

Living Justice and the City: Discerning the Spirit in Toronto

A Report Submitted by

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with a Foreword by

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Project Sponsors:

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Foreword by Brian Walsh

The Vision

In his “Nazareth Manifesto” Jesus turned to the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to captives,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (Luke 4.18-19)

This proclamation of Jubilee, at the heart of Jesus’ preaching of the Kingdom of God, is the very foundation of all Christian ministry, not least, urban ministry. Any ministry that bears the name of Jesus is a ministry of justice. Where there is justice, where there is good news for the poor, release to the captives, freedom from oppression, that is where we find the Spirit.

Urban ministry always happens as a response to what God is already doing and calling us to do in an urban context. All vibrant urban ministry recognizes that it takes its place within the movement of the Spirit that is busy renewing all things. The call to a ministry of justice is a call to listen to the Spirit, and a call to employ our gifts and resources, to dedicate our passion and our lives, to the work of the Spirit in our urban context.

But that requires discernment. If we are called to join in the ministry of justice rooted in Jesus and animated by the Spirit, where do we discern the Spirit at work in our midst? So often ministry initiatives begin with a sense of need, a perception of the absence of God, the absence of the Spirit, and indeed, the absence of justice, in a given context. And while this desire to respond to such need is admirable and at its best displays deep resources of Christian love, there is a danger here. We run the risk of an arrogance born of ingratitude when we have not opened our eyes and seen what the Spirit is already doing in our city. We seek to bring good news, but we are perhaps still in need of recovery of sight in our own blindness.

And so we need discernment. We need to engage in a process of observation, listening, prayer, and story-telling that will help us to see what God is doing in our city, to see where the Spirit has been moving. And within such a discernment, there will be inspiration. Being awake to injustice and being more deeply attuned to what the Spirit is doing and calling us to do in our urban context, new leaders will have the opportunity to be in-spired. New servants will be called into this Jubilee vision, led and filled by the Spirit.

The Project

In March of 2017 the CRC Campus Ministry to the University of Toronto joined forces with Wycliffe College, Trinity College's Faculty of Divinity, Yonge Street Mission, and St. James Cathedral to bring Mark Gornik, the director of City Seminary in New York to Toronto. Gornik's 2002 book, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City*,¹ has been foundational to much urban ministry education in North America. Since I was teaching a course for Trinity on "A Theology of the City," it seemed to be a good time to bring Gornik into the conversation. David Walsh, a long time Christian social justice advocate in Toronto attended a number of Gornik's presentations and was not only impressed with the depth of Gornik's insights, but also encouraged by the vibrant engagement of so many younger Christian adults (mostly, my students) in the issues of urban justice. Out of that experience, this project was born.

David and I (and no, we are not related) began to dream of a research project for the summer of 2017. We would ask two researchers to engage in a process of discernment. The task was simple, yet incredibly complex: discern where the Spirit is at work for justice in the city of Toronto. By visiting ministries and projects, interviewing practitioners, bearing witness to their ministries, walking the streets, and consulting with me as the project supervisor, the researchers would employ all of their senses - looking, listening, feeling, smelling, indeed, tasting - to discerning the Spirit in our midst. Where is the Spirit at work in affordable housing, the welcome and support of refugees, food security, urban sustainability, public policy, homelessness, addictions, transportation and a whole host of other dimensions of urban life?

After consulting with colleagues in the field on the shape of the project,² we approached two talented researchers. Becca Sawyer had already graduated from the Wycliffe Master of Theological Studies program with a focus on development where she had excelled in one of my courses. Courtney Reeve was a current student of mine in the same program and had impressed me with the insightfulness of her questions and comments in class. We invited them to work together on this project and, with both some fear and bounds of excitement, they accepted the invitation.

This is, of course, an impossible project, especially in terms of its scope (the City of Toronto!) and the time frame (one summer!), with only two researchers. We cannot expect anything like a discernment of the Spirit in the whole city of Toronto! And so the researchers, together with the project supervisor, had to establish certain parameters. Any discernment of the Spirit must always begin in specific things happening in particular neighbourhoods or sectors of society. The project tried to get at the larger question of the Spirit's movement of justice in Toronto by means of attending to these specific examples as indicative of something larger that might be going on in our city.

¹ Mark Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Eerdmans, 2002). See also his more recent book with Maria Liu Wong, *Stay in the City: How Christian Faith is Flourishing in an Urban World* (Eerdmans, 2017).

² Thanks to Hugh Brewster and David Kupp for early consultation.

Our Partners

The project began with David Walsh's enthusiasm and a grant from the Community Counts Foundation. Mark Wallace, provides denominational leadership for Christian Reformed campus ministries, and brought another grant into the project from Resonate Global Mission. And then, Joe Gunn, the executive director Citizen's For Public Justice, offered to bring in CPJ as another partner, with more grant money. Through my role as project supervisor, the CRC Campus Ministry to the University of Toronto served as the fourth partner and the ministry that would host the project as a whole.

But why would a "campus" ministry be involved with a project that has "urban" ministry as its focus? Perhaps the first answer to this question is that the Nazareth Manifesto is the foundation of all Christian ministry, regardless of location or focus. Any ministry that is not directed to the kind of restorative justice that Jesus proclaims in his inaugural sermon in Nazareth is seriously out of touch with the Kingdom of God. Our ministry at U of T, however, has its own contextual reasons for a connection to questions of urban justice. Not only is the campus where we serve in the downtown core of Toronto, but we have also enjoyed deep connections with a host of communities and ministries amongst the most marginal in our city. Indeed, the Wine Before Breakfast community that I am honoured to pastor, has always had a significant number of urban ministers, street pastors, shelter workers, and street nurses as part of our worshipping community. In our midst, these siblings in Christ have found encouragement and spiritual sustenance for their ministry, and in return our campus ministry has been deeply enriched.

There is, however, one other reason why it made sense to house this project within our campus ministry. The focus of the project is on young adults. Becca and Courtney come to this research as "millennials" and they address their report primarily to folks of their own generation. It was seeing young adults deeply engaged with these issues that gave birth to the Living Justice Project, and it is to them that we direct the results of this study. We hope and pray that this report will be an inspiration for a new generation of ministry for social, ecological and economic justice.

Advent 2017

Introduction

Justice looks like a refugee mother serving Ethiopian food to a gathering of volunteers who participated in welcoming her to the city.

Justice looks like a homeless man given renewed hope once he smells freshly picked rhubarb stewing on the stove like his mother use to do back home.

Justice looks like a woman exposing her despondency while surrounded by friends who know her and those who don't, simply because the space welcomed her.

Justice looks like a teenager being free to express themselves through art, dance, and music because someone believed in the creative beauty of their imagination.

How do we find what justice looks like in the city of Toronto? How will we know it is happening when we see it? Will we be able to follow its path? How will we discern Jesus' manifesto in Nazareth manifest in our city? If justice in the Kingdom of God is a Spirit endowed ministry that proclaims good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed, then where do we see the Spirit at work in our midst? And if such justice is all about proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour, that is, the year of Jubilee in which economic disparity is overthrown, then where (and when) do we see Jubilee breaking out in our communities?³

To pursue this kind of justice is to act in response to what God is already doing and calling us to do in the city. Our task in this project was not so much to identify the need for justice in our city as it was to observe the restorative movement of the Spirit of God in the enacting of justice. This was an exercise in discernment. Where is the Spirit already at work and where do we need to join? We have learned that a ministry of justice rooted in Jesus and animated by the Spirit necessarily cuts to the very heart of Christian spirituality.

Throughout the summer of 2017 we have engaged in a process of observation, listening, prayer, and storytelling to help us see where the Spirit has been moving. There was so much to learn, so many different faces of injustice in our city. But at the heart of it all, we have discerned a poverty of relationship, and only where we met stories of restored relationships did we see the flourishing of justice across urban communities. And when such justice flourishes, we have found that justice isn't just an idea, nor can it be limited to programs and policies, as important as these are. Rather, we have learned that justice can be tasted and smelled. It tastes like a meal shared around a table, it smells like your mother's cooking. Justice can be felt in the room where there is hospitality and safety, it is seen and experienced in the art, dance and music of at-risk youth.

