

September 2021

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 SISTERS of ST. JOSEPH of TORONTO

Journey for Justice

Listen! Learn! Act!

From the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care

Joint Ecological Ministry Bill C-15 Adopted

On June 21, National Indigenous Day, Bill C-15 received a Royal Assent. Bill C-15 is an attempt to establish a process for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to become implemented into Canadian law.

The rights and principles affirmed in UNDRIP constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples of the world. It affirms Indigenous peoples' right of self-determination and underlines the prohibition of discrimination and genocide in international law.



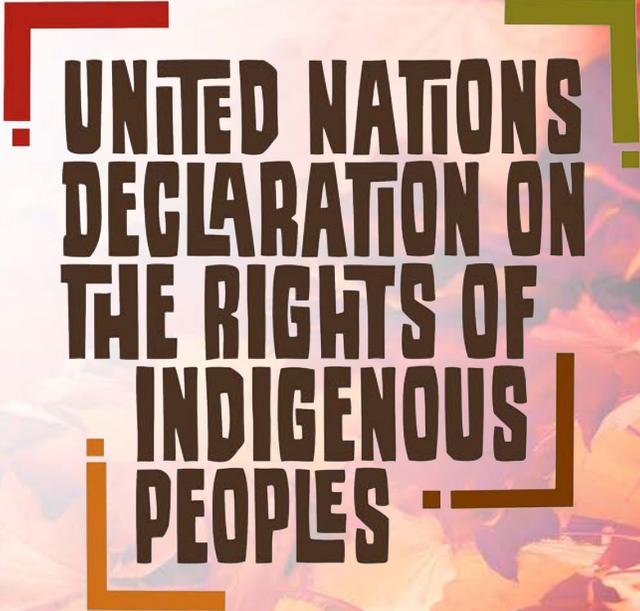
Bill C-15 Adopted (cont'd)

This historic legislation establishes a clear and ongoing legal obligation for the federal government to ensure that laws and policies are consistent with the principles affirmed in UNDRIP.

Following the lead of many Indigenous communities, we worked with our Joint Ecological Ministry (JEM) partners to urge MPs and Senators across the political spectrum to adopt this important legislation.

Despite a short deadline, 36 Catholic faith communities and organizations supported the letter initiated by JEM to the Senate in support of the Bill and its passage before the parliamentary recess.

You can read the full UN declaration by [clicking here](#).



**UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON
THE RIGHTS OF
INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

Every Child Matters, by Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

There are no words to convey the grief and devastation brought on by the discovery of 215 children's bodies in an unmarked grave at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

That news was followed quickly by the discovery of 751 bodies at Marieval, and 182 bodies at St Eugene's Mission School near Cranbrook, BC, and more to come.

As a Catholic and a white Canadian settler whose family came from England, I have a complicated relationship with this land and my place on it.

I am outraged at the way Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island have been, and continue to be, oppressed and dispossessed of their land, their resources, and their children. I also

know that I directly benefit from this oppression.

When my anger and grief threaten to overwhelm, I think back to a Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) event 10 years ago where survivors were sharing their stories. During one of the gatherings, an Indigenous elder stood up and, I'm paraphrasing here, but she said:

You are not responsible for decisions made before you were born; they are not your fault. You are responsible for what happens now; if the situation of Indigenous peoples does not improve in your lifetime, that is your shame to bear. You must be part of the solution.

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Every Child Matters (cont'd)

I took that message to heart. Here are some of the ways that I work to be part of the solution. I hope they give you some ideas for taking your own action.

Participate

Take part in a KAIROS Blanket Exercise.

Attend a pow wow (as in the nation to nation ceremony, and stop using that term to refer to a casual meeting).

Show up at Indigenous-led protests and support activism.

Learning and Giving

[Click here](#) to read the summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Also [click here](#) to read the Calls to Action and pick one for which to advocate.

Donate to Indigenous-led organizations like the Legacy of Hope Foundation which raises awareness about the residential school system. You can learn more by [clicking here](#).

