

LET JUSTICE ROLL!

An Occasional Newsletter Produced & Distributed
by the "Social Justice & Action Group" (SJAG)
of St. John the Divine Anglican Church - Victoria, B.C.

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"LET JUSTICE ROLL!" is intended to educate, inform and challenge readers regarding important issues and ideas at the intersection where faith and justice meet. For the most part, the themes offered here are viewed through a Christian lens. The articles chosen focus on social justice concerns that many of our parishioners already share. The short articles selected for each issue cover a diversity of topics -- *FROM* poverty/economic inequality, peace and human/LGBTQ rights, First Nations reconciliation -- *TO* environmental stewardship, refugees, racism, food security and community/international development. The political is never far away from the topics we choose to present. As Cornel West reminds us: "*Justice is what love looks like in public!*"



***"But let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness
like a never failing stream!" Amos 5:24 (NIV)***

The ideas and opinions expressed, and/or positions articulated, in this newsletter may not officially be those of the Parish and the Diocese. Your feedback is encouraged. Please address any comments to either Murray Luft (Editor) murrayrae@yahoo.com or John McLaren (SJAG Chair) jpsmamclaren@gmail.com. We also invite readers to submit provocative articles, already published or original, for inclusion in future issues of "Let Justice Roll!" . SJAG's intention is to produce this newsletter four times per year. During Covid 19, LJR is available ONLY in an on-line format via the St. John's website www.stjohnthedivine.ca, Thank you for reading LJR. M.L. Editor

LET JUSTICE ROLL #14

This issue of LJR takes on the subject of refugees, displaced people and migrants. In 2016, 600 migrants died when their boat capsized near Italy's Lampedusa Island. After this tragedy, **Pope Francis** decried the “*globalization of indifference*”, and asked the world: “*Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat?*” Recently, the Pope used the word “*parrhesia*” [“*boldness inspired by the Holy Spirit*”] to goad and guide Church and government policy-makers to action regarding the world's displaced people. *Parrhesia* is intended to inspire, motivate, and offer clear direction and robust support for the slow, difficult, often controversial, work of “*welcoming the stranger*”. For years, St. John's has acted boldly, and prophetically, in the face of refugee and migrant needs. **John McLaren's** article chronicles St. John's past refugee commitments. **Sara Chu's** feature article traces the important, but little-known, “*root causes*” of Central American asylum-seekers on the Southern U.S. border today. A number of our other articles advocate for a humane approach to all refugees and displaced people on the move in search of a better future for their children. In spite of opposition, **President Biden** announced on May 3/21 that he will raise the quota of refugees allowed into the US to 62,500 for this fiscal year, and promises 125,000 new admissions in 2022. This turnaround has been welcomed by migrant-justice advocates in the U.S. and Canada. LJR also presents a number of articles on the topic of **Covid 19**. Nicaraguan poet Gioconda Belli recently wrote: “*Solidarity is the tenderness of nations!*” Indeed, *solidarity and tenderness* are indispensable, not only for refugees and migrants, but also in the battle against Covid 19, particularly as it applies to “*vaccine equity*”. As the *Third Wave* of Covid 19 and the tragedy unfolding in India continue to afflict the world, Judy Jackson's powerful interview with **Stephen Lewis** on “*patent waivers*” is highly recommended! Our series entitled: “*Churches Walking the Talk!*” continues and incisive reflections by **Richard Rohr** book-end this issue. Once again, LJR is indebted to **Karyn Lehmann, Carol-Ann Zenger, Sara Chu and Karen Coverett** for their diverse skills in the production, roll-out and dissemination of this, our fourteenth quarterly newsletter. Enjoy your summer, folks ... and let's all double-down on COVID! We can't let-up now! M.L., Editor

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We acknowledge with respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples on whose traditional territory we work, play and worship, represented today by the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations in their continuing relationship with this land.

1.

The God of Welcome – Richard Rohr – CAC Mar. 18/21

Episcopal Priest, Rev. Stephanie Spellers*, tracks how we move from a love of self, and those like us, to a generative love for all:

Looking closely at the witness of Scripture, we see a God who not only seeks relationship and union with the creation but who reaches out intentionally for everyone, and in particular for the outcast. Regardless of how unclean, unworthy, insignificant, or marginalized we may feel or others may claim we are, the God of grace and welcome shatters every barrier to embrace us and draw us home.

Lest we think the welcome is meant for us or our group alone, the Scriptures are filled with reminders to God's chosen ones that they are not the only ones God welcomes. In Deuteronomy, Moses speaks to the Israelites as they journey from slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness. The frightened, tired and confused clan no doubt sought comfort in the knowledge that their covenant with God made them special. They soon learned that there is no rest for God's chosen ones. Instead, God's people are called out for a special mission.

The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17).

It is true that God stands with God's people through every trial, but not so that they will sit comfortably with the privilege of apparent divine favor. Now they have to stand in solidarity with, graciously receive and welcome the vulnerable ones within their community and beyond it whom they might find it most difficult to accept: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, The Other. God has done it for them. Now they are called to respond in kind, literally imitating the God who graciously welcomed them. . . .

Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see them naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6-7)

God has made it clear: if you love me you will work for liberation with the oppressed and marginalized in your midst, and you will share your home and food with those who have none. You will not hide from the brothers and sisters I have placed near you. Rather, you will actively go out to meet them and draw them to yourself, even if it is risky, even if you feel uncomfortable.

*Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (Church Publishing, Inc.: 2006), 36-38. The Rev. Stephanie Spellers is a leader in the Episcopal Church, working with Bishop Michael Curry to spread a message of God's inclusive and expansive love.

Kathy Cook**A Tribute from Sara Chu**

This is not a complete biography of our dear friend Kathryn Emily Cook, but it is an attempt to honour her memory. Kathy was one of the leaders of the combined St John's/First Metropolitan refugee support group in recent years. She died of cancer in February of 2021. Much of the information in this article was obtained from her close friend Janet Gray.

“Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
When they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesize such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.”

This poem by Wendell Berry speaks to Kathy's life. She was a soil scientist by training, so loving the soil came with intellectual layers of knowledge along with the passionate and pragmatic view that the soil was what sustained us - all of us. She took compost making very seriously and was on the board of the Victoria Compost Education Centre for at least 6 or 7 years. She cared deeply about Mother Earth and asked critical questions.

Kathy was a long-time member of First Metropolitan United Church. She was inspired by “Jesus the compassionate one – the voice of the marginalized and the oppressed – Jesus the community organizer – the justice seeker” and felt that hope and spiritual experiences happened when people cared and took part in making communities and the world a healthier safer place for everyone. She always got involved and was always caring and compassionate.

When daughter Gwyneth was young Kathy chaired the Parent Advisory Committee at her school and helped with many projects including a beautiful playground. She helped with family camp outings for the church at Shawnigan Lake, scouting camps and jamborees, political party and election day volunteering. As time went on she was a core member of the church's redevelopment task group, a member of the spiritual health and wellness team, and one of the organizers of the Dec 6th service of Remembrance and Action Against Violence Against Women. Anyone who worked with Kathy knew that details and loose ends would be taken care of by her practical approach. But Kathy was always humble about her contributions.

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When St John's and First Met formed a partnership for refugee support, Kathy was a tireless leader. Together the two churches supported many individuals and families. Kathy formed respectful, warm relationships with each refugee. She was also a master of the heaps of paperwork, teamwork and fund-raising. She made it fun. We all remember the community dances, the Big Bands, and the pie making raffles. Kathy continued personally to support many of our refugees long after the official sponsorships were finished. Kathy was an activist who said "Yes" to life.

For Kathy, growing friendships was like making compost—in layers and over time. She was always kind, intelligent, humorous, and courageous. As she faced cancer in 2020, Kathy, supported by her beloved husband Andrew, was always open and empathetic with her friends. Nine of them met weekly on line for the "Resilience Café". They talked about the Climate Crisis and concern for all human beings. Kathy shared her personal journey with many friends even when lying exhausted on her bed. She was a wonderful gift to all who knew her. She will be deeply missed by very many people. Kathy was one of finest people I have ever met.



"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 the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."
- Luke 4:18

40 Years On: Four Decades of Refugee Ministry at St. John's

Reflections By John McLaren *

Refugee support ministry has a long history at St. John's, beginning in 1979 during the Vietnamese refugee crisis. Under pressure from an alliance of Canadian faith groups, then Prime Minister Joe Clark and his Immigration Minister, Ron Atkey agreed that a private sponsorship system be created in Canada to supplement existing government sponsorships, in order to address this crisis.

