest version of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, known as UPOV'91, farmers' realization of their ancestral rights to preserve, use, and exchange their seeds have in some cases become illegal acts, punishable by law. The danger of criminalization in Canada increased in February 2015 with the passage into law of Bill C-18, a component of which involved amendments to Canada's current Seed Act. The new Act gives seed breeders—large multinational companies—"massive new rights over seed along with the power to extract vast amounts of money from farmers," says Ann Slater, an Ontario farmer and United Church member.

More concentrated control of seeds is also diminishing the Earth's biodiversity. Almost 75% of crop varieties have disappeared. Crop genetic diversity is vanishing at a rate of about 2% each year. In North America, 90% of fruit and vegetable varieties disappeared over the past century. Farmers have a shrinking choice of seed varieties available to them, creating a less stable food supply for us all.

In 2002 Canada ratified the United Nations International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. As a signatory to this treaty, Canada

- agrees not to limit any rights that farmers have to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seed/propagating material, subject to national law and as appropriate.
- recognizes the major contribution that Indigenous communities and farmers globally have made for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources. These resources constitute the basis of food and agriculture production throughout the world.

Canada should live up to its responsibilities under this UN treaty. The United Church of Canada, National Farmers Union (NFU), Food Secure Canada, and other Canadian groups are calling on the Canadian government to develop a new Seed Act for Farmers. With a new Farmers Seed Act, Canada would recognize the inherent rights of farmers to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds. The Act would ensure that control of seed, the foundation of food sovereignty, stays in the hands of farmers.

Questions You Can Ask

1. Do you and your party consider seeds to be part of the global commons? Why or why not?
2. As a signatory to the United Nations International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Canada agrees not to limit farmers' customary rights to save, use, exchange, and sell the seeds they grow. Yet, with the passage of Bill C-18, these rights were effectively eroded. What will you and your party do to ensure that farmers get back their rights to save, reuse, exchange, and sell the seeds they produce?
3. What steps will you and your party take to stop the loss of crop varieties and crop genetic diversity?

Sources

GM Watch, "The World's Top 10 Seed Companies: Who Owns Nature?," www.gmwatch.org/gm-firms/10558-the-worlds-top-ten-seed-companies-who-owns-nature.

National Farmers Union, "Fundamental Principles of a Farmers Seed Act," www.nfu.ca/story/fundamental-principles-farmers-seed-act.

Food Justice: Providing a Healthy School Food Program

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink....”
(Matthew 25:35)

According to Food Secure Canada (FSC), a United Church partner, 1/3 of students in Canada’s elementary schools and 2/3 in secondary schools do not eat breakfast before school, leaving them at risk for learning, behavioural, and health challenges. Food insecurity among Canada’s children is an urgent public health challenge, affecting 1.15 million—or one in six—children under age 18. Astonishingly, Canada is the only G8 country without a nationally funded school meal program.

Canada’s current school food programming reaches only a small percentage of its over five million students—a situation that creates many problems, including the following:

- Only about 1/3 of children between the ages of 4 and 13 eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily.
- The prevalence of diabetes and obesity is at an all-time high, particularly among Indigenous peoples, for whom it is higher than in the rest of the population.
- About 1/4 of children’s calorie intakes is from food products not recommended in Canada’s Food Guide.
- Not all populations are affected the same: two in three Inuit children experience food insecurity.

According to research undertaken by FSC, school food programs have been linked with positive impacts in children’s mental health, including reductions in behavioural and emotional problems, bullying, aggression, anxiety, and depression. Children who eat a morning meal are sick less often and do significantly better in terms of co-operation, discipline, and interpersonal relations. When children attend school hungry or undernourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, and concentration are all negatively affected. They are also more likely to repeat a grade.

Also according to FSC, “Supporting a Universal School Food Program reduces the financial burden on our health care system by reducing the risk of diet-related chronic disease and mental illness, which are some of the most costly and long-term health problems to treat.” Also, such a program “has the potential to create thousands of new jobs in communities in Canada.” Many leaders and experts have called for a Universal School Food Program in Canada. They include the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the former Chief Public Health Officer for Canada.

FSC first called for a Universal School Food Program in its 2012 document, “A People’s Food Policy for Canada.” Such a policy would be founded on the concept and principles of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is an internationally recognized approach where food is acknowledged as the primary foundation on which healthy lives, communities, economies, and eco-systems rest. The United Church approved policy in support of food sovereignty in 2012. Canada needs a universal school food program.

Questions You Can Ask

1. Why is Canada the only G8 country without a nationally funded school meal program?
2. What will you and your party do to create a Universal School Food Program for Canada’s children?

Source

Food Secure Canada, “For a Universal Healthy School Food Program,” <http://foodsecurecanada.org/CHSF2015>.

Gender Identity: Moving Toward Full Inclusion

“I came that they have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10b)

Over the past several years, provinces have taken steps to update and amend their human rights codes to reflect a deeper understanding of gender expression and gender identity. While the current Canadian Human Rights Act recognizes “sex” as a category for discrimination, this category has not been successful in establishing sufficient protection for people who are transgender, that is, who identify as a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth.