Call for Reconciliation

Contact your local priest and bishop, asking them to commit to reconciliation efforts in meaningful ways that include financial reparations, a papal apology, and a National Catholic Reconciliation Plan.

As Canadians, we must engage in real nation-to-nation relationships with the many nations in our artificial borders. We have to respect Indigenous sovereignty. And for goodness sakes, we must end boil water advisories and supply clean, fresh water to all these communities. Let the good work begin!

Do No Harm, by Varka Kalaydzhieva, Program Manager



This year, one of our most prominent projects was the webinar series Do No Harm: A Fresh Perspective on Human Trafficking.

This six-part series from the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation (CNEE) highlighted how survivors of human trafficking should have their voices prioritized in anti-human trafficking work.

This proved to be in line with the United Nations' 2021 theme for anti-human trafficking work: "Victims' Voices Lead The Way."

Our goal with our series was to create a platform for frontline workers, survivors and policy experts to share new perspectives, unintentional

impacts, and best practices rooted in solidarity and anti-oppression.

It is common for anti-human trafficking events to have survivors speak. Storytelling is a powerful tool to humanize survivors.

However, storytelling can be retraumatizing. Community agencies often exploit survivors' stories to secure funding without further engaging survivors in leading the work. Many organizations offer little to no compensation.

Ethical practices require that we do no harm with survivors of human trafficking.

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Do No Harm (cont'd)

In our webinar series, one of the key speakers was Rhonelle Bruder, a survivor, activist, and scholar. She spoke to how survivors' stories should not be exploited in her presentation: Beyond Inclusion: Survivor Leadership & Empowerment.

Our webinars led to:



87 certificates of completion



Eight organizations reaching out to consult and collaborate



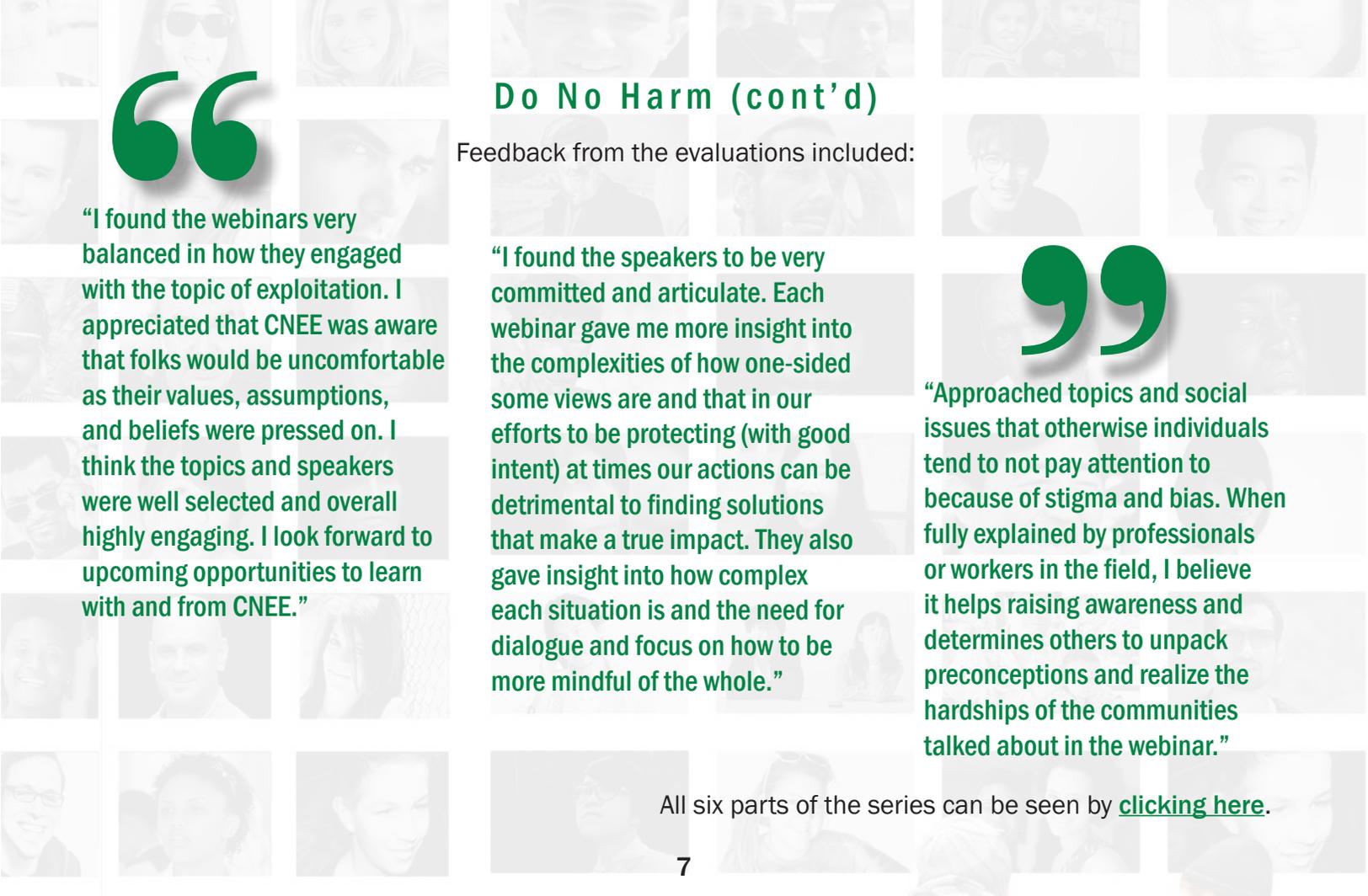
100 participants per webinar on average



32 evaluations with helpful feedback

Participants were from various fields such as social workers, legal professionals, students and others interested in addressing human trafficking.

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“I found the webinars very balanced in how they engaged with the topic of exploitation. I appreciated that CNEE was aware that folks would be uncomfortable as their values, assumptions, and beliefs were pressed on. I think the topics and speakers were well selected and overall highly engaging. I look forward to upcoming opportunities to learn with and from CNEE.”

Do No Harm (cont'd)

Feedback from the evaluations included:

“I found the speakers to be very committed and articulate. Each webinar gave me more insight into the complexities of how one-sided some views are and that in our efforts to be protecting (with good intent) at times our actions can be detrimental to finding solutions that make a true impact. They also gave insight into how complex each situation is and the need for dialogue and focus on how to be more mindful of the whole.”

”

“Approached topics and social issues that otherwise individuals tend to not pay attention to because of stigma and bias. When fully explained by professionals or workers in the field, I believe it helps raising awareness and determines others to unpack preconceptions and realize the hardships of the communities talked about in the webinar.”

All six parts of the series can be seen by [clicking here](#).

A photograph of the Toronto skyline at sunset, featuring the CN Tower prominently on the left. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey, and the city buildings are reflected in the water in the foreground.

Police Violence in Toronto, by Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

On July 21, I witnessed about 200 police officers and 100 private security guards violently remove 16 unhoused people from their tented community in the park by Lamport Stadium.

Toronto has a housing crisis. At the end of its first quarter of 2021, the City had 79,332 applications on their active wait list for affordable housing. Tent communities are the inevitable result of years of underfunding in housing and other social support services.

We cannot police our way out of this crisis. But that didn't stop the City of Toronto from trying.

The weapons of the state included fences, bodies, horses, batons, pepper spray, drones, detention, arrest,

and facial recognition cameras. I cannot comprehend the cost of such an operation. Our city leaders have claimed that any violence from the police and private security was a measurable and proportionate to the threat of the encampment residents and their allies.

Video footage shows nonviolent protestors standing side by side, arms linked to form a human chain to protect their unhoused neighbours as they were shoved, thrown, hit, punched, gassed, chased, trampled, and more. At least three were hospitalized: one with a broken wrist, another with a concussion.

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Police Violence in Toronto (cont'd)

Members of the press were obstructed from filming what was happening.

This was state sanctioned violence and police brutality. The purpose: to remove less than two dozen unhoused people living in tents on unused public lands.

Toronto Police Services are supposed to be here to serve and protect. I have to ask: who was being served here? Who was being protected?