From a movement that inspires abundant living through deep relational engagement, to an organization connecting homeless men to new home communities; from a support group for the social reintegration of dangerous offenders, to family-style drop-in centres; from a

³ See Luke 4.18-19.

neighbourhood oriented church community, to a network of interfaith leaders for action, we see a city ripened for rich relationships that restore the oppressed and broken-hearted to renewed life. Our neighbours who are poor, the Indigenous community, those who are mentally ill, those who suffer racial discrimination, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalized people are fighting to be seen, heard and known. And the Spirit is busy calling new people to sit down and befriend these neighbours. We cannot ignore this epidemic of loneliness.

We have had the privilege of seeing first-hand the fruits of faithful justice-seekers across this city. We have seen profound feats of compassion as well as justice for the oppressed. Yet there is new work to be done that has been left for our millennial generation. It is to this generation that we dedicate this project, trusting that you will take our assessment to heart so that loneliness will no longer oppress our city.

Having spent countless hours together walking the streets of Toronto, visiting so many people, and having such rich conversations, we thought that we would simply invite our readers into the conversation, framing these thoughts and insights in the form of a dialogical narrative. After conducting each interview, we would take time to go through our notes and gather our thoughts. We would walk through each of the questions we asked our interviewees and share together what stood out to each of us. This report continues those conversations. We hope that you will find as you read, a sense of story, conviction, and a personal call to pursue your role in social justice for the city of Toronto. So from here on, when you read text that is normal font, then that will be Becca Sawyer's side of the conversation. *When the text is in italics, that is Courtney Reeve's voice.* And when there is a break between the two voices, we'll be sure to visually highlight that with either a double space between paragraphs or a new subheading. And we'll highlight the names of the people we interviewed by placing their names in **bold**. We'll begin with Becca explaining something of our methodology in this process of discernment.

Methodology

We began the Living Justice Project in June of 2017, knowing very little about where this project would lead us. We were given the mandate to discern where the Spirit of God was working for justice in the city of Toronto. This incredibly complex and multifaceted question seemed daunting, intriguing, and humbling to say the least. While I was grateful to be given this opportunity for summer employment, my practical nature had me nervous to take on such a big task. Obviously more of an optimist, Courtney's excitement and eagerness to begin was more evident. We both sensed an awareness that discerning where the Spirit is moving for justice in Toronto is a collective undertaking and not to be taken on solely by the two of us.

Our task was to be question askers, using our curiosity to find themes and links that clearly demonstrate where justice is actually happening in Toronto. We were to be listeners, gathering stories and reporting back for others to learn as we have all summer. We began by compiling a list of people actively pursuing justice in the city. We arranged to sit down with these people in their work locations, sometimes for a tour or meal, but always an interview. Throughout this process, we asked each interviewee to suggest more people to continue the conversation. This snowball effect connected us to a broad social justice network in Toronto, but required effort to move beyond the loop of folks all talking the same language. Recognizing that

the Spirit of God is not limited to the church we intentionally sought out voices from different faith backgrounds and also from the public sector. We spoke to frontline workers, veterans in the field, activists, priests and pastors, founders and directors, authors, social workers, and volunteers. Most interviews lasted one hour and by the end of August we had spoken to 29 different people active in Toronto's social justice sector. Regrettably, we do not have the space within this paper to share the details of how each of them is pursuing justice in this city. Instead, we have provided a list of the organizations and people we encountered in the Appendix for you to reach out and learn more for yourself. You will be so grateful if you do. Through these conversations, we took the pulse of justice in Toronto and dedicated ourselves to this process of discernment in spite of the daunting scope of our research question.

As this project is vast, so are our limitations! We were given a total of three months to complete this city-wide assessment, yet we recognize discernment processes often require a greater time commitment. In this time period we attempted to connect with as many people as possible; some connections were made too late and many others we could not make time to reach out to. What we offer is far from a city-wide assessment or discernment. There is just too much going on in Toronto for us to be able to make contact with so many folks engaged in good work for justice across the city. In addition to these limitations, we recognize the biases of our own experiences, mentioned in the section below. Nonetheless, we believe that in spite of these limitations we were able to discern something of how the Spirit is moving and submit this report to inspire God's ministry of justice for Toronto within you.

In this report we reflect on the compelling answers and key themes that emerged from our interviews. We have so much to learn and only ask you to do that which we asked of ourselves: to open our ears, eyes, hearts, and minds to encounter a radical call to justice, to not run away from the uneasiness of conviction, and to be open to finding that justice is most deeply revealed in restored and healing relationships.

Locations of Privilege

Throughout the three months that we have been working on this project, I have felt unexpectedly homeless. On May 11 the house I was renting caught fire. Seven city fire-trucks arrived on my street waking me from my sleep. The fire department broke down the doors on our front porch as well as our balcony while my housemates and I shuffled ourselves onto the sidewalk. Neighbours emerged from their homes in housecoats and pajamas. The property manager arrived stunned and our landlord was hysterical. The fire department personnel slowly filtered onto the street to be informed of the details: construction workers on the house next door were using a blow torch and hot tar for roofing when some uncovered, unprotected insulation on our side of the duplex caught fire. Once sparked, fire travels quickly through the air pockets of insulation and before the construction workers could control the situation, the roof was enflamed. My housemates and I were effectively evicted from our home.

Since that day, I have moved from house to house as very uncertain circumstances and an ongoing brain injury have made it difficult to re-establish myself. Without my home, I have felt deeply displaced and uprooted. The day-to-day difficulties became challenges far too hard to resolve outside the security of my home. Where do I cook my food? Where do I put my things?

Where can I access the internet, scan and print personal information required to rent a new home? Where do I sleep in the meantime? How can I pay for this? And even when I have found a place to rest my head, where are the pictures and trinkets that are meaningful to me? I have felt incredibly vulnerable to be without a home.

Yet my story both compares and contrasts to the state of homelessness in Toronto. Where I have the privilege of social capital amongst home owners who can offer me temporary residence, our city's homeless do not. Where I have a student ID card to access libraries to accommodate my printing, scanning and WiFi needs, so many of our city's newcomers do not. Where I have a network of friends and family throughout the city to emotionally support me, our city experiences an epidemic of loneliness. And even though I have to go through the wild hoops of credit checks, police checks, guarantor's mortgage statement, employment letters, landlord recommendation letters, cash safety deposits, as well as first and last rent, I do not worry about whether I will have a new home in the near future. Even during my period of homelessness, I have come to see the place of privilege that I have. So many of our neighbours would be on the streets or in a shelter with very few economic or social resources if they had been displaced as I had been. I've had to prove my financial security in order to move through my crisis. What of those who can not provide such guarantees to landlords?

Thankfully, most of us don't experience the kind of displacement because of fire that Courtney had to deal with this summer. For millions of people in this city, the displacement is more mundane. They don't live near where they work, and that gave me a different perspective throughout this research project. Together with thousands of other people I commuted into the city from my home in Oshawa. Like other commuters, I consistently experienced stress over the often delayed TTC system which threatened to make me late for meetings and interviews. On average, I had to allow a minimum of an hour and half to get into the city and the same was true for going home at the end of the day. The extra hours of travel were often time consuming and added to feelings of exhaustion at the end of the week. I learned quickly about the extra energy you need just to travel to work when you don't live near your workplace. While the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) was named "Transit System of the Year" by the American Public Transportation Association, many of the commuter's on the TTC have their doubts. Nonetheless, my frustration with the TTC and travel times is possible because public transit was something that I could afford to take. There were routes that went where I needed to go and I did not have accessibility issues that extended my travel time. There are, however, so many people for whom travel in Toronto is an extreme barrier to quality of life. Having a job in an area of town that requires you to take transit might mean that many cannot afford to get to work. The amount of time and transfers that some have to take makes travel time a nearly impossible addition to their day. In a city that now prides itself on its award winning transit system, accessibility for all is a justice issue to be addressed. Perhaps now is not the time for the city to rest on its laurels.