Bill C-279 is a private member’s bill that was introduced on October 16, 2013. It seeks to address the issues of discrimination based on gender identity on a federal level. Bill C-279 seeks to promote the rights of transgender people in two ways:

- amending the current Canadian Human Rights Act to include “gender identity”
- amending the Criminal Code so that acts of transphobia and transmisogyny may be recognized as hate crimes

Bill C-279 has been passed in the House of Commons and only very recently was addressed by the Senate. On February 26, 2015, the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs proposed an amendment to the bill that upholds the practice of using “sex” rather than “gender identity” as the determining factor in whether or not an individual may access a space such as a crisis centre, shelter, washrooms, and change rooms. In essence, this amendment gives legal precedence for the exclusion of transgender women from women’s spaces, or transgender men from men’s spaces.

Questions You Can Ask

1. The recent amendments to Bill C-279 have left many transgender people in a very vulnerable position, including the possibility of being denied access to public washrooms and facilities that reflect their gender identity. What steps will you and your party take to address the barriers for transgender people created by the newly amended Bill C-279?
2. Given the recent setbacks in the efficacy of Bill C-279 in protecting the rights of transgender people, what steps will you and your party take to ensure the dignity of all transgender people is respected?

Health Care: Toward Health and Wholeness for All

The ability to provide health care to all people regardless of their income, age, or location is a deeply held Canadian moral value. The gospel calls us to seek health and wholeness for all God's people as part of Christ's ministry. Health care is at a critical juncture in this country.

By not renewing the Health Accord in 2014, the federal government lost its ability to tie national standards to federal transfer dollars. As a result, the quantity and quality of health care services will vary across Canada. Some people will be left with fewer services and substandard care, because future federal health transfers to provinces and territories will likely be diminished substantially, owing to new federal funding formulas. Beginning in 2017, the annual percentage growth rate in federal health transfers will be reduced. This could cut the federal health transfer by up to \$36 billion over a 10-year period (2017–2027).

The 2014 federal budget replaced a needs-based formula with a per capita funding formula for health care. This will reduce federal equalization transfers to the provinces and territories by \$3.5 billion this year and by \$16.5 billion over the next 5 years. These cuts will make good planning almost impossible.

The federal government will now decrease its contribution to the total costs of medicare from 20% to under 12%—a historic low. This unilateral change will hit poorer provinces hardest. Because the new funding formulas are tied to economic growth, in hard times, when health needs increase and provincial capacity to meet those needs is weakest, the government's contribution will decline. Taken together this is a formula for fragmentation and inequity. Also consider these issues:

- One in 10 Canadians can't afford to have prescriptions filled. The expiry of the Health Accord has also meant the loss of an opportunity to expand public health care into new areas like medicines (pharmacare) and continuing care (palliative, home, long-term, and hospice).
- Many Canadians are not currently receiving health care when they need it. This is especially true for seniors, who often receive substandard care. The federal share of health care spending will drop dramatically at the very time Canada's population is aging. This will place enormous financial strain on provincial and territorial governments

We advocate that the federal government

- implement national standards based upon federal sharing of 25% of health care costs
- establish a national aging strategy and public home care system

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party ensure that the federal government contributes 25% of the cost for health care in Canada?
2. How will you and your party implement a national aging strategy to ensure a cohesive continuum of care (home, long-term, palliative, and hospice) in Canada?
3. Canada remains the only country with a universal health care system that doesn't include medicines. One in 10 Canadians cannot afford their prescription drugs. How will you and your party develop and implement a universal pharmacare program?

Source

Canadian Health Coalition, "Speaking of Misinformation about Federal Health Transfers..." <http://healthcoalition.ca/main/issues/federal-health-transfers-myths-and-facts/>.

International Development: We Can Do Better

In February, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) launched its “We Can Do Better” campaign. CCIC is calling for greater leadership from Canada in tackling global issues in 2015, and specific action on inequality, climate change, and women’s rights.

- “Inequality has grown to extreme levels globally and is seriously hindering our ability to eradicate poverty,” said Denise Byrnes, Executive Director of Oxfam Quebec. By the end of 2016, 85 rich people globally will control as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity. “It’s an alarming gap that impedes growth and hurts everyone, in particular the poor,” said Byrnes.
- Climate change also threatens sustainable development. “We’ve witnessed, in our work with small-scale farmers in developing countries, that climate change and environmental degradation have a tremendous impact on the most vulnerable,” said Jim Cornelius of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.
- Inequality and climate change disproportionately affect women. Women represent 70% of the world’s poor and are often relegated to low-paying jobs in precarious working conditions. “Promoting women’s rights is essential to the health of families, communities, and economies, and our work with local groups confirms that over and over again,” said Kathryn Dingle from Inter Pares. “For meaningful change, we need to support women’s rights and leadership.”

Development practitioners (including churches) have a role to play alongside other agencies and governments. Yet groups like KAIROS have had their funding cut, and others find themselves unable to present new proposals to the Department of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Development. And while we press for action on inequality, climate change, and women’s rights, we must do so while pointing to the connections between poverty and the rules that align the global economy with the interests of the rich. What Naomi Klein calls the “growth imperative” stifles creativity and blocks attempts to make the changes that are necessary to reduce use of carbon-based energy.