Nancy Bailey recalls that we welcomed our first group, four young men, in that year. This was an initiative of the whole parish as we did not then have a support group in place. Then during the early '80s, we formed a support group to help settle two more Vietnamese families. Both were large (10 and 8 in total) and required family reunification initiatives to bring them all together in Victoria – a challenge by Nancy's account.

The sponsorship ministry has continued ever since, through to 2019. This consistency reflects strong support from our clergy, particularly from **Bob MacRae**, and from within the parish community those who have unconditionally provided money and services, and not least friendship, to the newcomers we have supported. I took on co-ordination of the support group and the program in 1991. In 2014 **Ruth Turner** assumed that role and took the initiative in forming an important partnership between St. John's and First Metropolitan United Church. **Kathy Cook** of First Met was the other leader in the joint effort. Then most recently, late in 2015, **Chris Eve** took over as the St. John's co-ordinator in partnership with Kathy, when Ruth was about to move to Metchosin. The period from 2015 to 2019 was the busiest in sponsorship activity in Canada, since the 1980s.

One of the reasons I believe I became involved in this ministry dates back to an experience I had in the early 1960s. As a student I volunteered during two summers to help build housing in Austria for former refugees. There I met other volunteers from several countries including the Netherlands and the UK, all working to help German-speaking families (*volkdeutsch*) who had fled their homes as the Red Army moved through Eastern Europe during the last year of the War. Among the things that impressed me was both the vigour of our hosts and the generosity of the volunteers working gladly with people who their parents would likely have considered enemies only fifteen years earlier.

Very early in the history of private sponsorships, it was agreed that to bring system and consistency to the process, most of these private sponsorship applications would be channelled through umbrella groups, *Sponsorship Agreement Holders*, as they became known. This was in order to supervise the application system and certify the various sponsorship groups. So the Diocese of BC became a "SAH". The Diocese appointed a coordinator to supervise the system on Vancouver Island and the islands, and liaise and advocate, where necessary, with Ottawa. Our own **Betty Miller** filled this role during the 1990s, her work extending to working with several faith groups other than Anglicans, who also wanted to sponsor. The agreement involved the SAH linking sponsors with refugees, ensuring adequate fund raising, and managing the early stages of processing applications. Once the paperwork for application had the stamp of approval by the SAH, it was sent to Ottawa. This system *usually* sped up the process. When a hiccup occurred, as it sometimes did, the Diocesan Director could and did intervene to encourage action. Betty was exceptionally adept at this.

Over the years St. John's has also worked with groups and individuals outside of our parish to support newcomers, the latest example being our alliance with **First Met United** to support families from Afghanistan, Syria, Gambia and Eritrea. In the 1990s we worked with a

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sponsorship group at Sacred Heart RC Parish to bring a family of seven, the Eros, from Nigeria to Victoria. The two groups were able to work well together in sharing the responsibilities of settling the family. More recently in the wake of the large increase of newcomers from the Middle East (particularly Syria) and northeast Africa (especially Eritrea), our efforts have been supplemented by volunteers from the community who have no other link to St. John's. Having chaired the group that recently settled a family of nine (now ten due to a childbirth), I can attest to the enormous dedication of time and effort of these people, working alongside, and with, parishioners. By way of an example of ongoing support, I should mention the remarkable contribution of our former parish gardener, **Bruce Saunders**, who has been helping that same family grow a successful and verdant vegetable garden, even though the sponsorship ended in 2019.

During the years since 1979, St. John's has sponsored refugees from many different countries (approximately 15 sponsorships and 70 individuals). We have assisted families or individuals from Vietnam, China, Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Gambia, Iraq, and Myanmar. The impulse to take on sponsorships has varied. Some sponsorships, as the Vietnam stories suggest, have involved responding to international pleas. Some sponsorships were in response to the specific requests of UNHCR, as when they wanted to resettle Iraqi Palestinians who had fled to Syria before and during 2010. Others have flowed from requests from family members of the refugees, already in Canada, or from Canadians who have met and been impressed by refugees on their travels abroad. An example of the latter was a young woman from Myanmar who we sponsored some fifteen years ago. She and her energy had caught the attention of a Victoria psychologist working with refugees in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the time, who recommended her to us.

St John's has also, on occasion, responded to pleas for help from former refugees already in Victoria, usually through local settlement agencies such as the **Inter-Cultural Association (ICA)** or **Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)**. Sometimes this has involved assistance with bringing a missing family member here. Short-term financial help has also been provided to a refugee claimant while awaiting a hearing.

Many factors contribute to a successful sponsorship. It important that members of the sponsoring group inform themselves about the state of the family's or individual's country of origin, and conditions in the immediate country of refuge. The aim is to develop, as early as possible, both political and social insight, as well as to sharpen cultural sensibilities. Connecting with and getting to know something about the particular refugees and their circumstances before their arrival is also advisable. This process can be assisted by talking with relatives already in Canada, but also, if there is a waiting period, through direct contact. We can, I think, take pride, in the fact that as matter of conviction, St. John's refugee program has never thought to avoid, let alone refuse, a sponsorship on grounds of religious or denominational affiliation, or the lack of an affiliation. Moreover, we have been very open to working with initiatives in local support communities to help bring LGBT+ refugees to Victoria.

Another important factor in success is the sponsoring group's ability to listen to, and to spend time interacting with, the newcomers. I recall being given the name "*Wahala*" by members of the large Nigerian family we supported in the '90s. Although it was the product of amused observation, I realized that in balancing the demands of my full-time job and support for the family, I was often popping in to interact with them and zipping away very quickly. This can work against understanding newcomers' feelings and concerns, as well as offending their strong impulses to hospitality. A sturdy sense of humour and an ability to recognize humour in the newcomers is very useful in refugee ministry.

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The sponsoring group and its members should be good listeners and aim to provide wise counsel to the newcomers about navigating a new system of government and living in a culture that often will seem strange. Although it is important to ensure that newcomers learn the ropes in the early days, it is imperative in the longer run to avoid seeking to micro-manage their lives. One has to balance firmness when it is needed (e.g. dealing with Canadian law and valid social expectations), and wise advice on issues of choice when that seems appropriate, while encouraging them to make their own decisions and manage their own affairs.

As Chris Eve once wisely observed, one should always be ready to be surprised in refugee ministry, for instance by complications in the lives of newcomers. On one occasion, we learned that a young man who had just arrived was, unbeknown to us and to Immigration Canada, married to a woman already accepted as a refugee in a safe, third country. Responding to the plea: "*Please bring her to Canada!*", we spent almost a year advocating on the couple's behalf on humanitarian grounds. However, just as the word came through that she was admissible, the couple decided to split up!

Contacts in the community and beyond can be extremely helpful to the success of a sponsorship. In the process of applying for and working with the immigration authorities in Ottawa, positive relations with local MPs can be very fruitful. Nancy Bailey recollects working with the then Tory MP for Victoria, Alan McKinnon in opening an avenue to the then Minister, Flora McDonald, in order to conclude a family reunification. In more recent years, Denise Savoie, Murray Rankin and Laurel Collins have all been willing to go to bat for us on specific cases. Community contacts are important in introducing the newcomers to their ethnic and cultural communities, finding housing in an overheated market, linking children to neighbourhood schools, finding employment and educational opportunities for adults, connecting with a family doctor and dentist, and so on. In recent years we have also benefited greatly from the support and advice of members of the LGBT+ community in reaching out to newcomers from that community.

Overarching all of these considerations is the gift that refugee ministry has provided to us -- the sponsors. We have learned so much from the courage, resilience and resourcefulness of the individuals and families we have been blessed to serve. They have been through, and have overcome, circumstances that it is difficult for us to imagine. Given the chance to resettle in a safe environment, they have, despite the hurdles that have often faced them, carved out lives for themselves as active and engaged members of Canadian society. Some have even been able to "give back" through assistance to their countries and region of origin. Such are the cases of Eric Sama through the Taiama Partnership, and several of the Ero children, through African NGOs. All of the sponsors over the years would, I believe, agree with the sentiments in this paragraph. Indeed, our experience of "accompaniment" has filled us with much inspiration and gratitude.

