

Simple Text Version

## **Journey for Justice: Listen! Learn! Act!**

From the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto

### **Summer 2024 Issue**

“Out of deep respect for those who have cared for these lands since time immemorial, we are committed to tread lightly on the land, protect water as sacred, and affirm our desire for right relations with all Indigenous Peoples.”

- **From our CSJ Land Acknowledgement**

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## **Our Summer 2024 Issue**

This edition of *Journey for Justice* focuses on DIGNITY. The dignity of the person, the dignity of work, the dignity of migrants, and more.

Capitalism judges the worthiness of the world by giving everything a dollar value: clean water, pollution, and life itself. There is even an equation to determine the dollar value of trees based on how much shade and oxygen they provide.

With these formulas, certain kinds of life are given higher value than others. But the Catholic faith teaches that we all have an inherent dignity and are loved by the Creator simply because we exist, and this dignity cannot be reflected in a dollar value.

So sit back, grab a cup of your favourite beverage, and dive into our dignity edition.

**Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director**

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# Dignitas Infinita

by Leah Watkiss

On April 8, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith released the document *Dignitas Infinita* on human dignity.

Dignity of the person is at the core of Catholic Social Teaching, and the core of the work of this Ministry. Every human, no matter their situation, possesses an infinite and inalienable dignity that must be respected and protected.

This basic principle is intrinsically tied to others: the dignity of work, the common good, solidarity, peace, care for Creation, and more. One way this Ministry puts the dignity of the person at the centre of our work is through our anti-oppression framework.

Anti-oppressive practice recognizes that oppression exists in our world. It aims to mitigate these power dynamics, attempting eventually to equalize power. Our Ministry's anti-oppressive framework requires that we operate, as a team and in our partnerships and relationships, in a way that fundamentally upholds the dignity of those who might look different from ourselves or make different decisions than we would.

It demands that we put the lives and dignity of others ahead of our own systems and structures, even if it's inconvenient or it makes us uncomfortable.

Our feelings of discomfort is for us to sit with and work through, not an excuse to take rights and power away from those who may be marginalized or oppressed by dominant colonial systems and structures. Otherwise, we run the risk of reinforcing the paternalistic and dehumanizing cycles that enabled harms like the Indian Residential School System.

We're not perfect. We don't always get it right. But we continue the work with an open mind and heart, following the example Jesus set us.

Check out our [Do No Harm webinar series](#) to see this work in action.

This series examines anti-human trafficking work through an anti-oppressive lens, bringing forth voices of those who have been harmed by dominant anti-human trafficking narratives and measures to tell their truth and challenge the status quo of this work.

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# **Open Work Permits for Migrant Workers: The Fight Continues!**

**By Varka Kalaydzhieva**

Labour mobility is a right inherent to Canadian workers. While in the current neo-liberal context, workers' rights have eroded, the right to change employer continues to be upheld as a basic human right.

Not so for migrant workers in low-waged occupations in Canada. They are issued closed work permits, preventing them from easily changing employers, even in case of mistreatment. The Canadian government continues to defend this egregious immigration policy, denounced by many for creating conditions for rampant exploitation. The Honourable Marc Miller, Canada's Minister of Immigration wrote:

“Employer-specific work permits remain an important feature of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program and Canada's immigration system. Eliminating employer-specific work permits would represent a fundamental shift that could negatively impact the current labour migration system and would not necessarily reduce abuse and exploitation in the TFW Program.”

The Minister of Immigration continued:

“Even with Open Work Permits, those who are vulnerable could face challenges in leaving their employer, including limited skills and financial options, low official language abilities, and challenges finding affordable housing, among others.

“Removing the employer-specific work permit also risks making it more difficult to retain workers in certain occupations and industries, exacerbating labour shortages in many regions, including those that are more rural or remote in nature.”

You can [click here](#) to read the full message.

This was part of the official stance of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It was in response to the Open Work Permit Campaign Now petition (e-4138) calling for the abolishment of the closed work permits.

The response to the petition didn't surprise many. However, it is still disappointing that the government of Canada remains reluctant to address the systemic injustices faced by migrant workers.

Even in the wake of the deeply troubling conclusions made by the UN Rapporteur Obokata that the closed work permit system is creating conditions similar to slavery, the Canadian government continues to prioritize economic needs over human rights concerns.

Migrant workers, advocates, researchers, including parliamentary studies, strongly agree that abolishing closed work permits will address most of the conditions creating vulnerabilities to exploitation and abuse.