These experiences shaped our entry into this conversation of justice in the city of Toronto. We also recognize that our positions of privilege affect the way we interpret, discern and experience the city. I am a white female, presently concussed, and beloved of Jesus. During the eleven years

I lived as a child in Indonesia, I became profoundly aware of the privileges attached to my skin: my family had access to wealth, status, movement and influence by virtue of inheritance. Moreover, I have only been able to repatriate to Canada as a result of my family's settler legacy. I have sustained a long-term brain injury that has substantially inhibited my post-accident functioning, yet at my young age I will recover from this concussion. Identifying with my assigned gender, as a woman I benefit from today's endorsement of female leadership, but misogyny and objectification are still common experiences for me. In the midst of the religious pluralism of our city I choose to follow Jesus and continuously learn that I am a beloved child of God.

I am also a white, educated, cisgender female. Being born on stolen land, I am the recipient of unearned settler privilege. I have had the opportunity to travel and live abroad on many occasions without fear of being denied entry or visas to the places I have visited. I resonate in many ways with the privileges that Courtney has already named, yet my identity as a queer woman means that I live in the intersections of privilege and oppression. I must acknowledge that I am still privileged within the LGBTQ+ community because of my skin colour, ability, education status, and the fact that I identify with the gender I was assigned at birth. Yet I experience discrimination and oppression in society because of my orientation. Today, because of the personal work of counselling and healing relationships with other LGBTQ+ people and allies, I can confidently and openly tell you that I am a queer Christian who is beloved by God. This is a sentence that I could not have written several years ago because of the tremendous fear I carried over judgment from others who believe I am condemned, as well as for fear of losing job opportunities, friendships, and church community. Furthermore, there are those within the Christian faith who believe that my identity and relationship are incongruent with a life in pursuit of Christ and would seek to disqualify me from any role I might play in ministry.

My lived experience as a queer person provided a lens through which I conducted research for this project. I was encouraged that nearly all of the practitioners we met with identified the struggles and issues facing LGBTQ+ individuals in Toronto and affirmed their belovedness, though I still had some anxiety whenever they first brought up the topic. For the interviews where some did not seem to understand or affirm LGBTQ+ people, I had to work harder to not disengage from the conversation. This is a challenge which Courtney did not face.

Each location we preside in today is fraught with complexities of privilege and some restrictions; it is from this awareness that we now enter this conversation of justice in the city of Toronto. We hope through the recognition of these identity positions, you will better engage with the thoughts and stories we share in this dialogical narrative.

Millennials and Justice

Since both of us were born between 1980 and 2000, we are considered to be millennials. This means we have been shaped by the internet and social media, the after-effects of 9/11, the 2008 recession, and various activist movements. It is our generation who are now entering the

workforce of Toronto.⁴ Research shows that in comparison to previous generations, we are much more confident and assertive as we start work.⁵ Confidence is a good thing, but it can breed arrogance. I've come to see how important it is to learn from the knowledge and experience of past generations, lest we think we know it all. It won't be long before our generation will dominate the workforce, so what does our particular age bracket need to be aware of as we take up the mantle? And when it comes to the pursuing of justice, how can we build on the past generation, continue the good work that is happening, and find our place in seeking the peace of our city?

This project began with **David Walsh's** desire for people of our generation to gather an understanding, appreciation and awareness of the social justice work that has gone on in Toronto up until today. The history is rich and the people who read this paper should do some further research into that story of faithfulness. We can't know where we're going unless we know where we've been as a movement. **Michael Polanyi** from the Children's Aid Society, asked our generation, "Do you know the history of collective action?" Are we able to recognize what has happened before and learn from that moving forward? I think it is important for people in our generation to know that our passion for justice is not new. We are not breaking new ground here. There are people in our midst who have struggled for justice and are still working day by day for the good of our most marginalized neighbours. We need to learn and glean everything that we can from them so that when it's our turn to step up - and the time is now - we are educated. To ignore the wisdom of this generation is foolishness and ingratitude.

One of the most encouraging outcomes of this project was seeing how many millennials are passionately working for justice in the city. Yet, as we were discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit for justice, we began asking the ways our generation could positively and negatively respond to the injustices of our city. What are the gaps and blind spots particular to our confident, technologically savvy generation? I surprised myself by my thirst for people's thoughts on our millennial generation! Of these comments, what stood out most to you, Becca?

So if we weren't personally convicted by at least twelve other points in our interviews, then this was definitely the place. A key caution that I pulled out has to do with getting into bed with the empire. There could be opportunity for us to get caught up in the culture that sometimes values the number of followers we have over the content we are delivering to them. Even in social justice work, we should ask ourselves if we are pursuing what is trendy and easy, or what is actually necessary for real change. Are we challenging authorities and calling them to account or trying not to make too big a wave in order to retain a favourable reputation? In our pursuit of justice, we can't be swallowed up by political parties or the power that arises from trying to gain influence in order to make a change. I'm not sure that this is unique to our generation, but

⁴ Smith, Travis J. and Tommy Nichols, "Understanding the Millennial Generation," *Journal of Business Diversity* 15, no. 1 (2015): 39

⁵ Ibid, 40

seeking status and power is certainly not absent amongst millennials, even when it comes to so-called “justice” work. But, losing sight of our vision and goals because we are trying to gain prominence in our field misses the point. Let us make sure we are not just doing what is popular and easy, but actually what is right and serves the needs of our poorest neighbours.

Nimble, but rooted

*There was a generous appreciation for our generation’s unbridled enthusiasm. **Phyllis Novak**, the founder and executive director of Sketch, put it this way: “Young people stand at the fork in the road with a nimbleness and fluidity to intuit the past and imagine the future.” I loved that. What a beautiful understanding of the gifts we have to offer. There is an intuitive ability to grasp what justice means for the people around us. I think she is referring also to the readiness of our generation to take new steps into the unknown. This nimbleness and fluidity speak to our desire to learn new things and try them out, and to not be stuck in the way things have always been done.*

Yet this quality of unbridled enthusiasm prompted a strong caution from many people we interviewed, which more or less boiled down to “get rooted.” In order to enact nimbleness and fluidity well, we must be a generation that is connected to community. We need to know the support of relationship to keep going. We need people around us to keep us accountable. Justice doesn’t happen outside of relationship. We need to be a generation sustained by the people around us. Justice work in Toronto is not about going at it alone.

***Greg Paul** is the Pastor of the Sanctuary community. He commended us to commit to a people and place. He said our generation’s biggest issue is committing to one community. And I’d agree! Since undergrad I have been moving all over the place! As I’ve been talking with my friends about this need to be committed to a place and a people, there has been some strong push back. We live in a climate where it is difficult for any of us to hold onto jobs; we have unpaid internships, part-time jobs without benefits, and housing prices are prohibitive in Toronto. But I think the ethos or the spirit behind Greg’s encouragement is apt. We do need, as far as we are able, to choose a community, a neighbourhood and then commit, stay, and invest. When we commit to one community for an extended period of time, we put down roots, and our identity is tied up with that place and those particular neighbours. If justice has to do with the restoration of relationships, then there can be little justice without such a commitment to a particular community. We need to get out of the addiction to immediate gratification that technology has taught us and realize that justice work takes time. It takes commitment. And this is a sacrifice for many of us, especially for someone like me with wanderlust!*

We need to ask ourselves, are we willing to sacrifice? Are we actually willing to lay down our lives and follow through on our commitment? **Joanna Manning** is an Anglican priest who was working out of All Saints Anglican Church at Sherbourne and Queen. She asked us this question: “How are you making use of your privilege?” If we are at least aware of our privilege and can name it, what are we going to do with it? How does being aware of our privilege incur a responsibility to refuse complicity in oppressive systems? What does that look like? How are we actually going to use our privilege to change systems and structures? I don’t think the answers to

this are always easy to implement. It's going to make us uncomfortable and cost us something. I think that's where commitment to community comes into play again. We need our communities to work this out with us and to be a place that is gentle with us as we learn.

One thing we can do is to get a clear picture of our financial privilege. Sanctuary's executive director, **Alan Beattie**, encouraged us to recognize that our "normal is actually excess and we need to give from our excess." So many of us believe we are not financially secure, or that our "normal" is just getting by with what we have. This leads us to be blind to our privilege - our excess. But if we can realize that we really do live with excess and that we are still called to generosity, then we can make giving from our "normal" a recurrent act of justice.

