

Winter 2024

Journey for Justice

Listen! Learn! Act!

From the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace and Creation Care

Simple Text Version

“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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Introducing Our Winter 2024 Issue

By Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

“An enemy might be able to defeat one person, but two people can stand back-to-back to defend each other. And three people

are even stronger. They are like a rope that has three parts wrapped together—it is very hard to break.”

- Ecclesiastes 4:12, ERV

From Solidarity Comes Unity and Strength

The spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, and by extension this Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care, is one centred on love and interconnectedness.

Our newsletter this season is an invitation to connection: connection with migrant workers, with ecological justice, and with others doing this work.

Let us come together, reach across our differences, stand in solidarity, and take action for change. Like a rope with three parts, we are stronger when bound together.

Essential But Disposable Labour: Migrant Workers Exploited in Canada *An Eight-Part Podcast Documentary*

Introduced by Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

Migrant Workers’ stories, in their own words...

“The separation – 10 years being away from little kids that I love – and at the same time I’m taking care of other people’s children.”

“There was a time when I worked for three months, 90 days, without one day of rest. That was just like slavery.”

“The greenhouse: this is like jail... If they need to spray [pesticides] over you; they spray over you!”

Migrant workers are a vital part of Canada. For decades, they have kept our economy moving by performing essential work. Yet Canadian systems, institutions, and employers treat them largely as disposable.

Our Ministry, through the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation (CNEE), is working hard to educate the public about what’s happening.

Our latest project is ***Essential But Disposable Labour: Migrant Workers Exploited in Canada***, an eight-part documentary **podcast** in which listeners hear from migrant workers, in their own voices, about the conditions they face across Canada.

Hear from migrant workers, policy experts, and service providers.

Learn from their insights and experiences.

Join the movement to fix our system.

Listen now at cnee.ca/podcast

Open Work Permits Now

By Varka Kalaydzhieva, Program Director

Will Canada's Reform of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program Once Again Fail to Deliver Real Justice for Migrant Workers?

Recently, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertook **a study on closed work permits and temporary foreign workers.**

The study was called in response to the visit of the UN Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, who condemned the use of the closed work permit system and the lack of access to permanent residency for migrant workers, especially those employed through the low-wage stream of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP).

During his appearance as a witness in front of the Standing Committee on November 7, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Marc Miller, alluded to upcoming reforms to the TFWP to prevent the exploitation of workers.

Most importantly, **in his statement**, the Minister downplayed and completely dismissed the systemic nature of the unjust treatment of migrant workers by referring to it as an abuse that exists on the “margins” done only by a few bad employers.

The minister's comments were deeply disturbing and demonstrated a reluctance to recognize the need for fundamental changes in a program such as the TFWP.

TFWP is deeply rooted in racist and colonial systems targeting racialized workers from the Global South.

In his statement, the Minister also hinted at changing the closed work permit system to regional or sector-specific work permits.

However, these permits also raise serious concerns regarding safeguarding the fundamental rights of migrant workers.

Hannah Deegan, a lawyer with the Association for the Rights of Household and Farm Workers' legal committee, stated in a recent press release by the Open Work Permits Now Campaign:

“Workers need the ability to circulate freely throughout the labour market. Permits tied to a specific sector or region would just end up providing employers with access to a pool of captive workers and will continue to undermine workers’ ability to demand fair treatment and negotiate better working conditions.”

Her words echo the concerns of other advocates, including the Migrant Rights Network (MRN).

The Open Work Permits Now Campaign stayed busy during the holidays.

We visited the office of Minister Miller to deliver a holiday gift: the award-winning book *Harvesting Freedom, the Life of a Migrant Worker in Canada* and a card with a holiday tree and vegetable ornaments.

We are hoping this first-hand account of the hardship and resiliency of a former migrant worker will inspire the Minister to listen to the voices of migrant workers and deliver policy changes that will fundamentally address the injustices they face.

The support for the Open Work Permit Now continues to grow. Recently, **30 Christian faith organizations** and **83 academics** sent two open letters to Minister Marc Miller and members of the Standing Committee of Citizenship and Immigration.

Both letters urged the decision-makers to end the closed work permit system directly responsible for the exploitation of migrant workers in Canada.

The signatories demanded:

Barrier-free pathways for permanent residency for all migrant workers, regardless of wage level or occupation.

Unconditional open work permits

You can support the call for justice by sending a letter with the same demands to your Member of Parliament.

You can [click here](#) to send that letter in three easy steps.

Given the anticipated upcoming changes, the moment to act is now!

National Migrant Workers Gathering

Migrant Workers Fight Back - Solutions for Migrant Justice

By Varka Kalaydzhieva, Program Director

The Collaborative Network to End Exploitation co-organized a *National Migrant Workers Gathering* in Edmonton on November 12, 2023. The event, *Migrant Workers Fight Back - Solutions for Migrant Justice*, provided a space for migrant workers and advocates to continue building the community and resiliency needed to move forward with the fight for justice.