Since our last sponsorship ended in 2019, refugee sponsorship has taken a sabbatical at St. John's. As an aging congregation; we badly needed a rest from our labours! We will revive only if there is new leadership and blood in the sponsorship group. Chris Eve retired, and sadly, Kathy Cook of First Met, died in February of 2021. Thankfully, **Bill Williamson** volunteered to take on an interim coordination role in 2018, with the task of ensuring the fulfilment of our remaining refugee commitments, but the future of this ministry still confronts us. At the same time, the Diocese has put a hold on new sponsorships, pending an overall review of the ministry. Among the Diocesan concerns is a perceived waning of interest in organizing and sustaining

sponsorships (even as the demand never wavers, but continues to increase). Therefore, can the Diocese afford to sustain this ministry, at least at its present level? The future of refugee sponsorship at St. John's and elsewhere in the island's Anglican firmament is accordingly uncertain. Ironically, our recent experience with sponsorships at St. John's suggests that there may be people in the wider community ready to be involved in this work. I sense that some of these folks would answer the call to join a renewed effort. We have realized that as a shrinking faith community, our ability to make a difference on social justice and action issues depends more and more on working in consort with others also committed to those ends. What we can be sure of is that refugees will always be with us. (Indeed, given conditions in various hot spots in the world, they will surely continue to increase in numbers). Therefore, we need to think prayerfully about what importance a refugee ministry has in living a Christian life, and particularly in the context of our witness in the St. John's community.

Note: Many thanks to Sara Chu and her help as a wordsmith, and to Nancy Bailey and Betty Miller for informing me on the history of this ministry. This article is dedicated to all the newcomers we have worked with, and all those who, in one way or another, have supported this ministry over the years.
JM

* John McLaren is a long-time member of St. John the Divine and current chair of our Social Justice and Action Group (SJAG). He is a former Law Professor, a Morris dancer, music *aficionado*, and an advocate for the vulnerable in Victoria and around the world.

Whenever the church fails as a prophet it also fails as an evangelist.
- Rene Padilla - Latin American Theologian (1932-2021)



The U.S./Mexico Border Crisis - By Sara Chu *

There is now a great deal of media focus on the situation at the border between the United States and Mexico, especially regarding the unaccompanied children taken into custody. Why are they there? The majority of ordinary people in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador face the Covid pandemic and adverse weather events from climate change, but they also experience lives of political and financial horror. What is missing in the media coverage is mention of the root causes of so much migration from Central America. The United States government and resource companies are of course major players but rarely do we hear about the role Canada and Canadian mining companies in this terrible tragedy.^{1,2}

One factor in the migrant situation is that Canada still abides by the 2004 Safe Third Country Agreement whereby migrants cannot travel through the United States to apply for asylum in Canada. The Canadian federal court in July of 2020 overturned this agreement but the Liberal government is appealing.³ To make matters worse, President Trump brought in the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) which meant that asylum seekers had to wait outside the U.S. for their hearings (which take place remotely and electronically via tents in Mexico). This “protection” put the migrants in a very vulnerable position. Migrants are required to wait in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, or El Salvador for their hearings. As we will see below, waiting in any of those countries means facing many of the same horrors from which the migrants have fled. President Biden lifted this protocol in January of 2021. But Title 42, part of Trump’s policy which basically bans all migrants because of Covid precautions, remains in effect. So the result is similar.^{4,5}

Most migrants have lost their homes and have lost their money to “coyotes” who promised to help them escape persecution at home and come to the Promised Land (the USA) but who abandoned them and took their money. Most have experienced physical violence and threats of kidnapping at home. Children could be threatened with death and forced to join gangs. In Mexico migrants are no longer welcome because when Trump threatened sanctions against Mexico, Mexico responded by deporting migrants and closing Mexico’s southern border. Migrants who are waiting in Mexico are subject to gang violence, extortion, and all the same terrors they fled from at home. Under Biden, those who already had asylum hearings are now being allowed into the U.S. Everyone else is being deported. Today many feel hopeless and are deciding to return to their countries of origin even though they would have no houses, no jobs, and face the same terrors they originally fled. Even some who had asylum hearings feel hopeless and are going back to their home countries.⁶

The United States is now turning away almost all single adults at the border. U.S. border officials apprehended more than 172,000 migrants in March of 2021 according to documents obtained by The New York Times. That figure is a 71 percent increase from February and the highest monthly total since 2006. Most were single adults and were expelled under the public health laws. 18,890 were unaccompanied minors detained at border crossings, nearly double the February figure and more than 5 times the 3,490 detained in February 2020, the documents showed.^{7,8} Desperate parents hope their children will be cared for and sent to relatives already in the States. These parents are not evil people but ordinary parents who see no other way to

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save their children.⁹ Biden is facing Republican criticism when he is trying to show mercy to helpless children. He is accused of creating the border situation.

The most important question for Canadians is why Central Americans are fleeing their homelands? The global pandemic and several hurricanes have no doubt contributed. But we need to look much further back. In 1939 Franklin Roosevelt supported Somoza, the dictator in Nicaragua. In 1954 the U.S. backed the CIA's coup in Guatemala that ousted democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz when he tried to implement a land reform and rein in the power of American-based United Fruit Company. Instead, Carlos Armas was installed as a puppet dictator. In the 1980s, the U.S. sent \$4 billion to El Salvador's unpopular government to counter the FMLN's growing insurgency. More than 70% of that money went directly to weapons and the military, 75,000 innocent peasants, workers and students were killed during the twelve-year civil war and the Archbishop of San Salvador, Mon. Oscar Romero, was assassinated while saying mass.

In 2009 the U.S. backed the coup staged by Juan Orlando Hernandez to become dictator in Honduras. Very recently in March of 2021, Hernandez' brother Tony was sentenced to life in prison in the U.S. for drug smuggling. Much testimony implicated Hernandez—including evidence that notorious drug lord "El Chapo" gave him \$100 million.^{10,11} Hernandez runs a "Narco State" in that drug cartels have become part of the legislature, the military, the judiciary, and the police. The U.S. and Canada, backed by North American mining companies have traditionally funded arms and coups to get governments that obey the United States politically and offer their resources for extraction. U.S. and Canadian mining companies often illegally evict (often violently) people to get land and resources. They have poor (or no) environmental practices and repress defenders of the environment. They exploit local labour and grossly underpay them. So many people are destitute. They face governmental and gang violence, extortion, rape, kidnapping, and murder. There is impunity for the wealthy. So they flee. Yet they are labelled "economic migrants." ¹²

What can be done? We need much more public awareness of our country's involvement. There needs to be a consumer effect. There needs to be legal accountability for the abuses of Canadian resource extraction companies. There needs to be accountability for our elected politicians. We need to stop sending aid money directly to dictators. ¹³

In April of 2021 Biden and Vice President Harris announced that USAID (US Agency for International Development) is going to deploy a (DART) Disaster Assistance Response Team to respond to urgent humanitarian needs in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Biden's administration has also placed about 28,000 radio ads in Latin America to discourage migration to the U.S. Biden and Harris say that they want to address the root causes of the border situation, but there is no mention of America's links to Narco States, nor to the role of North American resource extraction companies. ¹⁴

* **Sara Chu is a member of St. John's Social Justice and Action Group (SJAG) and is a frequent contributor to LJR Newsletters.**



The U.S. - Mexico Border Crisis -- Footnotes:

1. Russell, Grahame, Feb 9, 2021, <https://rightsaction.org/us-government-promises-to-pathway-citizenship-for-11-million-people>
2. Jackson Judy, film "Where Can We Live In Peace?", <https://vimeo.com/418977974>
3. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2020/08/government-of-canada-too-appeal-the-federal-court-decision-on-the-safe-third-country-agreement.html>
4. Jackson, Judy, film "Where Can We Live In Peace?" <https://vimeo.com/418977974>
5. Blitza, Jonathan, "Biden and the Blame game", New Yorker magazine, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/05/biden-and-the-blame-game>
6. Jackson, Judy, film "Where Can We Live In Peace", <https://vimeo.com/418977974>
7. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/12/politics/biden-agreement-mexico-honduras-guatemala/index.html/>
8. i-Habib, Maria, The Globe and Mail, April 3, 2021, page A16
9. Ibid
10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobo_Arbenz
11. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/30/honduras-president-brother-sentenced-to-life-drug-trial>
12. Russell, Grahame, <https://rightsaction.org/https://us-government-promises-pathway-to-citizenship-for-11-million-people>
13. Stokes, Sara Sherman, <https://rightsaction.org/emails/the-root-cause-of-migration-united-states-mr-president-is-us>
14. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/12/politics/biden-agreement-mexico-honduras:guatemala/index.html/>

Refugees in the World: 2021 Facts and Figures

March 22, 2021 • Willow Sylvester (UNHCR)

The past year has been challenging for everyone. We have been isolated from friends and loved ones, navigating through an unstable economic environment, and alter our everyday lives. While the disruption to our lives has been frustrating, refugees around the world have also had to face a new set of difficulties. Unfortunately, even amid a global pandemic, conflicts around the world have still forced millions of people from their homes. In 2009, there were a reported 34.6 million displaced persons around the world, but fast forward to the beginning of 2020, and that number has grown to roughly 86.5 million. While this group of individuals often fought to stay safe from conflict, famine and persecution, they now have a new challenge to face in the current pandemic.