*Midway through this journey, we began thinking about what justice looked like across the different initiatives with marginalized peoples in the city. With each encounter we had, we inevitably were given a parable-like phrase that enabled us to identify the justice happening within that particular community: justice looks like a man/a woman/a teenager that I know. It was **Angie Hocking** from the Church of the Redeemer who inspired this description of justice in Toronto. This language began articulating for us what we were discerning together. The notion that justice looks like someone directed us to relationship as the centre of justice in our city. These stories spoke of people's belonging and acceptance, their imaginative expression and creative engagement, as well as their ownership and participation within a community. Yet not all stories bore witness to these times of restorative connection. In fact, the greatest need seemed to be revealed in their absence. That's when we realized that we were within a city suffering from a poverty of relationship and an epidemic of loneliness. The Spirit's presence was in renewing people to relationship. The next question naturally would be, how does the church today and the next generation of tomorrow move with the Spirit in the restoration of relationships and the building of communities of healing?*

I think it all boiled down to virtually one of the first things **Mary Jo Leddy** from Romero House said to us: "You shouldn't be involved in justice if you don't have a friend who's poor." Indeed, friendship is at the heart of Romero House. Refugees who live in that community are not clients, they are friends and neighbours. A common theme we witnessed throughout our conversations was that lack in relationships can lead to different kinds of poverty. If we are people who are going to seek justice then where are our friends who are poor? Where are our friends who are disenfranchised? Who are we suffering with and walking with through life, who in turn walk with us through our really hard things?⁶

Suffering alongside

⁶ Mary-Jo Leddy's book, *The Other Face of The Other Face of God: When the Stranger Calls us Home* (Orbis, 2011) bears witness to the reciprocity of seeking justice in relationships of mutual care. So also does Greg Paul's moving book, *Twenty Piece Shuffle: How the Rich and the Poor Lead Each Other Home* (David C. Cook, 2008).

*It was actually this word suffering that deeply resonated with me. By the end of our project we were sitting down with **Mary-Jo Luddy** and **Jenn McIntyre** from Romero House where refugee claimants find a home and support as they go through the refugee review process and transition into Canadian life. Rather than focussing on oppression to articulate the pain and struggle of refugee claimants, the folks at Romero House find that the language of suffering enables them to more deeply be with their residents. Refugee claimants may flee from their countries of origin for fear of persecution because of race, religion, political opinion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. To pack your valuables and spend every last penny you own to leave your country, never to return again is an extremely traumatic and earth-shattering decision to be forced to make! But rather than speak about this experience with the word “oppression,” Romero House has found the word suffering to better articulate what it means to live through this kind of trauma together. **Jenn McIntyre** said, “Suffering acknowledges that hard things are hard. Sometimes no matter how hard we want to fix them, they are still going to be hard and so we have to learn how to figure out survival through suffering with each other.” It is this suffering that leads us into compassion, love, and justice for the people who are most vulnerable. It is a powerful way to think about being with others. We suffer with and alongside each other.*

“Self” or Community Care?

Jenn McIntyre also remarked on the popular talk of self-care to sustain yourself in justice work. We asked many interviewees about self-care, but Jenn reframed this language by thinking of community care. If we are going to suffer alongside others, we need a form of community care. When we are in relationship with and working alongside people who are experiencing intersecting marginalities and barriers to justice on a daily basis, Jenn said we need “to be deeply rooted spiritually or it will crush you.” We need to be a community of neighbours with a mutuality of care. **Angie Hocking** talked about how the millennial generation needs to have their unbridled enthusiasm fostered in a community of support. We need to rely on each other because the hard things are too hard for one person to deal with, regardless of how much self-care exercises you might engage in.

*Yes, we have to do this together. Suffering requires relationship, support and understanding; it requires somebody to look at you and say, “I see you. I see the pain. I see the hurt and I'm going to be with you through it.” **Greg Paul** gave us this miraculous vision of justice for Toronto: “To see people living in homes, free of addictions and infirmity, treated well by their government and society at large; people living clean and dignified lives receiving the proper support for mental health and addictions; people who know we are forgiven, beloved, precious in the sight of God and the Church will know who matters in the Kingdom of God.” **Mary-Jo** believes this generation can be a part of change like this. She said to us, “You millennials have everything it takes and everything you need to begin. So go and do it.”*

In addition to that, **Mary-Jo** said, “A change will come when people say, yes we do! And we don't have to wait for something to be done.” Which plays into the third big takeaway from our conversation at Romero House. Suffering, community care and ... calling. **Mary-Jo** impressed

upon us that we as young people in the Church need to hear this as a personal call. I need to hear the call to justice; a call to be open, to be radical and to actively resist a culture of isolation and loneliness. This isn't a matter of professionalizing compassion and justice so all of this becomes a job for those with a specific vocation to justice. Rather, this is a call that we all must hear and obey. We cannot wait for other people to do things that we see need to be done. Each of us carries the responsibility to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our whole lives. To not do so is a profound failure in our relationships with our neighbours, ourselves, and God.

*That was an amazing conversation with **Jenn and Mary-Jo**. From this one talk we were given three huge takeaways: 1) suffer alongside the poor, 2) seek out community care to sustain ourselves and 3) hear a personal call from God on your life. Relationship is at the core of each of these encouragements. If we heed these words, would we not be subverting Toronto's greatest poverty - the poverty of relationship in a climate of loneliness?*

Justice and the Church

At the start of our research, Becca was keen to see how the Spirit was moving in a special way towards justice amongst churches. I had expected to see justice playing out among a particular people group of the city, but your observation led us to consider how well the Church at large was responding to the Spirit's justice movement. What were some of the key highlights you gleaned from interviews on the readiness of the Church for justice work in the city?

I found it encouraging that while people had a lot of ideas around what the Church could or should be doing, we also heard from churches and communities around the city who were actively engaged in their neighbourhoods in pursuing justice.

Yes, each of the people we interviewed are presently working in their own contexts, exegeting their neighbourhoods, assessing who is around them and what is happening to them! But we wanted to see the connection of their work to the larger sense of the Church in Toronto.

So we began to deliberately ask how the people we were interviewing, and their organizations, felt about partnering with Toronto churches. How might church communities more actively partner for justice in the city today. In light of what we had come to see about loneliness and the poverty of relationships it was striking that **Mark Groleau** from Abundant Toronto and the "wikigodpod" podcast said that "the church should catalyze Christians to bring unloneliness and ultimately Jesus to those who are experiencing loneliness." The church has this massive potential - because the church is people - to reach out and become good neighbours and bring unloneliness to their neighbourhoods. Similarly, **Dion Oxford** from the Salvation Army's Causeway program insists that, "The opposite of homelessness is community." It's not housing, it's community. Now to be sure, Toronto needs housing, but the idea that a lack of authentic community is leaving people homeless can be a massive thing to get your head around. What does that say to the Church?

There were so many times that I was tempted to reply to all this with a quick, “Easier said than done!” Because it really is easier to talk about this stuff than to do it. It is really hard to love people by suffering with them as their indefinite community! It takes a lot of effort and intentionality. Jesse Sudirgo from Yonge Street Mission cautioned us by asking, “Are you ready for this?”

That was a big one.

Yeah. “Are you actually ready for this? ‘cause it’s messy.” It’s dirty, sweaty, and bloody. Are you ready for it?

Brad Sider, who works with Circles of Support through the Mennonite Central Committee with folks who have a history of sex-offence said, “God loves people. That’s just it. Either you get on board with that or you move away from it.”

Oh my goodness! If that doesn’t shake you to the core! God loves sex-offenders. God loves people. Throughout this research project, I’ve found myself realizing I don’t love this big. I see my limitations here, but recognize that Jesus’ love really is as big as the need demands and I am continually invited to love the people around me. And maybe part of this comes from receiving love from God and hearing the words that I am his beloved. I think that has been the start for me in moving beyond my own inability and incapacity to love the way that Jesus does.