After forcing protestors onto King Street using a technique called 'kettling' where police push crowds of people into a specific area, I was shocked when an officer had the audacity to say protestors were being inconsiderate neighbours by blocking traffic.

To me, Toronto Police Services has an odd understanding of what it means to be a considerate neighbour, instead showing that they are more concerned about the economically advantaged,

housed neighbours of Toronto than the ones who are in precarious situations, targeted, and unhoused.

The City of Toronto is likewise culpable in its choice to criminalize homelessness and fund reckless, militaristic operations instead of investing in resources, spaces, and facilities to serve those who are underhoused.

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Police Violence in Toronto (cont'd)

I urge our City and all Torontonians:

To recognize

that those experiencing homelessness are citizens of Toronto suffering from systemic inequalities and in need of care, support and understanding;

To no longer

treat homelessness as a crime;

To seek accountability

for the violence enacted against encampment residents and their supporters including a public inquiry and a commitment never to use such methods again;

To invest

in affordable housing options as well as programs, services, and spaces for those who are unhoused.



Tread Softly...

In this column, Cécilia Meunier shares ways we can find harmony with our natural world.

The Indigenous cosmic vision treasures the conception of creation as a living process, begetting a universe in which a kinship exists between all things.

Under our stewardship, the ramifications of our choices have been egregious – deforestation, species extinction, climate change, rising CO2 emissions. We have devastated the very systems that allow life. The restrictions imposed during the pandemic have caused us to stop and re-examine our choices.

Whether we interact with other humans, animals, or different ecosystems, we do not act alone. Every footstep leaves an impact. There are countless small ways we can build healthier connections with our planet.

Feeling connected to the Earth is a dynamic way to restore vitality and balance while promoting a respectful partnership with our environment.

In a study by David Suzuki, environmental activist, it was found that people who spent 30 minutes each day in nature exhibited enhanced well-being and happiness. In Japanese, the term *Shinrin-Yoku* – meaning getting lost in the forest or forest bathing – acknowledges the significance of nature as a partner in our journey. By engaging our senses, we bridge the gap between ourselves and our natural world.

The simplest activities can bestow powerful health benefits.

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Tread Softly... (cont'd)

Studies show that walking can be the key to losing weight, lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, and reducing one's risk for heart disease. Leave the car at home. Go for a walk. Daily exercise is sure to bring the spring back into your step. You will feel rejuvenated and, as we observed during the lockdown, the planet will breathe a little easier.

To nurture a garden is to engage with nature. Many of our vegetables and fruits are treated with chemicals, transported over long distances and sprayed for storage, all to the detriment of our health and that of our planet.

Do you cringe and grab a herbicide when you find dandelions in your lawn? In traditional herbal practices, dandelion is revered for its medicinal properties. Whether growing one tomato plant, creating a vegetable patch, or making peace with dandelions, we will effectuate healthier choices for ourselves while lessening the burden on our languishing planet.

Restoring native habitat is crucial to preserving the interconnectedness of our natural world. While non-native plants sever the natural food web, native plants grow in harmony with the environment, the soil, and the

water supply. They create a natural refuge for wildlife, attract bees, butterflies and birds, and protect vital microscopic organisms. Selecting native plants helps cultivate a healthy biodiversity.

By espousing the Indigenous vision of creation, we have the opportunity to follow a path that is in harmony with the natural world. We are emboldened to step softly and thoughtfully in a healthier direction for ourselves and our Living Universe.

The Season of Creation

In this reflection, Sister Mary Mettler, a Sister of St. Joseph of Toronto, introduces our readers to the Season of Creation as a time for contemplation and action.

In 1989, the Orthodox Church proclaimed September 1 as a day of prayer for creation. The Ecumenical World Council of Churches expanded this single day to a full season from September 1, the World Day of Prayer, to October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology.

During this season, the global Christian community is called to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration and action for the healing of our common home.

Since then, other churches such as the Australian Lutheran Church in 2000 and the Catholic Church in the Philippines in 2003 have initiated events to raise awareness of the need to protect and respect creation.