Canada is also failing to meet the international target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) for Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2013, we reached only 0.27%: 14 countries now spend more on foreign aid. The 40th General Council of The United Church of Canada (Kelowna, 2009) urged “our national government to immediately increase its Official Development Assistance, and to publicly commit to a firm timetable for meeting the 0.7% goal by 2015.” This call has been repeatedly voiced by many non-governmental and faith-based organizations. Despite promises by leaders of various political parties to increase ODA and commit to timelines, movement in this direction is inconsistent.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party support the use of international development funds and other actions to end inequality, reduce the impact of climate change, and protect the rights of women?
2. How will you and your party work toward a more just global financial system and support measures to overcome global inequality?
3. How will you and your party commit to increasing aid, or Official Development Assistance, expenditures to meet the UN target of 0.7% of the Gross National Income? By what date will you commit to meeting this goal?
4. Canada has strong legislation, the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. It states that ODA must a) contribute to poverty reduction; b) take account of the perspectives of the poor; and c) be consistent with international human rights standards. How do you and your party propose to ensure that the ODA Accountability Act is rigorously implemented?

Source

Quotes are drawn from Canadian Council for International Co-operation, “We Can Do Better 2015 Campaign Launched Today,” news release, www.ccic.ca/files/en/media/2015_02_05_News_Release_Do_Better.pdf, Feb. 5, 2015.

Migrant Justice: Ending Exploitation

“Migration” is a global phenomenon. For various reasons people choose or are forced to leave their countries of origin and, in United Nations vernacular, “migrate” to other countries. More than 200 million people are living as migrants in the world today.

Matthew 25:35 reads, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Historically, Canada has welcomed many strangers, or migrants, to its shores. Its per capita immigration rate is among the highest in the world. With the exception of Indigenous peoples, all people living in Canada are, in effect, migrants or are the direct descendants of migrants.

People migrate to Canada for various reasons, and some enjoy a high degree of freedom and privilege. Others are quite vulnerable. Migrants who are seasonal agricultural workers, live-in caregivers, or non-status persons often experience limited protection of their rights and endure precarious living conditions. According to United Church partner [KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives](#), “what these three groups all share is a common experience of wage exploitation, privacy violations, inferior housing conditions, limited access to services, and barriers to family reunification. Abuse and exploitation is linked in each case to temporary or uncertain status in Canada.”

Seasonal agricultural farm workers leave their home countries annually and travel to Canada. Many receive very low wages and work in substandard conditions. While they pay into Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan, they cannot access these benefits. Also, they can be deported or removed from the program at any time, particularly if they complain about working conditions. Furthermore, they can work in Canada for many years and never receive permanent residency.

Live-in caregivers, according to the Canadian government, are “individuals who are qualified to provide care for children, elderly persons or persons with disabilities in private homes without supervision.” Standards for their working conditions are the responsibility of the provinces. In some provinces domestic workers are excluded from minimum employment standards. Similar to seasonal agricultural workers, live-in caregivers are often reluctant to complain about their conditions, fearing dismissal or deportation.

Non-status migrants also are vulnerable. Once legally present, some can lose their status. KAIROS notes that “non-status persons legally present in Canada may include refugee claimants awaiting a decision on their claim and rejected refugee claimants who have not been asked to leave yet.”

In biblical times, God reminds people how to be in community together: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens” (Exodus 22:21). In Canada, however, there are still many vulnerable migrants who often work for minimal pay in exploitative conditions. Also, the majority are racialized peoples from the global South. They can be subject to racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Without legal rights, advocating for themselves can bring repercussions.

Questions You Can Ask

1. Canada is not a party to the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. What will you and your party do to ensure Canada signs and ratifies this treaty?
2. The Government of Canada recently made changes to the live-in caregiver program to “create two new pathways to permanent residence that will reduce workplace vulnerability and result in greater opportunities and higher wages for caregivers.” Seasonal agricultural workers currently do not have such recourse. How will you and your party work to create a path to permanent residency for all eligible migrant workers?
3. Temporary migrant workers cannot adequately access community support agencies. What will you and your party do to ensure funding so they can gain full access to these agencies and the services they offer?

Mining Justice: Help Make Canada Open for Justice

In 2013 over 50%, or 1,500, of the world's publicly listed exploration and mining companies were based in Canada. These companies had an interest in some 8,000 properties in over 100 countries around the world.¹ United Church partners in the global South, and many global social movements, continue to express concern about the impact of mining activities on communities and the environment. Rural communities, Indigenous peoples, workers, and others report negative impacts. They include

- environmental harms including concerns about pollution of air, water, and soil
- forcible displacement—whether planned and managed directly by the company, caused by environmental destruction, or out of the need to seek other forms of livelihood
- loss of smallholder farmlands and loss of Indigenous people's rights to traditional land
- community breakdown and social division; violence and criminalization of social protest²

As people of faith we believe that Earth is a gift of God to love and care for, rather than merely a depot of resources to be exploited for our own benefit. Seeking to live in right relation with others, we support the right of people to participate in decisions affecting their lives. We expect public and private institutions to be held accountable for the social and environmental consequences of their activities. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has urged states to adopt “measures to prevent the...human rights violations that can result from...development projects, both in countries in which the projects are located as well as in the corporations' home countries, such as Canada.”³ As a supporter of the Open for Justice campaign and the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability, the United Church