I haven’t been able to get a line out of my head from our talk with former Yonge Street Mission director, **Rick Tobias**: “Every society has the level of poverty that they’re willing to tolerate.” This is true for the Church. What I learned was that when the Church loves charity, we create relationships of dependency. **Dion Oxford** also talked about how the Bible doesn’t let us blame other people for their poverty. So this is not just a society problem, it is also a Church problem. He is saying, if you are following Christ, if you are the Church, you don’t have an option to blame people for their poverty because you are suppose to be people who are sharing with each other so that no one goes without; so that no one has any need.

And then Joe Abbey-Colborne - who is the man behind Faith in the City, this beautiful interfaith action organization - starts exegeting the story commonly known as the parable of the Good Samaritan. We can’t summarize this, it was so good. Joe tells the story like this:

The teacher of the religious law asks Jesus, “What’s the greatest commandment?”

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

And who’s my neighbour?

So Jesus tells this story that we call “The Good Samaritan.” Jesus never called it that. Jesus just told a story.

There was a man and he was beaten up; he was left for dead on the side of the road, stripped naked with no clothes to identify what culture he comes from. All the people he thinks would help him - the Levite and the priest - pass by him on the other side of the road. But a Samaritan has pity on him and helps him. Not because the injured man on the road is another Samaritan: he doesn't know who he is! He just helps him.

And then Jesus turns and says to the lawyer, “Who is the neighbour to the man on the road?” He doesn't say, “Who did the Samaritan see as his neighbour?” It's not about the Samaritan, it's about the man on the road. The person that Jesus wanted the lawyer to identify with was not the Samaritan - he knew the religious lawyer would never identify with the Samaritan anyway - he wanted him to identify with the man on the road. Who was the neighbour? You want to know who your neighbour is? Who's the neighbour to man on the road?

The guy says, “The one who helped him.”

Right. “Go and do likewise.”

Go and do what? Go and help other people?

Well no! That would be the answer to the question, “Who did the Samaritan see as his neighbour?” The Samaritan was willing to help anybody. We knew that. The question is how desperate is the one on the side of the road? Is he willing to receive care from anyone, even someone who is of a different faith, religion, tradition or culture? Are you willing to receive from them? If you are, then you know who your neighbours are.

Rather than being people who bandage everyone on the side of the road, Joe's telling of this story compels us as the Church to identify with need; to identify with the one left for dead in desperate need of a neighbour. It is as if Jesus in this story is crushed by the teacher's question “Who is my neighbour?” because it indicates the teacher's own lack of need. What does it mean when we don't need anyone because we're on top? It means we haven't experienced the kind of desperation that receives help from those we least expect.

Another temptation to arrogance for all of us, but maybe heightened with a generation of such affluence. If we are going to be in a mutual and reciprocal relationships, mutually beneficial friendships as **Dion Oxford** described it, we are required to identify our needs and allow other people to meet those needs. One-way compassion is charity. Justice is found in the mutuality of compassionate relationships.

This brings us back to commitment to place and to a sense of parish. Mutual relationships, this deeply biblical sense of neighbourliness only happens with a commitment to a particular neighbourhood. We saw good examples of this in some of the church communities that

we visited. **Maggie Helwig** at the church of St Stephen's-in-the-Field said, "Whether or not you go to this church, this church has a relationship with you." The people in Kensington Market know this church is their church whether or not they attend. Maggie leaves the door open whenever she's there for people to come in. While we were sitting there talking to her, several people came in asking for things, or just came in off the street for a quick chat. They are a church of their neighbourhood. The Sanctuary community is the same. **Greg Paul** said that Sanctuary understood from the beginning that St. Jamestown is their neighbourhood and "whoever is in it belongs to our community." They have community ownership where they are planted.

Maggie also told us about the church of the worthless people.

I was just about to go there.

Oh well go ahead then. Tell us about the church of the losers!

There is so much in this for us to hear. There seems to be a real and noticeable fear within the church to reach beyond people they would typically view as safe for their communities. Anglican priest and member of the Wine Before Breakfast community, **Jacqueline Daley** said, "The church needs to have eyes to see the oppressed not based on just who they're comfortable with." **Jesse Sudirgo** spoke about the fear in bringing street involved youth into the church - what if they start a ruckus and how do we deal with it? **Jake Aikenhead** of the Gateway homeless shelter asked, "What would it take for people to just go into their communities and move past the fear?" **Erinn Oxford** from the Dale offered a helpful way to frame an answer to Jake's question saying, "The beatitudes are true. There is a blessedness in broken things." **Maggie Helwig** likewise said, "Being a church of the losers and misfits is beautiful." We mustn't lose sight of the fact that we are to be a church of the beatitudes, of the upside down idea that the ones that society does not see as blessed actually are the blessed. Blessed are they who are despised, who have no place in popular society, don't fit in established religion, and are voiceless in the halls of power.

Justice and the unity of the Church

When we are talking about being a church of the losers and the beatitudes, it is not as if we are valourizing the state of being poor. We are not somehow inherently closer to God because we are poor. Rather, we see God moving close to the brokenhearted and oppressed, to the poor, widow and orphan; we see God resisting the poverty and the oppression that creates it. And by being a church of the losers and misfits, we will inherently be a messy conglomeration of misfits. The subsequent question is then how can we be together across our differences?

Rick Tobias really challenged me by suggesting the next step to justice is through Church unity. He said, "In order to have a conversation on justice, the Church will have to commit itself to unity that is beyond agreement. The Church will have to give itself permission to disagree with each other and still move together." Part of the response to justice is figuring out what it even means to be the Church! In John 17:21, Jesus prays "... that all of [those who follow him] may

be one, Father, as you are in me and I am in you.” Only in such unity is the glory, love and oneness of Jesus and the Father known in the world. If we want to do justice, we as believers must figure out how to be together across differences as misfits and losers and as people who hold different political and theological opinions. This was such a challenge from Rick!

And he said that the wider we draw our circles of inclusion, the more likely we will do justice.

And also, the tighter the circle is, the harder it will get.

I think that’s important for the Church to recognize. Where are we excluding people? Where are we dismissing people because they don’t look like us? If we are drawing our circles of inclusion wider, we are going to find places in the margins where restoration and justice are needed. Yet as we draw wider circles, we know that some people will react with self-exclusion. It is going to take a lot of hard work to remain unified and active when discomfort reveals itself and we find ourselves, for whatever reason, next to people we are uncomfortable with. I heard Rick saying that our deepest unity is found when we are practicing justice together. We may disagree on various theological doctrines, but surely if we follow the Jesus of the Nazareth Manifesto, we can be united over something like the fact that people need housing, that we need to be a society that welcomes refugees, that protects its eco-systems, that resists racism, sexism, human trafficking and homo/trans phobia. The unity of the church will never be found in theological agreement. But it may well be deepened and furthered more meaningfully in a shared mission of justice.

Didn’t James say that true religion was a matter of caring for orphans and widows in distress (James 1.26)? We should never let dogma get in the way of justice. Otherwise we’re preoccupied with the matters of disagreement between ourselves and unable to cooperate to bring about good things like affordable housing in the city!

Tolerance?

So do we need to be more tolerant with each other’s theological differences?

Well, yes and no. Rick also talked about the paradox of tolerance: in order to uphold tolerance, we need to be intolerant to intolerance. I don’t know, maybe tolerance is the wrong word. "I've heard the word hospitality used to replace the baggage of tolerance - an idea I'm still mulling over. But there is an assumption with hospitality that inhospitable behaviour is unacceptable. Same thing with people’s views, even views of justice. For example, when it comes to Israel and Palestine mainline and evangelical churches have very different opinions on who the oppressed are in the conflict. What do we do when we have two completely different understandings of what oppression is, and therefore two conflicting views of what justice requires?

Or let’s talk about the disturbing resurgence of fascism, racism, white supremacy, and bigotry that is declaring itself daily. I don’t think that we should tolerate or be hospitable to these views,

at all! When it comes to something like white supremacy, I don't believe we need to agree to disagree. We need to declare such an ideology as false and violent. This is where the paradox of tolerance really comes into play. In order to be a tolerant society we can't tolerate hate speech and action. There has to be a line. Because we want everyone to be safe, welcome, and flourishing, there is an intolerance to anyone who would want otherwise.