Workers and supporters from Quebec, Ontario and Alberta discussed challenges and shared stories of hardship and courage. Despite the mistreatment many workers continue to face, they are determined to make Canada their home and make it better and more inclusive for all.

During the event, migrant workers spoke loudly and clearly, saying:

“The closed work permit system sets us up for exploitation the moment we sign the work contract with the employer. It restricts our freedom of movement and takes away our freedom of choice.

“We are reclaiming our dignity and respect.

“We are calling on the government for unconditional open work permits with realistic and straightforward pathways to permanent residency. The requirements for permanent residency are too limited and far-fetched, and discriminate in too many areas including on language ability and field of work. We should have barrier-free pathways to permanent residency.

“We are the backbone of the Canadian economy.

“We demand regularization for those of us who are undocumented and continuously mistreated because of the lack of basic human rights.”

We are determined to make this gathering an annual event that builds community among migrant workers and advocates across Canada. A detailed account of this inspiring event can be found in our full report which you can **[click here to read](#)**.

Migrant Workers Exercise: Receiving Feedback

By Rachel Jones & Diane Maombi

Our Migrant Workers Experiential Exercise is a workshop where participants roleplay as migrant workers in Canada, and are hopefully inspired to demand systemic change.

Rachel Jones and Diane Maombi are placement students with this Ministry. In October, they travelled to Leamington, Ontario with Varka, Leah and other CNEE members to meet with a group of migrant workers and hear their feedback on the Migrant Workers Exercise.

Rachel Jones: I had heard that Leamington was the ‘greenhouse capital of Canada,’ but driving into Leamington, seeing rows of enormous greenhouses made that fact real to me.

The same thing happened during conversations with the migrant workers there – while I already knew most of the information, it struck me in a different way to hear it from the workers themselves.

Prior to our trip, I had learned a lot about the experiences of migrant workers. I knew of the difficult conditions they often face and I had heard stories of migrant workers uniting to work for better conditions.

In Leamington, I had the chance to speak with migrant workers directly for the first time.

It was appalling to listen to the experiences the workers shared about unsafe working conditions, exposure to toxic pesticides, and punishments for speaking up and to know that these things had happened to the people I was talking to.

What stood out to me even more: the resilience of the individuals with whom I spoke. Despite their hardships, they continue to work to build a better life in Canada not only for themselves and their children, but also for so many others who have been through the same experiences.

I am honoured to join with migrant workers and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto to build a better Canada for all those who live and work here.

Diane Maombi: Being part of the Migrant Workers Exercise last year was a transformative journey that spurred me to advocate for changes and enlightened my experiences to seek justice and peace for migrant workers.

The exploitation, abuse and discrimination faced by migrant workers in Canada has the same racist, colonial roots that underpin Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples and lands.

Though migrant workers contribute greatly to our economy and society, they are still denied basic human rights such as access to healthcare, permanent residency, safety, and job security.

They face barriers that limit their access to justice, language, cultural and financial struggles as well as being afraid of losing their visas and accessibility to Canada when faced deportation.

While in Leamington, hearing the stories of exploitation directly from the people, I realised the urgent need for our government to work on immigration policies and regulations.

Open work permits, improved working conditions, and upholding their basic labour and human rights are the least we can do for these people whose labour is so essential to our country's economy and food security.

Canada wouldn't be the country it is today without the hard work and sacrifices of migrant workers. We can honour that legacy by admitting the faults in our system and fixing them for current and future workers.

Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice: Boundless and Beloved

By Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

Once a year, at the end of October, the largest Catholic social justice gathering in the United States takes place in Washington, DC. In 2023, our Ministry Director and Creation Care Animator were two of the 2,000 people who joined the gathering to celebrate the theme Boundless and Beloved.

“We are boundless: unified in difference. We are beloved: working for justice witnesses to that love... We experience the walls and divisions of our world and challenge them with a radical love... We have deep faith that justice will prevail and that the promise of the boundless and beloved community is possible here on earth.”

- from the Ignatian Solidarity Network

To say that the event was inspiring is an understatement. Social and ecological justice work is hard and can feel overwhelming and frustrating. Systems of domination and oppression thrive by separating those who would resist them, pushing us into cycles of defeat and isolation.

The Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice was a wonderful place to meet like-minded people, find support, and build the movement this world so needs. The passion and enthusiasm were infectious.

As we looked around at the extensive list of vendors, speakers, workshops, and participants, our Ministry wondered – how could we muster this feeling of hope, solidarity, and determination at home?

This coming year, we are encouraging Canadians to join us at this event, so we can come together to pray, build, and strengthen our movements.

Let us know if you would like to join us!

Email our ministry

COP27 & COP28: Reflections on Youth Empowerment

By Yusra Shafi

Yusra Shafi is KAIROS Canada's Global Partnerships Reporting and Administrative Assistant. She was a Youth Delegate at COP27 and COP28, and is an advocate for creation care and climate justice.

Finding the right words to describe the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) and the negotiation outcomes has always been challenging. As youth, we experience many conflicting emotions with regards to climate decision-making.

However, this year, I feel a bit more equipped to articulate my feelings and experiences!