- advocates for the federal government to hold Canadian companies accountable when they are complicit in human rights or environmental abuses abroad
- believes that those who are harmed by the activities of Canadian oil, gas and mining companies should have recourse to justice here in Canada

The following measures are also needed:

- a. An extractive-sector ombudsperson in Canada, with the authority to receive complaints and undertake independent investigations to determine if a company has acted inappropriately and, if so, to make recommendations to the company and to the Canadian government for remedial action. The ombudsperson should make their findings public and should be able to recommend the suspension or cessation of political, financial and diplomatic support by the Government of Canada. The ombudsperson needs to perform these functions regardless of a company's willingness to participate.
- b. Access to Canadian courts for people who have been seriously harmed by the international operations of Canadian companies. Canadian courts have been reluctant to hear cases brought forward by foreign plaintiffs, denying them access to justice in Canada. The federal government, working closely with provincial counterparts, should allow non-Canadians who are affected by the overseas operations of Canadian extractive companies to bring civil lawsuits before Canadian courts.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party support the creation of an independent extractive-sector ombudsperson to investigate complaints of human rights and environmental abuses by Canadian companies operating internationally?
2. How will you and your party help people who have been harmed by the international operations of Canadian companies to seek justice in Canada by providing access to Canadian courts?

¹ Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, “Canada's Enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility to Strengthen Canada's Extractive Sector Abroad,” www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/topics-domaines/other-autre/csr-strat-rse.aspx?lang=eng.

² Working Group on Mining and Human Rights in Latin American, *The Impact of Canadian Mining in Latin American and Canada's Responsibility: Executive Summary of the Report Submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_canadian_mining_executive_summary.pdf.

³ Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “IACHR Wraps Up Its 153rd Session,” press release, www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2014/131.asp, Nov. 7, 2014.

Peace: Seeking Just Peace in Palestine and Israel

Hopes for a lasting and just peace for Palestine and Israel are in danger of being lost. Scripture warns of those saying, “‘Peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10). Peace processes have failed, the occupation of Palestinian territories has intensified, violence and extremism continue. In 2013 the building of an unprecedented number of illegal settler homes was approved in occupied Palestinian territory.¹ The people in Gaza have experienced three wars in seven years. Rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel continued with increasing reach. In 2014, children in Palestine and Israel paid a particularly high price for the lack of just peace:

- at least 544 children were killed in 2014: 540 Palestinian, 4 Israeli²
- Human Rights Watch reported that in 2014, at least 2,168 Palestinians and 6 Israelis were killed³

Militarism, economic greed, and impunity combine with religiously sanctioned extremism to further destabilize the Middle East. This is clear with the emergence of ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Concerns about ISIL appear to supersede the urgent need to end the occupation, decreasing hopes for a just peace and a viable Palestinian state. Palestinians are faced with increasing violence by settlers, home demolitions, and greater difficulty in accessing holy sites (a problem for both Christians and Muslims). The situation has not deteriorated equally for Palestinians and Israelis. United Church partners remain convinced that ending the occupation is an essential step toward achieving peace and healing in the Middle East.

United Nations resolutions require that Israel end its 48-year occupation of Palestinian territories and dismantle all settlements in the occupied territories. Canada should play a constructive role in promoting a negotiated, just peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that ensures respect for human rights and international law, addresses the security concerns of both the State of Israel and the future Palestinian State, and supports the economic viability of a Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

However, Canada is failing to live up to its obligations to uphold respect for international law in the case of Palestine and Israel. Canada also rejects non-violent efforts to end the occupation through its use of international legal mechanisms,⁴ including voting against the UN General Assembly resolution granting the Palestinians non-member observer status in November 2012. During the 2014 attack on Gaza, Canada demonstrated a double standard. It uncritically supported Israeli government acts of violence against civilians, while simultaneously censuring the Palestinian government for acts of violence against civilians. Like other nations and groups, the Palestinians have a right to self-determination and to secure that right through all legal international mechanisms. Canada has supported that right for the South Sudanese and many other groups. Canada should support the same right for Palestinians.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party continue to support United Nations resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which are based on established international humanitarian law, in order to secure a just resolution to the conflict?
2. How will you and your party live up to Canada’s obligations to uphold international humanitarian law by condemning acts of violence against civilians by both sides?
3. How will you and your party play an even-handed, constructive role in promoting a negotiated, just peace agreement between Israel and Palestine by bringing all parties concerned to the table?

¹ “West Bank Construction up 130% in 2013,” *The Times of Israel*, www.timesofisrael.com/west-bank-construction-up-130-in-2013, Nov. 28, 2013.

² If Americans Knew, www.ifamericansknew.org/stat/children.html.

³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2015: Events of 2014*, www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/wr2015_web.pdf, pp. 308–318.

⁴ Mike Blanchfield, “Canada’s Opposition to United Nations’ Involvement Appalling, Says Envoy,” Canadian Press, Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/02/16/canada-palestinian-united-nations_n_6690662.html, Feb. 16, 2015.

Peace in the Middle East: Aid and Dialogue Instead of War

Peace is at the heart of the gospel. Jesus prayed for peacemakers, assuring us that they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). The United Church of Canada believes that “peace and peace-making are central to the life of Christians,”¹ and has worked with ecumenical and global partners for just and lasting peace in many places around the world.