I think it's hard for some in our generation to draw those lines of tolerance vs. intolerance. We don't like drawing lines. We have difficulty deciding on absolutes. But in the present cultural climate those lines need to be drawn - which is kind of scary.

I don't know. I think even with our discomfort with "absolutes" our generation actually does a decent job at drawing certain kinds of lines. Precisely because we've lived and witnessed the intolerance of the generations before us, we are more likely to say that's not acceptable. I think we make space for more people and their differences. We are more likely to call people out when they start drawing lines of exclusion. As a queer woman, I'm sensitive to intolerant exclusion, but I'm happy to see so many of my cisgender, straight friends standing as allies with the LGBTQ+ community. It's true that many of us are uncomfortable with declaring absolute truth. We know that pretty much everything lives in a shade of grey. But we also won't put up with oppression.

It was interesting how people engaged with the question of defining oppression. We got similar answers. A lot of people talked about oppression being systems and structures that are designed and work to continually marginalize people. I'm really glad that people didn't shy away from naming those systemic oppressions, which include racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, economic barriers, mental health stigma, and isolation among a myriad of other ones. People tended to also give a definition of oppression that was super personal to the people they were working and living with. Most of the people we spoke to work for organizations or live in communities that have a specific oppression they are aiming to combat in the city, whether that is homelessness, housing, food security, or something else.

Oppression and Food Security

*Their responses came from a close and firsthand assessment of the people in their neighbourhoods. Flemingdon Park, for example, is an isolated food desert which has shaped what **Beverley Williams** and the Flemingdon Park Ministry do through community gardens to address food security. As a food desert, the people living in Flemingdon Park have little to no access to stores and restaurants that provide healthy and affordable food. A simple Google Maps search makes this apparent. The two grocery stores closest to Flemingdon Park are Real Canadian Superstore and Food Basics, neither of which are in the immediate neighbourhood. In fact, to get to Food Basics you need to walk across a high traffic bridge spanning the Don River. With a car you'd be able to manage grocery shopping at Food Basics, but if you had to walk, Google Maps predicts a minimum of 18 minutes for residents living on the closest corner of Flemingdon Park. That doesn't account for people living on the far north eastern corner! So realistically, Food Basics is only accessible for families with cars, especially in inclement*

weather. That's a justice issue of accessibility and mobility. The geographical layout results in food insecurity, or the struggle to make sure one has adequate and accessible nutrition for the surrounding community. We have to think of the elderly walking home with heavy bags of food through icy snow in the winter. It's just not safe. Working for justice in the neighbourhood, Beverley Williams has sought to address food insecurity by introducing community gardens and hosting community meals in the centre. The specific oppression that is experienced in the community shapes what justice looks like in the neighbourhood.

Looking at how different organizations did meals with community members was also something that demonstrated how they understood oppression in their neighbourhood. Those who held a deep understanding of the poverty of relationships spoke about how their meals address the experience of isolation and loneliness. Serving meals family style, where everybody sits around together and serves each other, is important for creating a sense of belonging rather than having someone do it for you. We went to places where they were served meals by volunteers and I think people there would communicate a different sense of ownership of their community. Those who are cooking together, passing plates around the table, and getting to sit beside people they know seem to communicate more of a sense of community in contrast with those who have people coming to provide a service for them where they are only recipients of charity. Again, it is a matter of breaking down the client/service provider dichotomy.

Absolutely. Meal styles really do reflect the different understandings of how to address poverty. In a city with so much disconnectedness, poverty is a force of deep social and emotional isolation. And a program that feeds people can inadvertently deepen a sense of isolation and shame. Much depends on dinner, and much depends on how dinner is shared together.

One of my favourite images was when **Beverley Williams** talked about how justice looked like stewed rhubarb. One day, the kitchen was stewing rhubarb grown from their garden. The smell reminded one man of his mother's cooking when he was growing up. He then said, "I have hope now." Hope in stewed rhubarb! After not having experienced hope in a while, he felt at home because of the work they were doing. Remembering this smell of home, gave him the hope that he was not alone and that home still existed for him. He had a place where he could belong.

We met the same kind of thing when we visited **Erinn Oxford** and the people at the Dale. At the Dale they enjoy family style lunches. Erinn says that they welcome people to take part in the community in a way that is most helpful to them. This is a community that is built around sitting at a table.

During our time at the Dale, we sat at a table eating in this family style and this lovely woman shared with us how difficult her day had been. She started talking about her medication. I could see the weight of the day she was carrying around with her. She was not hiding. She was vulnerable and raw. It was a privilege just to share lunch with her and ask, "Wait, have you got your drink yet?" It caused me to check in with myself - to see how I was doing and where I was at myself. She made a comment on my nail polish colour and I told her, "On my hard days, I like to paint my nails. It is a little thing, but still gives me a smile." It was a simple, yet beautiful

exchange. From one hard day to another, family eating makes these kind of meaningful exchanges ripe and available. They break down isolation and are a salve for loneliness. Erinn said that the “community acknowledges their collective brokenness and then journey together towards collective healing.” And this was painfully evident especially in light of the community's loss of a number of people. Bearing the grief of death, the community suffers together. Each week the same people come back together and repeat the meal, share their life's vulnerability and move on. That is the justice seen there at the table, through the breaking of bread together community is formed, a safe space is established and there is a possibility for collective healing.

Yes, that is it - justice at the table. It was so clear to us that there was a caring culture at the Dale because these people had built authentic relationships at table together. Justice begins to happen when people are allowed to be themselves and connect with others in meaningful ways. Loneliness meets community, harshness meets care, shame is replaced with dignity and disdain is countered with a deep and loving respect.

Complicity

Another key point on oppression that came up was the internalized or personal oppression people feel. **Jacqueline Daley** said some things that were really impactful for me at the beginning of our research. She said that, “Oppression is blindness to your privilege and blindness to your impact on the other.” As a person who experiences a lot of privilege in Toronto, I need to be constantly asking myself where my blindness is causing me to participate in the oppression of others. How am I complicit in the system? I can't just blame society, government or policy when I am blind to my own privilege.

Jacqueline also said, “Oppression is really popular and even the oppressed are skilled at it.” We have a knack for internalizing the oppression that the dirty systems of our society put upon us only to turn around and oppress others so we can feel powerful. That's something I have felt convicted to continuously check for myself. So for example, Courtney, you've been living with a traumatic brain injury which means that there are certain ways this world does not help you. The way society is expecting you to function right now is not always possible, but you still have to examine the privileges you have when it comes to getting care for your injury. This is where we need to acknowledge the reality of intersectionality. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, is a term that refers to the overlapping social identities one may have and the related systems of oppression that impact them.⁷ This means that you could be experiencing oppression because of certain identities you hold, while still receiving privilege from others. So as a queer person myself, I understand a fraction of the marginalization of some of the folks that we spoke to, but I need to pay attention to the other people in my own community that don't get to access the privileges that I have because I am a white, cis, and relatively well-off woman. I am capable of complicity in oppressing others even though I myself am still marginalized. And that is sobering.

⁷ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color". *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299.

We witnessed this level of conviction amongst all the people we met. Understanding something of our complicity builds in us a greater sensitivity and ability to love, to see and hear the suffering and the pain of the people around us who are not afforded the kind of privileges that we simply take for granted.

Recognizing our own privilege means that we need to be willing to give up that power and redistribute the wealth that we have been given in whatever form that is. There is never a redress of oppression without someone giving up their privilege in one way or another.

Kind of sounds like Jesus.

You think?

And let's admit it. This is hard. Giving up our own privilege is a kind of suffering. It's not easy to part with our privileges, but when we do we become the kind of people that resonate with need. We set aside our own privileges so that we can be helped on the side of the road by our neighbours. Which leads us into how interviewees viewed and defined justice in their own contexts; what does it look like to suffer with the people we are working with?

Justice, Compassion and Politics

In our conversations we picked up more varied perspectives on justice varied than we found concerning oppression. Maybe that is because the notion of “justice” seems like an abstract principle, but oppression always has a particular face. Most of the time people would describe justice by using a story of how they have seen it in their work, which I think speaks again to how personal and relational justice is. I mean, we are speaking about social justice, so it is social - it happens in relationships. **Greg Paul** said, “Justice is in the context of relationships and you do the next thing because you realize the people you love need it.”