Pope Francis proclaimed the Roman Catholic Church's commitment in 2015 with his encyclical, *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*. This document has become a moral guide for interfaith religions, spiritual and secular groups alike.

The focus of the season of creation in 2021 is to honour and advance the truth that our "Earth is Home for All." It calls on the planet's 2.2 billion Christians to reflect on our relationship with the environment – not just the global South, but especially the place where we live, and the ways in which our lifestyles and decisions as a society endanger both the natural world and those inhabiting it, both humans and all beings.

We need to discover radically new ways of living with creation.

The Season of Creation (cont'd)

In recent years, there has been a rediscovery of “the commons”, a concept rooted in the ancient traditions of shared grazing and maintaining hunting grounds that was codified in the English Charter of the Forest (1217).

This concept re-emerges today as we see that what should be

shared by all is threatened by greed and profit: for example, clean water has been increasingly privatized and most troubling is the persistent warming of God’s Earth.

If we consider the planet around us as a shared commons to be protected for the benefit of all,

we will come to understand that this planet is a gift in need of our nurturing and gentle care.

Below are some resources for knowledge, contemplation and reflection.

Let us pray together to see with new eyes and to fall more deeply in love with our earthly home.

Resources

To learn more about the challenges facing our shared air and water, visit onthecommons.org.

For prayer resources and a celebration guide, visit seasonofcreation.org.

To read *Laudato Si'*, see laudatosi.com.

Introducing Sabrina Chiefari

On June 1, 2021, we welcomed Sabrina Chiefari to the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace and Creation Care. Sabrina joins us as Creation Care Animator. She introduces herself to you here:

I read *Laudato Si'* during my commutes from Vaughan to Greentown over the Summer of 2015, and found myself renewed and relieved in ways that I hadn't expected with each chapter.

Environmental Education (EE) has been a primary interest of mine nearly my entire life. By the time Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si*, I'd been studying or working in EE for nearly 15 years, and I was tired. Tired of having my line of work questioned for it's worth. Tired of the cycles of politicking that ignored imperatives declared by scientists. Tired of a world with instant access

to information only to see how resolutely knowledge could be ignored. Tired of teaching children and teens about a Natural World that, but for books and movies, they would never know in adulthood.

Most of all, tired of how unimportant issues about Care of our Earth were to Catholics around me. Even not using single-use Styrofoam dinnerware for a Church function was a losing battle.

It was no small measure of relief when I read *Laudato Si'* and passages like this: *"All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education."*



Sabrina Chiefari

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Introducing Sabrina Chiefari (contd')

And it was with no small measure of affirmation when I'd read words like this:

“Environmental education has broadened its goals.... It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God. Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.”

Animating Creation Care in people is just that. The opportunity that has been extended to me through this ministry is one that will allow us to educate *“for the covenant between humanity and the environment”* that Pope Francis calls for in a way that no other professional role could.

Whatever the settings, be they schools, family events, social media campaigns, or places yet to be realized, fostering care for our common home will be a key focus in my work as Creation Care Animator.

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”

– Pope Francis, Laudato Si’

Subscribe to Our Newsletter

We hope this newsletter will inspire our readers to listen, learn and act to create a just and equitable world. The next issue will be released in Winter 2021.

Signing Up

Please visit 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.

Land Acknowledgement

The Sisters of St Joseph arrived in Toronto 170 years ago. As an order of Catholic women religious, our charism to care for the dear neighbour led us from Le Puy-en-Velay, France to the United States, and finally here to Toronto.

For our 170th anniversary, we are Celebrating our Oneness with God, Creation & Neighbour.

We acknowledge that Tkaronto has been a home to many nations since time immemorial. These include the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River.

These nations were irrevocably harmed by the arrival of European settlers who have systematically tried to erase these indigenous communities and their teachings.

In our ongoing journey towards reconciliation, we are relearning the history of this country and this land, critically examining the ways we have benefitted from systemic racism and the role the Catholic church has played in systems of oppression in Canada.

We are committed to redressing these harms.



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SISTERS *of* ST. JOSEPH *of* TORONTO