Concerns for peace in the Middle East in particular have grown in recent years. Conflicts such as those in Syria and Iraq have drawn in and severely impacted neighbouring countries. These conflicts also have global effects and implications, including in Canada. For over two decades, Canadian churches have strongly supported non-violent approaches to peace-making in the search for a just peace to conflicts in the Middle East, questioning the objectives and long-term impacts of military approaches that have characterized recent interventions. In addition to supporting humanitarian relief and refugee sponsorship, the United Church

- supported non-violent actions to end the occupation of Palestinian territories in support of a just peace in Palestine and Israel
- joined other Canadian churches raising concerns about Canada’s military involvement in response to the rise of the Islamic State (IS or ISIL or ISIS)
- supported Canada’s decision not to participate in the 2003 military invasion and occupation of Iraq

The United Church and its partners in the Middle East have condemned the brutal violence of religious extremists engaged in killing, destruction of homes and livelihoods, and displacement of thousands of people. Regional Mission and Service partners have expressed concerns that military interventions by the international coalition are also killing innocent people, displacing many people, and destroying vital infrastructure. Furthermore, Middle East Christians—who are among the vulnerable communities targeted by extremists—tell us that political solutions are needed to resolve the issues underlying the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. In their experience (e.g., in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria), military action does not solve these underlying problems. Instead, it has often exacerbated violence and increased instability. It has also fostered more extremism when innocents are killed as “collateral damage.”

Canadian faith leaders have urged the federal government to

- increase its support for and contributions to humanitarian assistance, especially in countries that are hosting refugees
- increase support and expedite the resettlement process for refugees, especially from Syria and Iraq, seeking security in Canada
- increase non-military support for inclusive political processes that strengthen fundamental human rights in the Middle East to address underlying causes of conflict, and to promote the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights, in particular the rights of women and vulnerable groups.

Questions You Can Ask

How will you and your party

1. increase Canada’s support for humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflict in the Middle East?
2. increase support to refugees from Syria and Iraq, and expedite processes for resettlement in Canada?
3. support non-violent political processes to address conflicts in the Middle East?

¹ The United Church of Canada, “Statement on Disarmament and Militarization,” 29th General Council, Montreal, Quebec, *Record of Proceedings 1982*, pp. 86, 275–83.

Poverty: Help End Child Poverty in Canada

Children are not an isolated group, and poverty is not an isolated issue. Child poverty needs to be addressed through an approach that supports the whole family. The gospels tell us that Jesus valued children and their place in the community. However, still today, children are among the most vulnerable people in our society.

- Recent statistics indicate that one in seven children in Canada lives in poverty.¹
- When it comes to child poverty, Canada ranks 24th of 35 industrialized countries.
- At a higher risk for poverty are children of immigrants, of a lone woman parent, of racialized families,² of Aboriginal identity, and those with a disability.
- Regulated child care in Canada is currently characterized by high fees, low staff wages, mediocre quality, and unmet demand.

Across the country and across our church, the effects of poverty are plain to see: food banks continue to proliferate; homeless people beg on our city streets; out-of-the-cold programs are overflowing; many Indigenous people live in conditions unimaginable for a wealthy nation like ours. As Christians, we believe that all people have the right to be treated with justice, love, and respect.

Children, especially, are the most vulnerable in our society and yet hold the most promise as future citizens, workers, and family members. As a resource-rich nation, Canada has an obligation to care for all people, ensuring that basic needs are met.

The United Church urges the federal government to

- a. develop a national strategy to end child poverty, with measurable and attainable goals
- b. raise the maximum federal child tax benefit (including the supplement for low-income families) to \$5,600 per child for low-income families (50% higher than current levels)
- c. increase child welfare support given to Indigenous people to balance that given to others
- d. initiate and invest in an affordable, accessible, quality child care system as a way to support low-income families.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will you and your party work to establish an overall strategy to reduce child poverty, with measurable and attainable goals?
2. Is your party prepared to raise the maximum federal child tax benefit (including the supplement for low-income families) to \$5,600 per child for low-income families (50 percent higher than current levels)?
3. Will you and your party increase child welfare support given to Indigenous people to balance that given to others?
4. What are your party's plans to initiate and invest in an affordable, accessible, quality child care system as a way to support low-income families?

¹ Campaign 2000, Family Service Toronto, *Canada's Real Economic Action Plan begins with Poverty Eradication*, 2013 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada.

² "Racialized people is a term used to indicate that race is socially constructed rather than an inherent physical identity that one is born with. It also draws attention to the fact that in racist systems, people seen as White are often regarded as 'neutral' or having no 'markings' of race. The term refers to people who are viewed as different from the status quo or unequal." (*Ending Racial Harassment*, The United Church of Canada, 2008, p. 5)

Refugees and Immigration: Welcoming the Stranger

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

Except for Indigenous peoples, Canada is a country of strangers/immigrants, or those who are descended from them. As Christians we are called to welcome the stranger. Recent changes in three areas of federal refugee and immigration policy severely limit the kind of hospitality Canadians can offer to those most vulnerable in our world.

- cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
- a policy shift promoting temporary rather than permanent migration
- narrow family reunification policies

On June 30, 2012, the federal government implemented cuts to its Interim Federal Health Program, claiming that the cuts will save taxpayers money. This program covers basic health care for refugees, refugee claimants, and other non-citizens. In July 2014, the Federal Court struck down the cuts to the IFHP as unconstitutional. The government appealed the decision and extended coverage for only some groups. Most sponsored refugees are no longer covered for supplementary health benefits and the burden has been transferred to the sponsors.