As the world shut down around us, it also shut down many opportunities for refugees. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic 168 countries fully or partially closed their borders. 90 of which made no exceptions to asylum seekers. As the year continued, healthcare workers were needed on the front lines of the pandemic. Resources needed to be reallocated to fighting the virus. For refugees, this meant increasingly limited access to quality health care, funding, and already scarce necessities. While this new year brings renewed hope for those displaced, it also brings continued challenges.

As vaccines start to be administered around the world, it means we can slowly begin to safely reopen. However, economies are still struggling to find their footing. The consistent opening and closing have made everyone nervous about once again committing to a full-fledged economic reopening campaign. Therefore it will take time before spending habits return to a fraction of the pre-pandemic levels. Since the beginning of 2021, the projected number of displaced people in need of resettlement has grown to 1.445 million.

How Many Refugees Are There Around The World?

- ◆ At least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26 million refugees, around half of whom are under 18.
- ◆ There are also millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement.
- ◆ At a time when 1 per cent of the world's population have fled their homes as a result of conflict or persecution, our work at UNHCR is more important than ever before.

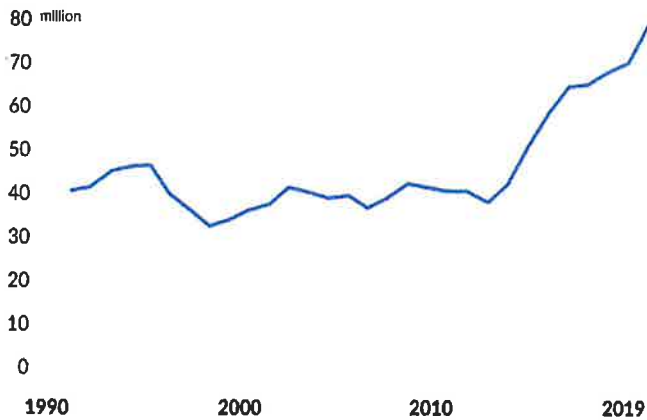
As we wait for an economic recovery, the refugee crisis continues to grow. Countries are still seeing record numbers of citizens being displaced. These countries include:

- **Syria** - 6.6 million people sought refuge from the 10-year crisis, as of mid-2020
- **Afghanistan** - approximately 1 in 10 refugees are Afghan – totaling 2.7 million.
- **South Sudan** - 4 million have been forced from their homes since 2013. Over half, 2.3 million, have sought refuge abroad.
- **Myanmar** - the Rohingya crisis has seen over 1 million flee from conflict in Myanmar. Most of whom have settled in neighbouring Bangladesh in the world's largest refugee camp.
- **Somalia** - the number of refugees has been declining over the years, however, at the end of 2020, there were still over 900,000 displaced from their homes.

UNHCR STATISTICS – JUNE 2020

Source: UNHCR

79.5 MILLION forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019



1%
of the world's population is displaced



80%
of the world's displaced people are
in countries or territories affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition



73%
Hosted in neighbouring countries *



68%
Came from just 5 countries *

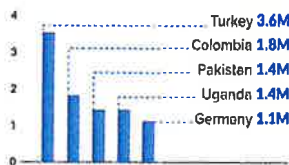


40%
of the world's displaced people are children

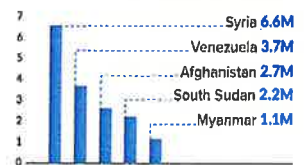


85%
Hosted in developing countries *

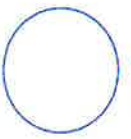
TOP HOSTING COUNTRIES



TOP SOURCE COUNTRIES



* Data includes UNHCR refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad



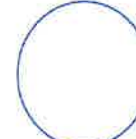
4.2M
Stateless people



2M
Asylum applications
(in 2019)



107,800
Resettled to 26 countries
(in 2019)



5.6M
Returnees
(in 2019)



employs **17,324** personnel in **135** countries
(as of 31 May 2020)

We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86 per cent from governments and the European Union and 10 per cent from private donors

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we call to mind your presence within us and around us. Inspire us with the Gospel message, that we may celebrate all that is life-giving, restore hope where it has been lost, and work to bring about change where it is needed.

- The Resistance Prays

FAITH, POLITICS & SOCIETY: THE MEXICO-U.S. BORDER

Parents who send their kids across the border are not heroes or villains. They're humans facing an impossible choice.

Joanna Williams -- America Magazine *

I will not forget the feeling of deep inadequacy I had a few weeks after my daughter's birth last fall. Despite generous paid leave, a stable home, a deeply committed husband and a supportive (albeit Covid-distanced) community, I had a distinct sense that I was not up to the task. I realized and continue to realize every day that even when I have my daughter's best interests at heart, I make imperfect choices because of my own limitations and circumstances beyond my control.

That realization grounds and frames my understanding of the current moment at the U.S.-Mexico border, especially the realities of children and families arriving here. As the executive director of the Kino Border Initiative, I have fielded many calls about the situation on the ground. It is tempting to paint the most sympathetic portrait possible of the parents and families migrating north.

But the reality is more complicated. Parents travelling with their children, or those who send their children to the border alone, are neither heroic martyrs nor conniving opportunists. They are ordinary parents in extraordinary circumstances who are doing their best to make decisions based on complex and ever-changing realities. Perhaps the small chance that their children could be released into the United States (and then be able to initiate an application for asylum) is worth the great risk of death and injury along the journey and the strong possibility that they will instead be immediately sent back to Mexico, even in the middle of the night, and become stranded in a border city like Nogales.

Last week I sat with my daughter on my lap in the Kino Border Initiative migrant outreach center in Nogales, listening to a mother speak of migrating to earn money to send back to Guatemala for her daughter's treatments for lupus. She spoke with great love for all three of her children yet had only brought her young son along with her. "*Why him?*" I asked, and she could not respond clearly. "*I just didn't have the heart to leave him,*" she finally replied.

I spoke to another father a few weeks ago who had travelled north alone, leaving his 7-year-old son behind. Previously middle-class, he lost his job due to the pandemic closures in Honduras, then had to rely on his family business for income—until it was destroyed in the devastation of last fall's hurricanes.

"*I can't stand looking at my son go hungry,*" he said, explaining why he left Honduras in search of work. Yet his heart was also heavy with the separation from his only child.

In both of these situations, the parent had been sent back to Nogales, Mexico, by the U.S. Border Patrol. They were now shouldering thousands of dollars of debt from the journey, which further inhibited their ability to support their families back

home. Should they have stayed or left? Travelled alone or as a family? As with all major parenting decisions, there is no simple answer.

In the United States, there is a growing awareness of the need for pro-family policies. Such policies do not solve every challenge in the parenting journey, but they do improve the range of options. This political movement acknowledges that a relentless focus on individual choice and responsibility risks foolishly ignoring historic inequity. The recently approved federal assistance to children, as well as momentum in support of paid parental leave and accessible, high-quality child care, are important steps for other parents in the United States to have some of the support I have relied on as a mother. That mentality ought to guide our approach to the border as well.

Our political leaders must take steps to improve, at least slightly, the imperfect choices that migrants face. The Biden administration should announce an actual plan for respecting the right to asylum and the rule of law at the border, including ending the Title 42 authority that uses the pandemic as a pretext to send migrants back to Mexico with no due process. That transparency would allow parents to make decisions based on clear facts and not haphazard practice. (Since February, we at the Kino Border Initiative have been asking Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas to meet with migrants at the border to listen to them and explain his plan. He has thus far declined our invitation.)

The administration should also immediately begin processing asylum seekers at official ports of entry along the border so that they can access the U.S. legal system. Opening the border to asylum claims would lessen the pressure migrants feel to instead pay smugglers to cross the desert. And Congress must provide the necessary resources for migrant reception in U.S. border communities. Many of these communities want to rise to the challenge of the moment but are not sure if they can handle another scramble to assist people that the Border Patrol has suddenly released in a remote Arizona town.

Just as important, the Biden administration should work tirelessly to improve economic and public-safety conditions in Central America and Mexico, thus strengthening the right to thrive without having to migrate.