Which I think is important to note because we can often get caught up in how new and unknown justice work can feel to us when we are just getting started. Greg Paul's comment helps us approach justice first through the people that exist in our neighbourhood. What is happening in your neighbourhood? Who are the people coming into your church? What is their life situation? Where are they struggling? Or perhaps more importantly, who isn't coming to your church? Who is hidden from your sight? Where are the relationships that you don't have but are called to develop?

Greg Paul also said, “Exegete your community.”

Exactly. Study the neighbourhood from street level. When that happens we don't have to be so afraid. Who is on the street? Where does the recent refugee family live? Where are the points of tension in the community? Who is hurting? Rather than becoming overwhelmed with the myriad

of aspects of justice that we discuss here, thinking about justice through the lens of relationships gives us the freedom to make the changes as change encounters us.

Rick Tobias gave us an understanding of justice work that he breaks down into two separate things. I know this conversation resonated with you.

Yes. This was particularly powerful for me. Rick says that often when church folk speak about justice, they are talking about what he calls “compassionate intervention.” This work addresses the present, immediate needs of people by feeding, sheltering or inviting people in. He mentioned how the church, especially the evangelical church, in Toronto excels at compassionate intervention. Yet the majority of people that we talked to who are working in shelters, drop-in centres and food centres expressed an inner tension within their work. You see, they know better than anyone that their work is only necessary because of inequitable and unjust systems. We would not need shelters if we did not have a homelessness crisis in the city! And often the large donors to charities that engage in compassionate intervention (such as corporations, banks and other profiting entities) are the architects of the systemic oppression in the first place! This is another reason why faith and politics is so tricky for people, because it can lead to a significant decrease in donations. But justice is not a guilt-relief valve, nor can it be reduced to charity. Real justice seeks to change the systems that make compassionate intervention a necessity. Rick put it this way: “Social justice is literally about the call to justice advocacy - holding structures and systems accountable in the delivery of fair and reasonable and equitable services.”

City Councillor **Joe Mihevc** echoed this by saying that leaders of faith communities “have the unique privilege of seeing the pain of the world and the hurts in their community, so faith people are good at being pastors, but they need to jump to advocacy.” He thinks that churches are wary of being caught up in this because advocacy “smells like politics” and that can be frightening to some and in conflict with notions of a faith/politics division for others. But there is no social change apart from advocacy. He even suggested that if congregations decided to invite city councillors to their services to speak about their platforms and policies and in return share with the councillors what they know their community actually needs, then their local politicians might be encouraged to act accordingly. By establishing a relationship with their city councillor, Joe believes that faith communities could actually influence policy. What a tool for pursuing community justice!

A really good illustration for understanding the distinction between compassionate intervention and political advocacy can be found in Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement written by Brian Walsh and Steven Bouma-Prediger. They tell a story of a church community discovering the difference between charity and justice. The story begins at a river.⁸

⁸ Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Eerdmans, 2008), 83-92. The metaphor of going “upstream” is not unique to this book. In fact, Brian Walsh acknowledges that he first heard it used by Joe Mihevc.

A church is gathered for a picnic and is disrupted by the cries of people drowning in the nearby river. The church responds to these cries of distress by jumping in and pulling these people out of the water only to hear more cries coming down the river. They continue to pull people out of the water and before long there is a crowd of soaking wet survivors in shelters next to overworked and/or disgruntled church goers. The work done to rescue these people is Rick's equivalent to compassionate intervention - the work Toronto churches are actively doing. But of course the story does not end here.

Some people begin asking why so many people were floating down the river to begin with. It is this investigation that brings us to an understanding of what Rick calls justice. So they began to investigate upstream to see why so many people ended up in this river. The further upstream this church goes, the more complex the story becomes. Housing is precarious for those unable to find employment due to the effects of globalization. Employment income fails to support single parents. The de-institutionalization of mental health patients has put more people with mental health problems on the street. There has been a weakening of the social safety net, social housing stocks are inadequate to meet the need, and there aren't even enough shelter beds. All of these realities resulted in single parents, the disabled, and working class people and others falling into the river. This investigation enables the church to identify ways to prevent more people from falling into the river and ending up on the shores of the church's picnic gatherings.

The group then begins to brainstorm strategies to combat the structures perpetuating this process. One decides to develop policy initiatives to increase unemployment benefits. Another decides to network communities to provide supportive housing for patients with mental health issues. Another joins a movement calling for more just international trade agreements. And another decides to run for elected government to be a leader who spearheads the kinds of changes his friends were ready to support. Justice comes into play through strategies combating institutional structures that siphon power and opportunity to the privileged few.

This story illustrates well the point that **Rick Tobias** was making.

Yes, and we found that a similar articulation of justice with most of the people we were talking to, but Rick pushed this advocacy piece as a serious place of lack within the church. The evangelical community in particular needs help taking this next step. The issues facing the homeless, youth, and newcomers we are caring for need to be brought to the municipal and provincial levels of implementation. For example, if you know that refugee claimant proceedings systemically discriminate against young men entering the country, then not only do we need to help them fill out their paperwork, we also need to address the injustice of the system itself. Unjust systems require the immediacy of compassionate intervention together with a commitment to advocacy for more just and equitable policies, laws and systems.

I think churches already know they are pretty good at compassionate intervention. But I wonder if that sometimes produces a certain level of complacency. "We are doing a good thing! Someone ate a meal today and that's great!" That attitude can keep people from asking the deeper question, "Why did they need to come here for a meal in the first place?" or "How is my own privilege blinding me from seeing why that need is present?" Like Joe Mihevc, several other people talked

about how the church can be afraid to do advocacy because advocacy smells like politics. I understand that fear, and it's good the church is actively engaged in compassion work, but can we challenge this fear and choose to take that step further into what is potentially unknown but might actually lead to real social justice for the people that we claim to love?

Yeah. Totally. We owe our neighbours more. But you know what was missing in the way that Bouma-Prediger and Walsh told their going upstream story? They never talked about race. I'm going to bet that proportionally there were more black and Indigenous folk in that river than anyone else.

Race and the Redistribution of Social Status and Place

Come to think of it, you are right. Racial justice needs to be a key part of this conversation. You and I are both white and cannot speak to the experience of people of colour. We heard from some amazing people who are at the forefront of working for racial justice and equality within their communities and the Church of Toronto. We would like to amplify their voices here.

Jacqueline Daley is a black woman and priest in Toronto, who recently worked in a parish in the Jane and Finch community. In a community like Jane and Finch which has a lot of intersecting communities, she has encountered firsthand the "colonization of the mind" - a turn of phrase made famous by Frantz Fanon whereby racialized communities internalize the language of the privileged.⁹ Within her parish there were black immigrant families from both the Caribbean and Africa. In her ministry, Jacqueline saw these groups demonstrate internalized hate through a miserable coexistence together. Ascribing to colonized evaluations of a person's worth and value, these two communities were unable to recognize their internalized racism and instead chose to pretend there were no presiding prejudices. In reality, African identities seemed to be looked down upon and diminished within the parish. This is the particular story that makes real our earlier quote from Jacqueline: "Oppression is popular and even the oppressed are skilled at it." Jacqueline also became the recipient of this kind of diminishing attitude when she felt that congregants were "waiting for the real priest to arrive." Somehow, a black, female priest couldn't be the real thing. Here Jacqueline experienced intersecting oppressions. Given this context, Jacqueline's intention towards justice meant bringing this "colonization of the mind" to light. There couldn't be healing without recognition of internalized racism. She began by inviting different voices to read Scripture at the podium than those who normally would and then invited different lay people as communion administrators. These simple actions from a resilient leader announced to the church, "This is not just a Caribbean church! It is a church of Caribbeans and Africans!" In this case, the beginning of justice had to do with uncovering the inner workings of racism so that one church with many intersections of identity could worship a loving God in unity.