I was introduced to the world of COP when I was selected as a youth delegate on the For the Love of Creation and KAIROS delegation to COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh last year.

After years of following COP updates online and through news headlines, I was finally right in the heart of all the action — and as a youth, which was an incredible honour.

I participated in activities such as meeting with Catherine Stewart (Canada's Ambassador for Climate Change), co-facilitating the KAIROS blanket exercise at the Civil Society space, and engaging in other delegation tasks.

A lot of my advocacy took place post-COP — I spoke at panels, webinars and events, and embraced every opportunity possible to learn from diverse communities and engage in meaningful dialogue.

KAIROS and For the Love of Creation played an instrumental role in facilitating all of this — and I am forever grateful for the lasting connections I made and the lessons I learnt.

This was all excellent preparation for my second COP. In December 2023, I had the privilege to attend COP28 in Dubai on an International delegation put together by the United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition, and was generously

supported by KAIROS, the Mary Ward Centre, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

This time, I went in with a little more experience and a little more knowledge! I had a packed schedule from the get-go — upon my arrival in Dubai, I was off to a Strategy Breakfast hosted by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. We discussed a potential advocacy idea for 2024, networked, and laid down a plan of action.

During my time at the conference, I had a wonderful meeting with Senator Rosa Galvez to discuss the KAIROS Women, Peace and Security Program, and then also had the opportunity to serve as a Global South co-facilitator for a bilateral with the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, where youth delegates raised crucial issues about youth inclusion.

The differences in the overall COP experience between COP27 and COP28 were quite noticeable from a youth perspective.

There was a significant increase in youth presence, and dedicated youth bodies such as YOUNGO and the Youth Climate Champions were notably a lot more active. As a young person, I felt a greater level of recognition by decision makers, and that my points and perspectives were respected even outside of the delegation space.

I am happy to share that there were opportunities for us as youth to be heard, but there is still a long way to go and much progress to be made.

Our unwavering goal as youth remains to be more represented in decision-making and policy-making — and I am optimistic that this goal is possible.

40 Days of...

by Sabrina Chiefari, Creation Care Animator

“Lent is the time of renewal and repentance, a time for change. Is it the time to have a wrong image of yourself? You are the image of God and if you have a poor image of yourself, then you desecrate his image. That is not how one wants to walk through Lent.” – Servant of God Catherine Doherty

...love through prayer

A dear Cameroonian friend once referred to Lent as a dreaded “spiritual dry season” and, just like a meteorological dry season, it is natural.

The Lenten season invites us to reconnect with beautiful prayers, relying on traditional rhythms as a road map through the desert; the Rosary, Way of the Cross, Chaplets, Adoration, Praise & Worship, and so much more.

Recalling that *“the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one”*, I invite you to consider the prayers compiled in the **Laudato Si’ Movement Prayer Book** this Lent. It’s one of many prayerful resources that can help us wrestle with today’s heart wrenching realities.

If you feel like taking on a daily Lenten practice, check out **Lent 2024: Refresh here.**

...love through fasting

One of the more common ways to observe fasting during Lent is on our plates; we “give up” sweets, caffeine and/or alcohol or, perhaps, we “take on” better habits, like drinking more water or eating more fresh food.

And while we abstain from meat each Friday during Lent, we also know that cutting back on our consumption of meats and highly processed foods helps the Earth as much as our individual bodies. Have a look at some of these **Lenten Recipes from CRS Rice Bowl** for plenty of meatless meal ideas.

...love through almsgiving

Earlier in this issue, we highlighted the **Open Work Permit Campaign**. The dignity, rights, and overall well-being of those who work closest with the Earth are just as real an issue here in Canada as they are anywhere else in the world.

This year, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto and the CSJ Ministry for Social Justice will be utilizing Development &

Peace's **Share Lent 2024** Campaign: *Create Hope – Reaping our rights.*

Wherever you choose to give alms, consider Pope Benedict's statement:

“Almsgiving teaches us the generosity of love.”
- Message of His Holiness Benedict for Lent 2008

No matter how you feel drawn to do it, observing the quiet, reflective, penitential liturgical season of Lent always becomes about 40 Days of Love.

*Lent starts on Ash Wednesday which, this year, falls on
St. Valentine's Day*

A Prayer to Create Hope

Loving God!

We believe that we are one great human family.
You call us to walk together and to recognize the
dignity of every person.

We believe that we share a Common Home.
You call us to care for all of Creation.

We believe in the sanctity of life.

You call us to treat all people with kindness and compassion in the way of Christ.

We believe that you reign in justice, peace, and joy.
You call us to put your Word into practice to build a more just, humane and joyful world.

Lord Jesus!

Guide us to be in solidarity with the joys, hopes, sorrows and anxieties of all people, especially those impoverished by unjust socio-economic and political systems.

Help us to follow your footsteps, to be bearers of the Good News.

Holy Spirit!

Inspire us to find new and creative ways of responding to your calls.

Strengthen us in our commitment to Create Hope in our world.

Amen.

From the “Create Hope” Share Lent 2024 prayer card,
Development & Peace

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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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