I have not given up loving my daughter well, even when I do not have clear answers to the challenges she faces. Parents here at the border and in Central America have not given up loving their children when they choose between two or three imperfect options, none of which guarantee that they will survive or thrive. And border communities have not given up loving their neighbours, even when resources are stretched thin.

The least that our political leaders and the U.S. community can do is not give up on people at the border. We are capable of welcoming our brothers and sisters, even if we do so imperfectly and even when such welcome requires sacrifice.

* **Joanna Williams is the executive director of the Kino Border Initiative, a bi-national Jesuit and Catholic ministry in Nogales, Ariz., and Nogales, Mexico. Her article appeared in the April 06, 2021 Jesuits/Georgetown U. Publication, America Magazine.**

**Poor Nation's of the Earth Host Millions of Refugees
as US Refuses to Host a Few Thousand Central American Migrants**

*By Phyllis Bennis (IPS) **

The factors that drive displacement are complex, but welcoming refugees isn't!

Thousands of desperate migrants, mostly from Central America, are stuck at the U.S.-Mexico border. Most are families and unaccompanied children. Despite their legal rights to apply for asylum, U.S. officials are turning away huge numbers, claiming pandemic restrictions. But thousands of children remain, held in crowded border detention facilities while awaiting transfer to Department of Health and Human Services facilities that are full to bursting.

The situation is terrible for those children and their families. But dealing with it isn't rocket science: The government should authorize emergency spending to expand and build new facilities and hire social workers, health care providers, and teachers to care for these kids — along with an expanded team of family reunion workers.

Here in the wealthiest country on earth, we should know how to care for influxes of desperate people. Just ask the teams who welcomed, cared for, and arranged placement for 131,000 Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. in 1975. All that's missing now is political will.

When you look at the global picture, the situation on our border starts to look much more manageable. So let's clear up a few things.

1. There is a massive displacement crisis all over the world:

Globally, more than 80 million people, including 34 million children, have been forced from their homes because of war, violence, economic collapse, or climate disasters. Among these, 26 million are refugees, forced out of their country. Another 4 million are seeking asylum.

2. The world's top refugee hosts are mostly poorer countries:

More than two-thirds of refugees come from just five countries — Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, Venezuela, and South Sudan — none of which are in Central America. These refugees have mostly sought safety in nearby countries. Millions of Syrians fled to Turkey. Venezuelans poured into Colombia. Afghans escaped war in Pakistan, and South Sudanese in Uganda. Myanmar's Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. Among the world's top refugee hosts, the United States isn't even close. In Lebanon, a tiny country facing a massive economic crisis, one of every five people is a refugee — the equivalent of the United States taking in 66 million. Yet under the last administration, we admitted just a few thousand each year — a record low.

3. Allowing refugees to apply for asylum isn't just a nice thing to do — it's law:

When the United States signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, it committed itself under international law to protect refugees. According to the United Nations refugee agency, the Convention's "core principle is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom."

That means that a desperate Honduran family showing up at the U.S. border seeking refuge from violence, hurricanes, or extreme poverty cannot legally be either returned to Honduras or sent to "wait in Mexico" for a U.S. court date, since either choice means facing those serious threats. It's U.S. domestic law too — specifically the Refugee Act of 1980. Neither law lets governments avoid their obligations because of the pandemic — in fact, the Refugee Act describes specific U.S. obligations to provide medical care to potential

refugees. Today that should mean providing vaccines and testing, ensuring social distancing and masks, and avoiding the super-spreader environment of crowded detention facilities.

4. No one chooses to lose their home:

No one decides to leave their home on a lark, or just because someone said President Biden will treat them better than Trump. They make the often deadly journey — or send their children — when they are desperate and have no choice. Because if they stay, the government-protected gangs that threaten to kidnap their son or rape their mother will make good on their threats. Because if they stay, their hurricane-destroyed crops mean their children will have nothing to eat. Because if they stay, the bombs will fall again.

A great many of these “push factors” have been accelerated by Washington’s own wars, trade policies, sanctions, arms exports, and carbon emissions. President Biden can keep telling refugees “don’t come,” and that someday the U.S. will let people apply for asylum from their own country, but that won’t stop them if their house was destroyed, their children are hungry, or their lives are at risk. The real crisis isn’t the temporary chaos on our border. It’s the hunger, violence, and climate catastrophes forcing people to leave their homes in the first place. If impoverished countries can host millions of refugees, certainly the U.S. — the richest country in the world — can welcome a few thousand Central American children and their families. Common decency — and the law — demands it.

*** April 09, 2021 in Foreign Policy In Focus - By Phyllis Bennis , fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies.**



What Will It Take to “Build Back Better”?

DAVID KORTEN - JAN 21, 2021 – YES MAGAZINE *

Much has transpired to disrupt the political status quo since President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris chose their campaign slogan “*Build Back Better*.” But the chaos and violence of former President Trump’s final days in office may help to open a deep national dialogue on what “better” means, and what it will require.

We will soon have in place a new administration focused on solving problems rather than creating them. Especially in the wake of recent events, we hope that principled Republican leaders are ready to join principled Democratic leaders in the cause of creating a better world for all.

Humanity faces a potentially terminal crisis of collapsing environmental systems, extreme and growing inequality, failing institutional legitimacy, and disintegration of the basic trust of one another on which the social fabric depends. No individual caused these vast problems, and no individual or group of individuals can solve them alone. We may differ on the details, but we should unite in common recognition of the failure of our existing institutions to address these crises.

Our future depends on finding common cause in creating a world of peace and beauty; a world in which every person has opportunities to contribute that earn them respect and material sufficiency; a world where families and communities are strong, people support and care for one another, and nature is vibrant. It is a vision both progressive and conservative. Some call it an Ecological Civilization, the theme of the next print issue of YES! Magazine.

In 2020, Earth issued a wake-up call we could not ignore. **COVID-19** disrupted daily life and imposed suffering on billions. The pandemic made it impossible to ignore the injustices of an economic system in which those who do the most essential work are often the least secure and most poorly rewarded.

Herein lie essential lessons. As a society, we massively misallocate our labour and other resources, spending them in ways harmful to both people and Earth. Defenders of the failed system claim the burdens are necessary to create jobs and generate GDP growth, while at the same time they insist that we lack the resources to meet everyone’s basic needs.

The misallocations include, among others:

- **Preparations for and the conduct of war.**
- **Mass production and support facilities for cars, trucks, ships, and airplanes for needless movement of people and goods.**
- **The labour, technology, and energy consumed in supporting financial speculation that produces no real value.**

The urgent unmet needs that require the application of our intellectual and physical labour include, among others:

- **Eliminating the causes of war, mass incarceration, and desperate mass migration and reassigning the resources thus freed up.**
- **Restoring the health of Earth’s lands, waters, and atmosphere, which includes eliminating human sources of Earth’s contamination.**

18.

- **Restructuring how we live to assure everyone a place to live and reducing the need to move people and material goods.**
- **Producing the food for nutritious diets for all the world's people in ways that maintain the health of soils, rivers, and aquifers, and simultaneously sequester carbon.**
- **Providing care to those who are incapable of self-care, including children and the mentally and physically incapacitated.**
- **Preparing our children for responsible and fulfilling lives.**
- **Restructuring political and economic institutions to shift power from profit-maximizing corporations to life-serving communities.**

In discussing our options, we too often get sidetracked into a debate between political philosophies—capitalism vs. socialism— that sidesteps the larger issues. We need a different framework. Our common future depends on serious institutional rethinking and restructuring to localize power and share it on a global scale.

Life, as we now understand it, organizes from the bottom up, not the top down. As living beings who depend on the health of a living Earth, our future depends on learning through our lived experience to do the same. This deepens the meaning of the motto, “Build Back Better.”

The human capacity for innovative local adaptation requires the support of radically democratic local, national, and global governance structures supported by worker and community-owned cooperative businesses that meld individual and collective rights and responsibilities in ways that honour the best of conservative and progressive values.

Framing the possible vision and the path to its actualization necessarily begins with a dialogue that transcends traditional political lines, which is largely impossible in the two-party win-or-lose political system now in place.

President Biden presents himself as a facilitator of trans-partisan dialogue and cooperation, with Kamala Harris as his well-chosen partner. They are working, however, within a failing system nearly impossible to reform from within. With skill and dedication, they can repair much of the damage of the Trump years and propel us on a better path. But to truly transform the system, the people must lead. Our individual actions, our movements, our cities, and our states/provinces need to continue to lead the way with steps far more transformative than is possible at the U.S. national level.