I think that what Jacqueline demonstrated in her parish is another avenue to finding justice in this

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frantz_Fanon

conversation - equitable distribution. Many people talked about the equitable distribution of income, resources and also power. We heard that a lot - how power has been taken away from many, especially those who experience racial discrimination. **Ejay Tupe** from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, said that justice is “eliminating the power struggle.” But Jacqueline demonstrates that something like social power, the power of prestige and control within something as insular as a congregation, also cries out for redistribution. Let’s call this the redistribution of social capital, of place and participation, of honour and respect. I think we saw one community’s attempt at such redistribution when we went to Black Creek Farm - again, in the Jane and Finch community.

Largest Urban Farm in Ontario! Leticia gave me kale seeds!

Yeah! **Leticia Boahen**, the director of the farm, said food security is an issue of justice they are trying to pursue. But they realize that the farm is not a solution to the intense food security needs of Jane and Finch. They hope the farm can be a centre of belonging, building, and pushing against the systemic barriers facing the community. The farm doesn’t only provide access to fresh produce at a just price, it is also a community hub, where people can gather, share, learn, and organize together. I think it is really beautiful that she sees their work in urban agriculture as an opportunity for people to come together and use their collective power to change and get rid of the barriers they face. Justice is happening here as people are connecting back to the land and to their neighbours, while meeting real needs.

Indigenous Peoples

*We also heard from **Sandra Campbell** (Toronto Urban Native Ministry) who gave us a great First Nations perspective on what justice looks like. She said that just relations need to be found in our relationship with creation, the Creator, each other, and the self. And, there needs to be a new relationship of justice with Indigenous communities.*

Sandra called us to recognize the pain and harm that the Church has brought to Indigenous communities and the important work of establishing just relations in that healing process. She impressed upon us the need to be in right relationships ourselves if we want to be agents of justice in relation to anyone else. We must establish right relations with the Creator and creation. This means recognizing the biblical call to stewardship and healing through creation, together with repentance and working for the renewal and protection of the land. Furthermore, as settlers we need to be active in pursuing reconciliation. I imagine that starts with listening to Indigenous experience and centring their knowledge in the conversation. Sandra said that from an Indigenous perspective, individuals have to do their own healing work first before they can help other people on their journey. Each Indigenous person has their own inner healing work to do especially when it comes to the residential school system, its after effects, and the Church’s role. Sandra believes that there is an extreme need for Indigenous role models, and specifically more ordained Indigenous clergy to walk with people. Spiritual mentoring through one-on-one interactions need to be led by Indigenous leaders in order to end the cycle of colonial religion.

Sandra and her colleagues at Toronto Urban Native Ministry are doing important work by being out in their community and advocating for their community in churches around the city. I know there is so much more we need to learn from our Indigenous siblings in Christ.

We finished this conversation with Sandra by walking to Tim Hortons on Parliament and Dundas. I sat with her a while in the sunshine chatting with neighbours passing by as we sipped our tea and coffee. She introduced me to one activist working for the much anticipated Council Fire's Youth Pow Wow at the end of the summer. It was one of those moments of discovering the excellent interconnected community of social justice workers in Toronto. Throughout the entirety of our research we continued to see a tight knit relationship amongst justice workers in the city which is encouraging for future work. We often heard this referred to as "the loop". Even when we left this loop, we heard similar insights on justice in the city. I especially think of Abdul-Hai Patel, a Toronto District School Board Trustee and community development veteran in Flemingdon Park, who was so enthusiastic as he shared his knowledge on what has been, what is going on, and what could come through small things like our conversation and report.

I think one of the best parts was when we were finally getting to other people who had heard that we were doing the project. The news of the project had made it into the loop and people were willing to share their experiences and tell us about where they too were seeing the Spirit's work of justice. Our conversations began to form an arch with key themes and ideas that we kept hearing about which helped us in the discerning process.

I saw a shift in the ways we even approached the conversation. As we moved towards the end, we were given different images and ideas supplementing the others until we had an entirely new way of understanding how to stand alongside the poor and brokenhearted. This was a really good challenge for me. The number of times I cried in these conversations was incredible! I was so deeply moved by these people's lives, their dedication and their love for the people they live and work with.

I think that's because we got to hear stories and engage with people through a narrative of understanding of what actual life is like. It wasn't just theory. We covered theory, but we were able to talk about the actual reality of on-the-ground work and why people are even motivated to attempt this thing called social justice. And the answer to every question seemed to be relationship.

Conclusion

Our discernment process has led us to seeing justice in Toronto through relationships. Where there is injustice, a poverty of relationships is surely connected to the cause. When we have sensed the Spirit moving, it is because of relationships that are working to bring equitable distribution in power, resources, community, and dignity. If we ask where the Spirit is moving towards justice in the future, we believe the answer will come through being in relationship with those who are most vulnerable, most marginal, most left behind in our fast-paced consumer

society. We keep coming back to the challenge that we heard from **Mary-Jo Leddy**: “You shouldn’t be involved in justice if you don’t have a friend who’s poor.” Canadian Catholic philosopher and humanitarian Jean Vanier articulated the transformative power of relationship with the poor when he said:

“Yes, the broken and the oppressed have taught me a great deal and have changed me quite radically. They have helped me discover healing takes place at the bottom of the ladder, not at the top. Their cry for communion has taught me something about my own humanity, my own brokenness - that we are wounded, we are all poor. But we are all the people of God; we are all loved and are being guided. They have taught me what it means to be with brothers and sisters in communion, in community. They have revealed to me the well of tenderness that is hidden in my own heart and which can give life to others. The broken and oppressed are teaching me what the good news is really about.”¹⁰

If we as millennials want to have a meaningful impact and work for justice in the city of Toronto, where are our relationships with those suffering different kinds of oppression around us? Are we willing to ask ourselves why we don’t know them? Are we willing to address our privilege and give up power so that others can flourish? Are we willing to establish a culture of community care so we can suffer through the hard things together? Are we willing to risk our comfort in places where we are afraid? We have learned so much in this project, but at the heart of it we have come to see that injustice always creates loneliness and the breakdown of community. Could not the restoration of relationships in community be the beginning of justice? From what we’ve seen, it already is.

¹⁰ Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (Paulist Press, 2002), 23-24.

Appendix

Interviews Conducted for this Study during the Summer of 2017

Joe Abbey-Colborne, Faith in the City: July 6

Jake Aikenhead, Gateway: June 28

Alan Beattie, Sanctuary: July 12

Leticia Boahen, Black Creek Farm: Aug 10

Sandra Campbell, Toronto Urban Native Ministry: Aug 2

Jacqueline Daley, Anglican Priest: June 14

Bill Dyck, Toronto Alliance Church: June 28

Karl Gardner, No One Is Illegal: July 27

Mark Groleau, Abundant Toronto: July 28

Maggie Helwig, St. Stephen's-in-the-Field: July 5

Angie Hocking, Church of the Redeemer: July 19

Mary-Jo Leddy, Romero House: Aug 3

Joanna Manning, All Saints, Sherbourne: June 20

Jenn McIntyre, Romero House: Aug 3

Joe Mihevc, City Councillor: June 20

Phyllis Novak, Sketch: June 15

Dion Oxford, Causeway: June 19

Erinn Oxford, Dale Ministries: July 17

Abdul Hai Patel, Flemingdon Community Food Bank: July 27

Greg Paul, Sanctuary: June 13

Michael Polanyi, Children's Aid Society: July 17

James Rhee, Intentional Living Communities: July 6

Bill Ryan, Yonge Street Mission: June 15

Michael Shapcott, Holy Trinity Church: June 7

Brad Sider, Circles of Support & Accountability: July 28

Jesse Sudirgo, Yonge Street Mission: July 4

Rick Tobias, Yonge Street Mission: July 18

Ejay Tupe, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: July 18

David Walsh, (Community Counts Foundation): May 30

Beverley Williams, Flemingdon Park Ministry: Aug. 1

Events Attended

Church of the Redeemer Drop-In Program: June 8

Cahoots DIY Social Justice Festival: June 8-10

Sketch Rad Grad: June 15

Matthew House World Refugee Day Celebration: June 20

Toronto Alliance Church Community Meal: July 8

Dale Ministries Community Lunch: July 17