The significance of this movement is further underscored by the two separate class action lawsuits in Ontario and Quebec, which are challenging the constitutionality of the closed work permits. This is a clear indication that change is on the horizon.

Eventually, the Canadian government will be forced to recognize that the human rights of migrant workers matter. Canada's food and service delivery security is dependent on the hard labour of those workers.

Essential but disposable labour: **no more.**

The Open Work Permit Now Campaign continues to advocate for fair and equitable treatment of migrant workers. More actions will follow.

## **Meanwhile**

Those wishing to act and continue their education on migrant workers issues are encouraged to:

**[Click here](#)** to check out this new and exciting digital exhibit called *The Human Cost of Food*.



Sign up to attend virtually or in-person the June 12, 2024 court hearing for authorization of the class action lawsuit in Quebec. The hearing holds great importance as the court will decide whether or not the *End Migrant Worker Unfreedom* constitutional class action lawsuit can proceed on behalf of all workers in Canada directly impacted by closed work permits.

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## **UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Collaborative Effort**

**By Varka Kalaydzhieva**

Established by the United Nations in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all.

They encompass a broad range of interconnected issues, including poverty, decent work, good health and well-being, etc. Since the SDGs are universal, they craft a path forward for Canada and the rest of the world to build a future where all living beings prosper and live in harmony.

Our CSJ Social Justice Ministry, the Mary Ward Centre, and Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, embarked on a collaborative project with the FCJ Refugee Centre and the Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Groups.

The latter youth group is national in scope and has youth members from across Canada.

The FCJ Refugee Centre involves youth from Toronto and the GTA. Both youth groups are spaces for community and skills-building for newcomer youth, including those with precarious immigration status and non-status.

Access to education and permanent immigration status are significant issues of concern and advocacy for both groups and their members.

Our collaborative project features a series of webinars aiming to create and foster an environment where newcomer youth can speak and advocate on issues affecting their lives.

The webinars focus advocacy on SDG #13 (climate action), SDG #16 (justice, peace, and strong institutions), and SDG #17 (partnerships). The main goals are to be discussed at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum in July at the UN in New York.

The first webinar, UN SDGs: Collaborative Youth Action, on April 11, provided the newcomer youth perspective on the three goal. In the context of SDG #13, the youth spoke about the need for urgent climate action and Canada's obligation to climate migrants, those pushed out of their countries of origin due to extreme climate.

Many newcomer youths experienced firsthand climate displacement. They called on the Canadian government to reduce CO2 emissions, halt oil extraction, allocate more resources overseas to help other nations combat climate change in their communities, open immigration pathways for climate migrants, and support their dignity and rights.

At the same time, Canada should prioritize proper Indigenous representation in discussions about climate action and Indigenous rights.

In their overview of SDG #16, they were critical of the Canadian Indicator Framework (indicators used to measure progress on the SDGs) for not being reflective of the issues faced by the newcomer youth.

They raised questions about how newcomer youth are included in Canadian communities, how their rights are respected, and what environment is fostered to enable them to fulfill their full potential and succeed.

The youth highlighted Canada's failure in upholding its international commitments.

Many newcomer youths have lived the horrors of armed conflicts, lost family and friends, and futures in their homelands. They have loved ones in Palestine, Haiti, and Soudan, to name a few.

They urged the Canadian government to stop selling weapons to aggressors, and to open doors and immediately accept refugees from those places without conditions.

Canada has done this with Ukrainian refugees, succeeding in welcoming many looking for safety. This model should be applied to other communities as well.

At the end of their overview, the youth highlighted that SDG #17 urges us to foster inclusive partnerships to create pathways for education, employment, social integration, and the full realization of the rights of newcomer youth, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to society and achieve their full potential.

We invite you to join us for the next SDG webinar for collaborative youth action.

Webinar: United Nations  
**Sustainable Development Goals**  
Collaborative Youth Action

**Webinar 2:** Dialogue with Decision-Makers:  
Youth and the UN SDGs

After the remarkable kickoff led by passionate newcomer youth in our first webinar, it's time to take the next big step towards a greener and more sustainable Canada.

Experts and newcomer youth will delve into the innovative solutions and proactive strategies that Canada is implementing to move towards a more sustainable future for all.

**Date:** Thursday, June 20

**Time:** 5 p.m. (EST)

**Location:** Virtual. Please register at [csj-to.ca/sdg](https://csj-to.ca/sdg).

From the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, The Mary Ward Centre, FCJ Refugee Centre and Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network.