To build back better, we must applaud the best steps at global, national, and local levels, while recognizing that the essential transformation is ultimately up to us working together for the good of all.

***David Korten is co-founder of YES! Media, president of the Living Economies Forum, a member of the Club of Rome, and the author of influential books, including “When Corporations Rule the World” and “Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth.” Korten's other articles are available in YES Magazine's print and on-line editions.**

“I don’t want to be an anti, against anybody. I simply want to be the builder of a great affirmation: the affirmation of God, who loves us and who wants to save us.”
Saint Óscar Romero of El Salvador

Anxious About Returning to Regular Life? 6 Jesuit Discernment Tips for the Post-Covid World

By Debra Mooney - April 11, 2021 - AMERICA MAGAZINE *

I vividly recall returning from my first Ignatian silent retreat almost 20 years ago. It was about a 25-minute drive from the [Jesuit retreat center](#) to my house in suburban Cincinnati, and halfway home I was overwhelmed with the traffic, noise, crowding and colors. It was a staggering sensory overload, but I now know my transition experience is not uncommon for retreatants. With the promise that all Americans will have access to Covid-19 vaccines by the end of May, many of us feel excited for our return to the ordinary. But there will be unanticipated and undesirable reactions during the transition from sheltering in place and working from home, similar to the re-entry process after a retreat. Noises will be louder, colors brighter, touch more tactile. We will experience traffic on Sunday as weekday rush hour; shopping at the mall in May will feel like Black Friday after Thanksgiving. Returning to normal social spacing and large group interactions will lead to social fatigue. All the options re-opening before us (literally) will cause choice overload and cognitive exhaustion. What can be done to ease the transition back to regular life? The answer may lie in the guidance offered to Ignatian retreatants: Continue following an Ignatian way of proceeding. Within this framework, here are six suggestions for an effective transition to post-pandemic wellness.

1. Identify the Positives During the Pandemic.

In video conversations, I have noticed people talking about the extreme stresses they have been coping with during the pandemic. But when asked about moments of gratitude amid lockdown, people offer many profound responses, such as appreciating dinners with the entire family, enjoying lunchtime walks with their partner, improving their homes and making them more comfortable, and visiting local parks for the first time. I have also heard about “mini-joys” or daily uplifts, including the ability to wear slippers all day, bake a favorite treat from scratch or binge-watch a worthy television series. Gratitude has been found to have a range of benefits—emotionally, socially and physically. People who focus on gratitude and God’s blessings are more optimistic, happy, helpful, compassionate, empathic and forgiving; they are also more likely to stick to an exercise plan, sleep well and choose healthy foods. Beginning with St. Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuits have shared a way of praying, called an examen, to notice God’s presence and goodness in our life. We are invited to pause and review meaningful moments and recognize the Spirit in the experiences. Anyone can use the tool of an Ignatian annual examen to prayerfully find healing graces and beauty in the past year.

2. Recognize That You Have Been Transformed.

Living through Covid has changed each of us in ways that are important to notice. It is helpful to consider how to include some of the experiences of gratitude that you have identified in your examen into your new normal, such as making plans to continue monthly hikes in the forest or regularly wear comfortable clothes. Conversely, we need to consciously drop actions that were helpful for coping through the pandemic but which we do not want to continue going forward. These might include excessive exercise (or a lack of exercise) or indulging a sweet tooth.

3. Remember That “Haste Makes Waste.”

According to social scientists, it takes 60 to 90 days for new habits to form and become automatic. So give yourself a couple of months to gradually return to old habits or to develop a new routine that fits the new you. A quote attributed to the three-time Olympic gold medal bicyclist Kristin Armstrong describes how this can be an opportunity: “Times of transition are strenuous, but I love them. They are an opportunity to purge, rethink priorities, and be intentional about new habits. We can make our new normal any way we want.”

4. Pinpoint Emotions and Desires.

Just as an attitude of gratitude relates to wellness, so does the ability to recognize and manage emotions. A humorous meme that spread early in the pandemic was the word coronacoaster, used

to characterize the extreme ups and downs felt during social distancing and isolation. It is worthwhile to avoid making momentous life changes and decisions until these emotions have steadied. Similarly, we should reflect on pent-up feelings of mourning for our many losses, minor and major, and allow time for grieving. Additionally, the time in lockdown may have revealed powerful yearnings related to relationships, vocations or other mindsets. For example, a friend of mine has recently taken a leave of absence from a prominent position in a successful organization to consider a change to more socially purposeful work. Another friend has found that their feelings toward a "Covid bubble" companion may be more than platonic. Mark Thibodeaux, S.J., calls these "the great big desires that God has placed in our hearts." Prayerful discernment can help us interpret the thoughts and feelings behind these desires: Are they superficial or will they genuinely produce feelings of Ignatian consolation if acted upon? If the latter, discernment can guide us to move on the yearnings in ways that Father Thibodeaux says "will lead to faith, hope and love for God and our fellow neighbour."

5. Focus on Those You Love.

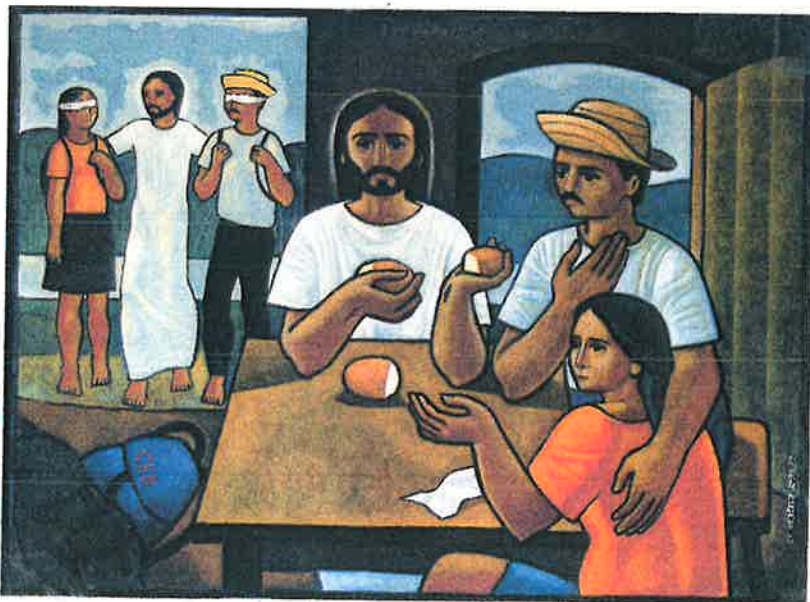
One difference between transitioning after a spiritual retreat and after Covid is that everyone around us has also experienced the pandemic. But each of our reactions are distinctive and individualized. Talking to partners, family, friends and co-workers about reactions builds companionship and provides opportunities to be a supportive person for and with others—both of which relate to spiritual, mental and physical well-being.

6. Rejuvenate.

In the same way that we feel tired after sitting for hours in a car or on a plane, sheltering in place was not restful. Instead, it made us restless. As we begin to spend more time outside the home again, anticipate mental and physical fatigue, and engage in activities that will restore your energy and vitality. Relatively early in the pandemic lockdown, Brendan McManus, S.J., wrote how he was living through Covid-19 as if it were an Ignatian retreat, relying on his "Jesuit training to be able to read [his] feelings, respond well, and act in a compassionate way." We are now coming to the end of a once-in-a-lifetime experience: transitioning back to a regular and routine life following a global pandemic. With continued attention and awareness—an Ignatian way of proceeding—the process of re-engagement will not only be healing but one of mental, physical and spiritual thriving.

* **Debra K. Mooney is the chief mission officer at Xavier U. and a clinical psychologist.**

RETHINKING JUSTICE



Never forget those who are living on the margins: undocumented, differently abled, imprisoned, queer, poor, or nonconforming individuals. There is no quick fix. The work is in remembering and bearing witness.

Stephen Lewis Keeps Fighting for Worldwide Access to Vaccines

Judy Jackson - May 4, 2021 – Rabble Magazine *

Stephen Lewis is fighting for his life. He has inoperable cancer.

I was privileged to document his heroic work as UN HIV/AIDS envoy to Africa, for three documentaries made for the CBC. I filmed as he set up the Stephen Lewis Grandmother to Grandmother Foundation, and as he relentlessly advocated for cheap and generic drugs for the 16 million Africans who were dying needlessly during that pandemic.