Canada has also made a policy shift to promote temporary, rather than permanent, migration. This means that Canada is bringing in more and more workers on a temporary basis only. These workers have fewer rights, limited access to services, and—in all provinces but one—no access to settlement services. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, since there is no mandatory monitoring to ensure their rights are protected. Many are economically exploited, charged illegal recruitment fees, or paid lower wages than permanent residents or citizens. They are also subject to visa conditions that often make them dependent on their employers for such things as housing, access to health care, and access to basic information about their rights. Some workers who come to Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program even become victims of human trafficking.

Refugee and immigrant families are frequently separated for prolonged periods of time or indefinitely, due to policies and practices that block or delay reunification. The barriers include a narrow definition of family (excluding, for example, non-biological children), costly and time-consuming DNA testing, restrictions on sponsorship if the sponsor is receiving social assistance, a category of “excluded family members,” and administrative delays. Refugees are among those hardest hit. People who flee persecution and seek asylum in Canada are often prevented from bringing their spouse and/or children. Once recognized as refugees in Canada, they can apply to bring to Canada their immediate family. However, sometimes they are forced to wait years to be reunited with their spouses and children, who themselves can be living in situations of danger and persecution.

Questions You Can Ask

1. How will your party restore basic health care benefits for refugees?
2. How will you and your party prevent the exploitation of temporary foreign workers in Canada?
3. How will you and your party facilitate a more efficient and timely system for family reunification?

Trade and Investment Rules: Let's Protect People and the Environment

Since Canada's first Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States came into effect on January 1, 1989, Canadians have learned more about the unexpected consequences of trade deals. Trade is important to the Canadian economy to the extent that it creates jobs, enriches communities, respects democracy, and preserves our shared natural environment. But FTAs signed by Canada and other countries over the past 35 years have undermined governments' ability to maintain the environment, protect water as a public trust, or guarantee access to medicines. Trade agreements trump local and national laws, environmental protection, human rights, and the provisions of other international agreements, including those on climate.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA, a United Church advocacy partner) says that the investor-protection provision in the North American Free Trade Agreement has made Canada the most frequently sued country in trade tribunals. A majority of the disputes involve corporations challenging our environmental laws. Meanwhile, tiny El Salvador is the object of a \$300-million suit by a mining company over the government's decision to ban open-pit mining as a way to protect scarce water resources.

Since the last federal election in May 2011, Canada has brought five free trade agreements into force: South Korea, Honduras, Panama, Jordan, and Colombia. Talks are ongoing with the European Union, the CARICOM group of nations in the Caribbean, six individual countries (Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Morocco, Singapore, and Ukraine), and toward a Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Meanwhile, Canada concluded a 31-year Foreign Investment Protection Agreement (FIPA) with China, as well as other FIPAs with Benin, the Czech Republic, Jordan, Kuwait, Latvia, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Tanzania. Other FIPA processes are underway with another 25 countries.

As people of faith, we have a vision motivated by the economy of God, an economy of life and abundance that promotes global solidarity, human dignity, and care for the integrity of creation. At various moments in recent decades, The United Church of Canada has expressed concerns about trade negotiations. Through participation in coalitions like KAIROS and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, we have also advocated for the principles of just trade with the World Trade Organization and other global bodies. As pointed out by KAIROS, Canada's approach to trade continues to rely on global rules that facilitate liberalization and promote increased economic growth as a means for poverty eradication. United Church partners such as the Council of Latin American Churches and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) say that this approach has increased the concentration of wealth instead of promoting sustainable development for all.

Questions You Can Ask

1. In trade negotiations, how will you and your party work to protect the sovereign power of countries to protect their own citizens?
2. How will you and your party press for renegotiation of the investor-protection chapters of trade agreements, and press to exclude investor-protection from future trade agreements?
3. How will you and your party call for protection of human rights ahead of trade deals, and for a new approach to trade that improves the condition of those affected by violence or living in poverty?

Sources

CCPA data: Scott Sinclair, "NAFTA Chapter 11 Investor-State Disputes to January 1, 2015," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/nafta-chapter-11-investor-state-disputes-january-1-2015, Jan. 14, 2015.

Data on FTAs and FIPAs: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, "Canada's Free Trade Agreements," www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/fta-ale.aspx?lang=eng.

Recommended Websites

Information on justice issues can be found on the United Church website (www.united-church.ca) or your Conference website (see www.united-church.ca/contact/conferences). For further information regarding social justice issues and the federal election, explore the websites below. (Note that information on the websites below cannot be cited as United Church policy.)

Ecumenical Partners

KAIROS (www.kairoscanada.org) unites churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). KAIROS deliberates on issues of common concern, advocates for social change, and joins with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation.

Project Ploughshares (www.ploughshares.ca) is a project of the Canadian Council of Churches to carry out the practical application of biblical teachings concerning peace, justice, reconciliation, and non-violence as a witness to the reconciling power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Civil Society Organizations

Campaign 2000 (www.campaign2000.ca) is a cross-Canada public education movement to build support for the 1989 all party House of Commons resolution that pledged to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

Canada Without Poverty (www.cwp-csp.ca) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan, member-based organization dedicated to the eradication of poverty.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (www.policyalternatives.ca), Ottawa, offers an alternative to the message that citizens have no choice about the policies that affect them, and promotes research on social/economic justice.