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# **New Changes on the Horizon for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program**

**By Varka Kalaydzhieva**

In March, the Employment Standards Development Canada (ESDC) announced its intentions to overhaul the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).

The government's proposal includes extending the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) to occupations outside of seasonal farm work to food processing, including fish and seafood. The program would implement a sector-specific work permit regime, with permits valid for up to two years.

Other changes include clumping the other low-wage streams into one Open-Source Category where the workers will also be issued sector-specific work permits.

Extending SAWP to other occupations is a bad idea. This is a program known for rampant rights abuses, such as wage theft, health and safety violations, dangerous or substandard housing, and the list systemic abuses goes on and on.

There are reasonable fears that employers in those sectors will have the power to form cartels to suppress collective bargaining and keep low wages and poor working conditions.

The government remains indifferent to the inhumane treatment and abuses migrant workers are facing in Canada. It is still stuck on proposing Band-Aid solutions which are not addressing the problem from its roots: namely migrant worker immobility and lack of access to permanent residency.

Despite their essential labour, low-wage workers continue to be mistreated and face prolonged family separation.

How long will the Canadian government continue to evade its responsibility to uphold the human rights of migrant workers?

Under the SAWP, employers constantly blacklist and quickly remove from Canada workers who are injured on the job or become ill. They target workers who speak out against injuries they are experiencing.

With the proposed changes, the government is essentially expanding the group of employers that will benefit from those power imbalances.

The SAWP is not a model to emulate.

Furthermore, the government's proposal includes sector-specific (rather than closed) work permits. The document explaining proposed changes frames this as an improvement that would provide "workers with increased labour mobility."

However, these permits would still trap workers in sectors where working conditions and wages are notoriously exploitative and substandard.

There are reasonable fears that employers in those sectors will have the power to form cartels to suppress collective bargaining and keep low wages and poor working conditions.

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How long will the Canadian government continue to evade its responsibility to uphold the human rights of migrant workers?

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## From Self-Care...

By Sabrina Chiefari

Most of us, I think, still look to Summertime as *the* season of rest and renewal. If you're feeling the pull to really slow-down and take a time out, but aren't sure how, consider a retreat of Ignatian Spirituality, such as the ones offered by:

**Villa St. Joseph Ecology & Retreat Centre**  
**Loretto Maryholme**  
**Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Renewal Centre**  
**Loyola House at Ignatius Jesuit Centre**

### **Is cost a barrier? Consider a public labyrinth.**

You might be surprised **where you find one**, and guides are easy to find online or at your local library. Whether you visit once, daily, or anywhere in-between, labyrinths can help us meet ourselves where we are.

### **...to celebration...**

Summer festivals and exhibitions allow us to celebrate everything and everyone! From **the Na-Me-Res Pow Wow & Indigenous Arts Festival** to **ReconciliACTION, ROMWalks**, and **Vintage & Gallery Crawls**, don't miss out on the many joyful bursts of cultures, arts, and colours this summer.

## **...and solidarity**

Exercising genuine solidarity as an individual can seem impossible. At times, we all ask ourselves “what difference can I make?” As Saint John Paul II reminds us, solidarity “...is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

**Here are some September opportunities to think on as ways to express your solidarity:**

**Grassy Narrows River Run 2024**  
**Global Day of Action (coinciding with The Summit of the Future)**  
**Spirit Garden Launch**

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## **Reflections from Our Placement Students**

*Diane Maombi and Rachel Jones are placement students with the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care. As they come to the end of their placement, they would like to express their appreciation.*

### **Diane**

My time as a placement student at the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto has been invaluable and rewarding. I participated in projects that resonated with my commitment to social justice and community advocacy.

Facilitating group sessions, contributing to program development, and delving into research on Canada's Sustainable Development Goals significantly deepened my comprehension of our shared obligation to a brighter tomorrow.

One of the most memorable moments for me was facilitating an activity and discussion with the Sisters at their residence at 2 O'Connor Drive. It was truly enriching to establish rapport with them.

Witnessing their commitment to serving their communities deeply inspired me, prompting reflection on my own impending career path.

Sisters' unwavering dedication to fostering a society grounded in justice, equality, and compassion serves as a constant source of empowerment and motivation to do better.

I am immensely grateful for the guidance and mentorship provided by my supervisors. Their support empowered me to champion social justice causes and extend assistance to migrant workers, newcomers and refugees through networking and community engagement initiatives.

Those were priceless experiences that I will carry with me into my new role working as a Community Integration Network Coordinator at the Catholic Centre for Immigrants in Ottawa.

## **Rachel**

These last eight months, I have had the honour of being a placement student with Varka and Leah in the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care.