"Rapacious drug manufacturers are protected by patents and could charge whatever they wish," he said. Today, even though he is sick, he is still speaking out about the rampant global inequality in access to vaccines for the COVID-19 pandemic which, once again, is created by the big pharmaceutical companies. "What we are seeing with vaccines is a mirror image of what we saw with HIV and AIDS. The North is secure, the South languishes at the end of the line." Will we never learn?

Mulroney Put Lewis on Global Stage

In a twist of fate, Stephen Lewis started his illustrious second career -- this one on the international stage -- when Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney shocked many by appointing the avowed social democrat as Canada's ambassador to the UN.

Mulroney and Lewis both abhorred apartheid in South Africa, but over time their differences would emerge. Mulroney, *"the greatest privatizer,"* sold off Canada's publicly owned Connaught Medical Research Laboratories, which, amongst many historic advances, organized clinical field trials and the worldwide rollout of Jonas Salk's polio vaccine.

When asked if he would patent his vaccine, Salk said: *"Can you patent the sun?"* Today, polio is all but eliminated around the world. If those labs had not been privatized, they'd be producing COVID-19 vaccines for Canada and the world today. Instead, our government is endlessly negotiating with big pharma, trying to import them.

Mulroney couldn't have known that Stephen Lewis would become one of the world's most eloquent voices opposing big pharma's huge profits, and the privatization of public health: *"The pharmaceutical industry has benefitted from billions of dollars of public money for research and discovery, and even greater billions in pre-purchase vaccine agreements. Why in the world should the pharmaceutical industry eclipse the role of governments?"*

Biolyse, a small pharmaceutical manufacturer in St. Catharines, Ontario, echoes those remarks. Biolyse's vice-president, John Fulton, says that, if given the recipe, it could produce 20 million doses for nations in the global south. Neither AstraZeneca nor Johnson and Johnson nor the Canadian government have responded.

"We've been passed over. We have got this production capacity. If we had started last year, we could have shipped millions of doses by now. This is supposed to be a wartime effort, everyone in it together. But that doesn't seem to be the case," Fulton told *The Guardian*.

In the first film I did about Lewis, *Race Against Time*, in 2011, I struggled to keep up with his relentless pace as UN HIV/AIDS envoy to Africa. He'd be in one country in the morning, with eight or 10 meetings on his agenda, with presidents, cabinet ministers, hospitals, organizations of people dying from AIDS, and sex workers. Then, by evening, he'd have moved to another country, and yet another set of urgent meetings.

Working alongside activist groups, his main aim was accessing affordable anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, which turn the disease from a death sentence to a chronic condition. ARV drugs were available in developed countries for \$10,000 to \$12,000 per patient, per year -- but that price was way out of reach for Africa. As Lewis put it: *"Rapacious drug manufacturers were protected by patents and could*

charge whatever they wished."

It was a historic fight against patent protections. The South African government took 39 pharmaceutical companies to court, and huge demonstrations shamed the companies into reducing their prices. Then, in India, which had passed a law permitting the overriding of patents in a public health emergency, a company called Cipla started producing generic equivalents of anti-retrovirals at \$350 per person per year.

Fast forward, and today 92 countries have access to ARV drugs which cost just \$75 per patient per year. Over four million South Africans are on ARV drugs which are available free from clinics. Treatment outcomes are as good as in Western countries. But we haven't learnt much from this critical moment in global health. Today wealthy countries outbid each other, and order far more COVID-19 vaccines than they need.

Over 90 per cent of the Pfizer vaccines have been sold to a handful of rich countries. Only one per cent of worldwide doses have been administered in low-income countries, leaving millions vulnerable. Profit reigns supreme for most big pharmaceutical companies, and the wealthy countries that back them.

Taking on Patent Protection for Life-Saving Drugs

Though they receive huge government subsidies to develop drugs, big pharmaceutical companies are protected by the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, fostered by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Companies have negotiated secret vaccine deals with governments. A Belgium minister made the mistake of posting the secret prices the European Union pays on Twitter. Pfizer then complained: *"The prices are covered by a confidentiality clause in the contract."*

During the struggle for affordable anti-retrovirals, the WTO eventually agreed that, if three-quarters of its 184 members voted for it, TRIPS could be bypassed for a limited time in a health emergency, so low-income countries could access and produce affordable drugs. At the end of last year South Africa and India called for such a vote over COVID-19. But in March the wealthy countries voted it down, which means that 90 per cent of the population in dozens of poor countries could wait for the vaccine till at least 2024. Talk about inequality.

South Africa has warned of "vaccine apartheid," and India is now suffering a COVID apocalypse, with 379,257 new infections and 3,645 deaths on April 30, 2021. Its hospitals are out of oxygen, and its crematoria overwhelmed. The lesson for us all of India is that the emergence of ominous variants poses a huge global health risk without vaccines available everywhere. *"The mantra of global solidarity has been trashed,"* says Stephen Lewis. *"What we are seeing at the World Trade Organization is the resurgence of a contemporary colonialism. Vaccine nationalism will triumph over global public health."*

There is to be another vote at the WTO next week. A group of 100 Nobel laureates and 75 former world leaders have called on U.S. President Joe Biden to take the "vital and necessary step to bring an end to this pandemic through a waiver," and there is serious discussion about this proposal at the White House.

On May 8 pop star Selina Gomez will host a star-studded concert, "VAX Live: The Concert to Reunite the World," to raise \$22 billion from corporations and governments for countries with less access to vaccines. Strangely, given Canada's position, Justin Trudeau will be one of the speakers. Canada did not vote against the WTO waiver; however, it has not agreed to it. And Canada has hoarded more vaccines than any other country, even though delivery is desperately slow. *"It is both astounding and appalling that Canada is refusing to waive patents,"* says Stephen Lewis. *"We are on the wrong side of the debate. Waiving patents would mean massive reduction in prices and dramatic increase in generic manufacture. Canada has opted to protect the profits -- frankly obscene profits -- of the drug companies at the expense of global public health. In the face of a pandemic, it is unconscionable"*

behaviour."

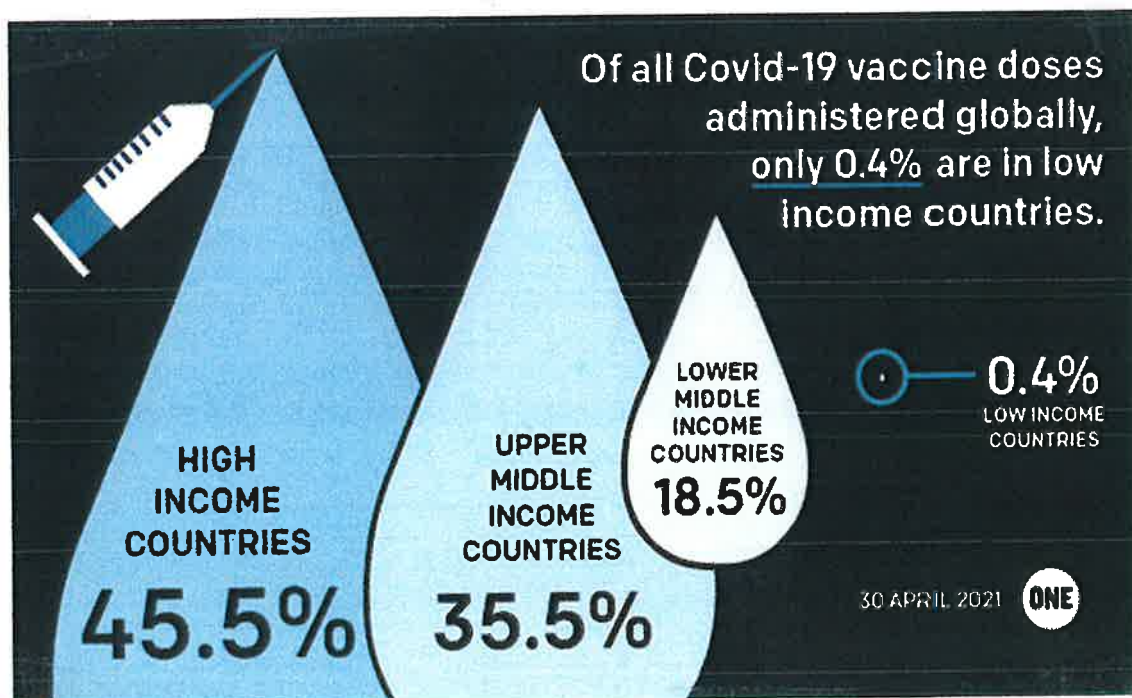
The World Health Organization's (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus echoes Lewis's pleas for equal distribution of vaccines: *"We can't accept a world in which the poor and marginalized are trampled by the rich and powerful in the stampede for a vaccine. This is a global crisis. And the solutions must be shared equitably as global public goods, not as private commodities that exacerbate wider inequalities."*

The WHO has set up an organization known as COVAX, through which rich countries can help finance vaccines for 91 low- and middle-income countries. But COVAX is also struggling. AstraZeneca vaccines were being cheaply manufactured for COVAX by the Serum Institute of India but, given the present disaster, many have been commandeered for domestic use. Meanwhile, Canada, which invested \$440 million into COVAX, is waiting for deliveries as part of the deal. Should we be taking vaccines from countries that desperately need them?