Canadian Council for International Co-operation (www.ccic.ca) is a coalition of Canadian voluntary sector organizations working globally for sustainable human development. The council seeks to end global poverty, and to promote social justice and human dignity for all. See their current “We Can Do Better” campaign.

Canadian Council for Refugees (www.ccrweb.ca) is a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada.

Canadians for Tax Fairness (www.taxfairness.ca) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization advocating for fair and progressive tax policies aimed at building a strong and sustainable economy, reducing inequalities, and funding quality public services.

Canadian Health Coalition (www.healthcoalition.ca) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting and expanding Canada’s public health system for the benefit of all Canadians.

Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (<http://cnca-rcrce.ca>) (CNCA) brings together environmental and human rights NGOs, faith groups, labour unions, and research and solidarity groups across Canada who are advocating for federal legislation to establish mandatory corporate accountability standards for Canadian extractive companies operating abroad, especially in developing countries.

Canadian Youth Climate Coalition (www.ourclimate.ca) is a non-partisan coalition seeking immediate and meaningful action on climate change by governmental and private sector leaders.

Church Council on Justice and Corrections (www.ccjc.ca) is a national faith-based coalition seeking to foster healthier communities and crime prevention through social responsibility.

Citizens for Public Justice (www.cpj.ca) is an organization made up of over 1,500 justice-oriented Christians along with dozens of local churches, religious orders, and others to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key policy debate through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. Its main focus is the Dignity for All campaign, which the United Church and many members have endorsed.

Climate Action Network Canada (www.climateactionnetwork.ca) (CAN Canada) / Réseau action climat Canada (RAC Canada) is composed of member organizations committed to preventing dangerous levels of human interference with the global climate system, protecting environmental sustainability and public health, while upholding principles of just transition, equity and social justice. The United Church of Canada is a member.

Common Frontiers (www.commonfrontiers.ca) is a multi-sectoral working group that proposes an alternative to the social, environmental, and economic effects of economic integration in the Americas.

Faith and the Common Good (www.faith-commongood.net) is an interfaith and intercultural organization that affirms common values of justice, peace, participation, human rights, ecological inter-relationship, and compassion as cornerstones of a healthy society.

Food Secure Canada (<http://foodsecurecanada.org>) is a pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.

Green Communities Canada (www.gca.ca) is a national network of community-based non-profit organizations that deliver innovative environmental program and services, with a focus on household and community action.

Voices-Voix (<http://voices-voix.ca>) is a non-partisan coalition of organizations and individuals defending democracy, free speech, and transparency in Canada.

Political Parties

Bloc Québécois (www.blocquebecois.org)

Conservative Party of Canada (www.conservative.ca)

Green Party of Canada (www.greenparty.ca)

Liberal Party of Canada (www.liberal.ca)

New Democratic Party of Canada (www.ndp.ca)

Elections Canada (www.elections.ca)

Using the Media

A Helpful Ally

Using the media can be helpful in raising public awareness on social justice issues. A well-written story can gain community support and engage candidates in dialogue; a well-timed story can have a significant impact on a political campaign. If your group intends to contact local media or issue a media release, please remember these points:

- Consult the United Church Election Kit and the websites of your Conference and the General Council regarding the information you want to send to the media. In any campaign, it is important to maintain consistency about what is being said, to which media, and by whom.
- Please remember that you can only speak on behalf of your own group (committee, congregation, presbytery, Conference), not for the United Church as a whole.
- Timing of a news release is important. Your local paper may publish only once a week: make sure your release gets there in plenty of time for follow-up before their deadline.
- Always provide a name and phone/fax/e-mail details of a member of your group that the media can contact to discuss your release.
- If you are focusing on radio programs, check the names of the shows' producers and telephone ahead to let them know you are sending a release—they may wish to do an on-air interview on the subject matter. The names of local radio outlets, as well as contact information and staff positions, can be found online and in the reference section of your local library.
- Check websites for specific guidelines for submitting letters to local papers and media outlets.

Using Talkback Radio

The biggest daytime radio audiences are for talkback radio. On such shows, you'll only be given a short time to talk, so plan your points and expect to make only a few. Remember these tips:

- Talk to one person at a time. Of course, more than one person is listening, but each is an individual. Just imagine yourself talking to one person—not the whole of Canada.
- To prevent interference from your radio, turn your own radio off before you go on. When you can hear the program through the phone—and that will be well before you go to air—switch your own radio off. You'll hear callers through your phone, so you won't miss out on anything.
- Radio can be anonymous—one of its problems, as scurrilous things can be said, but useful if you're a reluctant speaker.

Letters to the Editor

The most well-read part of any newspaper or media website is the letters section, and politicians use it to gauge support for issues. A letter to the editor is a good way to raise an issue and engage in public debate. Some key points for getting a letter to the editor published:

- Keep your letter short and simple (no more than 200 words).
- Relate it to a previous story, letter, editorial, or feature that the paper publishes (make imaginative links if necessary).
- Plan your first sentence carefully—if it is dull the editor may read no further; if it's catchy you're in with a chance.
- A simple letter pattern could be to state
 - what you support or disagree with
 - what evidence or examples you can offer to support your view
 - what can be done about it
- If you're sending your letter by e-mail, the contents must be sent in the body of the e-mail. Send the message as plain text only. You may also send submissions in by fax.