It has been a joy to learn about the work of the Sisters, to meet some of you in the office and at events, and to be able to join in on your work for a time.

Varka and Leah have provided incredible support and mentorship to me in this journey, and I have learned so much from them.

I am especially grateful for the skills I have developed in advocacy, through working on the Open Work Permits Campaign, and I am looking forward to applying these skills as I continue on to a career in Settlement Work.

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity and for all of your kindness and support.

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## **Tread Softly...**

*In this article, Cécilia Meunier looks at how acknowledging our interrelatedness with all creation fosters respect and dignity.*

Does dignity exist?

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights speaks of the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical ability and yet...

On June 27, 2022, an abandoned tractor-trailer packed with illegal immigrants was found on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas. The truck was without water or air conditioning. Of the 100 people crammed inside, 53 people died from stifling heat. On April 18 and 19, 2020, a perpetrator in Nova Scotia killed 22 people and injured three others before he was shot by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A gunman killed 11 people in the Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue in 2018. Issues of overcrowding, resident neglect, abuse and lack of infection control in Long Term Care facilities were highlighted during the recent pandemic. Many elderly people died, lonely and isolated.

The clash between the intent of the Declaration and the reality lies in our unwillingness to see the bigger picture. When we refer to human dignity, we are dissociating ourselves from the world we live in. In reality, from the moment of conception, we are deeply embedded in a vast and sometimes bewildering

interconnected web of life. The interrelation is such that we cannot honour humanity if we fail to respect all of creation. Thus far, we have betrayed both humanity and the natural world.

It is time we advocate for all of creation. We adopt Indigenous wisdom that teaches us a more delicate view of the planet, not a pawn to be used and desecrated for our benefit, but a symbol of nurturing and love, our Mother Earth. As people learn to live in harmony with nature, complacency morphs into mindfulness. Planting a native garden, minimizing the use of outside lights, avoiding pesticides or cleaning up a patch of our fragile planet sows the seeds of change. Pollution, deforestation, habitat destruction and climate change are no longer condoned as negligible consequences of a consumer driven society. We begin to “imagine a world where nature is thriving, biodiversity is on the mend, and humans live in harmony with the natural world.” (What are the Rights of Nature? Cody Peluso)

Embracing our interconnectedness with creation awakens an inspired sense of belonging and gratitude. We discover that, at our essence, we are interdependent. We are liberated to look beyond our differences and celebrate our mutuality. We are the intimidated refugee fleeing persecution, the worshipper seeking comfort, the elderly patient yearning to be respected. We are the Madagascar rosewood tree on the brink of extinction, the whooping crane desperately searching for dwindling wetlands, the leatherback sea turtle suffering and dying from intestinal blockage after ingesting plastic.

In a world confronted with catastrophic climate change, social injustice and economic inequality, dignity is the energy that dissipates hatred and disdain. It is not just a concept or a feeling but a way of viewing the world that values all species. It flourishes when we tread softly and gently within the fragile web of life, when we uphold ourselves, others and creation. As humanity restores peace and reverence throughout the universe, a whisper of dignity emerges... a beacon of hope for the world.

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## **Discernment: Imagining more abundant life**

By Brenna Davis, Ignatian Solidarity Network, *Laudato Si' Movement Prayer Book*

Loving Creator,

As I begin this new day, I ask for the grace to pay attention. As I make decisions throughout the day, open my heart to remember that the ultimate goal of my life is to be in a loving relationship with You, myself, my neighbor, and the earth.

When I call to mind this purpose, I am more easily able to discern the most loving action to take, the next right step.

As I come to a crossroads during the day, help me to be a “contemplative in action” by pausing to notice my feelings and to remember the purpose of my life.

As I make a decision, I ask myself, “What will bring about more love?” “Which option will help create a world of abundant life?” “What supports right relationship?”

Encourage my dreams for this world. Expand my imagination beyond what I currently believe is possible as we co-create a future where all life can flourish. Amen.

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We hope this newsletter will inspire our readers to listen, learn and act to create a just and equitable world.

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Please visit [csj-to.ca/journeyforjusticesignup](https://csj-to.ca/journeyforjusticesignup) to subscribe to our next issue.

### **Get in Touch**

If you have any suggestions or want to connect with us, you can email us at [vkalaydzhieva@csj-to.ca](mailto:vkalaydzhieva@csj-to.ca).

### **Our Website**

Visit us online at [csj-to.ca/socialjustice](https://csj-to.ca/socialjustice).