- Make sure you sign your letter, and include your name, address, and phone number so the editor can verify it. Generally only one letter in 10 gets published. If yours doesn't make it the first time, don't give up. Keep writing and eventually you may end up in print.

Social Media

There are many forms of social media. All are socially interactive platforms on the Internet that allow for the production and dissemination of user-generated content. Some popular forms of social media include [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), blogging platforms (e.g., [Blogger](#) and [Tumblr](#)), photo-sharing platforms (e.g., [Flickr](#), [Imgur](#), and [Instagram](#)), and video-sharing platforms (e.g., [YouTube](#)).

Social media guidelines

1. Be respectful. Conversations should always be encouraging and kind.
2. Be on-topic and engaging. Share information about key election issues, not just the personalities involved.
3. Be visual. The more visual media you share (i.e., photos and videos), the more attention your content will get.
4. Be up to date. If social media is going to be a key part of your election efforts, start early and post often.

Ideas for using Facebook

- Use Facebook events to invite people to your election-related events and track RSVPs.
- Create a Facebook page about the election and invite members of your faith community to “like” the page. Use the page to share election information and encourage dialogue in your faith community.
- Share information about the election by posting it to your Facebook wall to be seen by your friends.

Ideas for using blogging platforms

- Create a federal election blog.
- Post to the blog regularly during the election about issues that are important to your community.
- Invite members of your faith community to become authors and share the work of creating content:
 - Did someone go to an all candidates meeting who is willing to write a review?
 - Is a person in your faith community an expert on a particular election issue? Will they agree to author a post about it?

Ideas for using photo and video-sharing platforms

- If you attend an election event, check if the organizers will allow you to use your smart phone to take pictures or video.
- Use a photo-sharing platform to organize and share your photos, creating a centralized place where members of your faith community can view them.
- Create a YouTube channel for your faith community, and post any election-related videos you have created there.

- Perhaps you could create short videos of members of your faith community discussing election issues that matter to them?
- Share links to these videos with your followers on Facebook and Twitter, and tweet the links to local and national candidates.

Ideas for using Twitter

- Ensure you are following key individuals and organizations involved with the election on Twitter. Invite them to follow you. Invite members of your faith community to do the same.
- Use the @ symbol to credit an account in your Tweets, for example, “As @UCCan tweeted, please plan to vote this election day!”
- Click “retweet” (RT) to share another user’s post with your followers. When you RT, take time to add your own thoughts.
- Use “hashtags” (# symbol) to facilitate topic searches, for example, “We hope members of our #faith community plan to vote in #elxn42!” Twitter users can click a particular hashtag to see other similarly themed tweets.

Possible key hashtags for the 2015 federal election

#ptbloc Bloc Québécois
#canpoli or **#cdnpoli** Canadian politics
#cpc Conservative Party of Canada
#cv15 Canada votes 2015
#demreform Canadian democratic reform
#gpc Green Party of Canada
#idlenomore Idle No More movement
#lpc Liberal Party of Canada
#ndp New Democratic Party of Canada
#poli append this hashtag to another term to localize it, e.g. #niagpoli for the Niagara region
#youthvote used by Canadian youth to post about the election
#2getmyvote used to explain what parties and/or candidates must do to earn your vote

Provincial and territorial hashtags

#abpoli
#bcpoli
#mbpoli
#nbpoli
#nlpoli
#nspoli
#nunavut
#nwt
#onpoli
#peipoli
#polqc
#skpoli
#yukon

Social Justice in The United Church of Canada

The founders of The United Church of Canada believed that ours is a living faith, a faith that is expressed not only in ministry, but also in mission in and with the world.

Current Campaigns



The *Unsettling Goods: Choose Peace in Palestine and Israel* campaign includes resources for worship, study, and action; tools for economic action focused on settlement goods; and support for trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis.



The *Seeding Life* campaign builds on the food justice work already being done by many United Church congregations across Canada. It calls members of the church to help transform the dominant industrial global food system using the principles of food sovereignty.



Open for Justice campaign: Those who have been harmed by Canadian mining, oil, and gas operations overseas need to be able to seek justice in Canada. As a member of the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability (CNCA), the United Church is encouraging its members to contact their Members of Parliament and advocate for greater accountability and enforcement of rules for Canadian resource extraction companies.

Stay Informed!

[Take Actions](#), posted on the United Church website, invite you to take part in current campaigns, studies, appeals, and ongoing concerns in solidarity with our partners in Canada and around the globe. Consider subscribing to the Take Action [RSS Feed](#) for Take Action e-mail alerts.

Subscribe to the [United Action for Justice E-Newsletter](#), which highlights issues and resources related to justice, human rights, ecology, peace, global partnership, and ecumenical relations.

The United Church's justice work is featured on several forms of social media: [United Action for Justice Facebook](#), [Justice@UCC Twitter](#), videos on the United Church's [YouTube Channel](#), and photos of our ministries and partners on [Smugmug](#).