"It's morally wrong for Canada to procure 1.9 million vaccines from the international program," says Stephen Lewis. He feels Canada should be on side with countries voting to waive patents: *"I think it would be very valuable to Canada given the delays in receiving doses it is currently experiencing."* Voices like Stephen Lewis' calling for change are being heeded. The Biden administration has backed the initiative, proposed by India and South Africa, to waive intellectual property rights at the WTO for COVID-19 vaccines. It is *"a historical, monumental moment in the fight against COVID-19,"* says Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the WHO. Pharmaceutical companies are opposed. Their stocks have fallen sharply. In order for this to proceed, there needs to be consensus of the 164 WTO members. Canada, the EU and the U.K. are still opposed. The Trudeau government has yet to respond.

** Judy Jackson has made over 100 films about human rights and social justice in many countries. They've won many prizes, but the ones that make her happiest are those which bring "ripples of change". You can Read part two of this series, on Stephen Lewis' work in Africa combatting the HIV/AIDS crisis in rabble.ca. Judy is a friend and neighbour of Sara Chu's.*

Editor's Note, May 6, 2021: This article has been updated by the author to include the news of Mr. Biden's recent support for the initiative to waive patents for COVID-19 vaccines (See p. of LJR).



Doses administered globally by income groups – ONE.org

Running to Stay Behind – By Emily Rogers (TAPS) *
How Income Assistance Rates Are Not Keeping Up with Rent Hikes

On March 16, 2021, the British Columbia government announced that income assistance rates would permanently increase by \$175 per month. This means that a single person receiving basic income assistance will now receive \$935 a month, and a single person with the Persons with Disability designation will now receive \$1,358.42 a month. This increase is largely thanks to the tireless advocacy of people province-wide who have raised their voices for years to demand increased rates, and it is certainly worth celebrating. That said, both the “income” and “expenses” side of the ledger must be considered when contemplating whether our government’s policy decisions are effectively supporting people in our community.

For most people, housing costs are their most significant expense. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has defined affordable housing as 30 percent of a person’s income. According to the CMHC, the average rent in Victoria is \$1015 for a bachelor unit and \$1185 for a 1-bedroom unit. This means that someone on income assistance is \$80 short of being able to afford a bachelor unit even if they put every cent of their income towards rent. Someone on PWD has \$343.42 left over after paying rent, which needs to cover utilities, food, and medication for the month. This is after the \$175 monthly increase.

According to the CMHC, “the gap between asking rent for vacant units and occupied units has climbed from \$39 to \$356 in the past 6 years”. Put differently, in 2015 a renter could find a new place to live for almost the same amount of money as they were paying in their previous home. Now, someone looking for a new place to live would be looking at rental listings that are approximately \$350 more than their old place. This is a problem for three main reasons. First, anyone looking for housing will be faced with housing costs that may be entirely out of reach. Secondly, given that landlords can charge 20 percent more for the same rental unit if they list it today, they are incentivized to end long-term tenancies. At TAPS we often see this occur under the guise of renovation or over small disputes that could otherwise be resolved. Third, the power differential between landlords and tenants is further increased as tenants feel trapped in tenancies that may not be safe or enjoyable because they can’t afford to move.

These problems could be largely addressed with one policy: vacancy control. Currently, rent increases are controlled *during* a tenancy, but there is no limit to the amount landlords can increase the rent if there is a change in tenants. This is why available units are so much more expensive than occupied rental units: the “market” rate is uncontrolled and dictated entirely by landlord interests. A vacancy control policy would limit rent increases to a fixed percentage, even if there is a change in tenants (i.e. rent is controlled even when the rental unit is vacant). This policy was in place between 1974 and 1983 in BC and is currently enacted in PEI and Quebec.

TAPS helps hundreds of tenants every year who are facing precarious housing situations. We firmly believe that the government needs to implement a vacancy control policy if there is any chance of balancing the ledger between “income” and “expenses” for people relying on social support. Without it, the recent increase to income assistance rates is likely to go straight to landlord pockets rather than making a measurable difference in the lives of people living in poverty.

* Emily Rogers is a Program Manager. at Victoria's Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS). Her article first appeared in the TAPS newsletter Tap Root in March 2021. Several St. John's parishioners have volunteered with TAPS programs over the years.

CHURCHES WALKING THE TALK!

In each issue of LJR, we will present examples of progressive religious congregations and denominations investing in innovative projects and programs to make the world a better place.

'Who Is My Neighbour?' Links 3 Faiths for Peace with Iran *

A small group of Canadian and U.S. Mennonites has been working for six months to find a way for Mennonites to contribute to COVID relief in Iran. In the process of our search, we discovered other Christians who shared that desire. We've joined together to found an ecumenical organization, LUKE 10 (in reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan) with leaders from Catholic, Protestant, evangelical and historic peace churches, to send aid and do peace-building with Iran.

With hostility growing between the governments of the United States and Iran, we realized peace-building between the peoples and faith traditions of these countries might be even more important than the modest amount of medical supplies we have been able to send to Iran. The LUKE 10 board asked me to work with a former Iranian United Nations ambassador who still lives in New York to bring together a webinar with faith leaders from the U.S. and Iran as panelists and invite participants from Canada, the U.S., Iran and around the world. The subject of the webinar, the issue around which our organization had arisen, was the question asked of Jesus 2,000 years ago, "Who is my neighbour?"

Episcopal Bishop John Chane and Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb from the U.S. and Ayatollah Damad from Iran readily agreed to be panelists. We called the webinar "Who Is My Neighbor? Abrahamic Dialogue in the time of COVID." The Dec. 3 webinar was hosted by LUKE 10 and co-sponsored by the Washington National Cathedral, the Interfaith Center of New York and the World Evangelical Alliance. Supporting organizations — committed to sharing webinar information with their members — included the Center for Interfaith Engagement of Eastern Mennonite University, Canadian Mennonite University, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Hartford Seminary and Pax Christi USA.

The Zoom webinar had 242 people registered, and by the next morning another 380 people had seen it live streamed or the recording on Facebook. Participants contributed \$2,300 for COVID relief in Iran. Of those who indicated their faith tradition, there were 103 Christians (including 20 Mennonites and six Quakers), 20 Muslims and 14 Jews. The countries of registrants: U.S., 169; Canada, 19; Iran, 14; U.K., seven; Israel, two.

An Iranian professor who shared the webinar live with his class at the University of Mashhad reported his students were totally engaged. "It was the first time that they had ever encountered a bishop or a rabbi," he said. "They were less interested in the ayatollah, as they had often heard ayatollahs, but they were amazed to be able to hear directly from an American bishop and rabbi." *o Is My Neighbour*. At a time of mutual demonization, we were able to bring American Christians and Jews together with Iranian Muslims to discuss the profound question: "*Who is my neighbour?*" I believe it was a historic peace-building effort at a critical moment.

* Doug Hostetter serves on the LUKE 10 Board of Directors. The recording from the webinar is posted on the LUKE 10 [Facebook page](#), luke10.faith, and on YouTube. This article appeared in the Mennonite e-newsletter <anabaptistworld.org>

FAITH IN TREES - By Flossie Baker (Sierra Club)

On Tues., March 27. 2021, over 50 people participated in the Zoom event **"Faith In Trees"**, jointly organized by **St. John's, GVAT and Sierra Club of BC**. It was an inspiring evening. So that we can move from reflecting to acting, here's several ideas for follow-up action:

1) Plan future "Tuesdays for Trees" Events - At another Church (or any other organization or club you might be a part of). It could be a Sunday sermon, or inviting a speaker to lead a zoom conversation after the service. Let Jane know if you are interested in planning something. You can also sign up to attend "Environment from a Spiritual Perspective" hosted by The Interfaith Liaisons Network - 2pm Mon. 10 May, online.

2) Build relationships with Churches on North Vancouver Island - Whose members may well depend on forestry to put food on the table. Reach out to see if a listening circle can be organized between members of that Church and your Church so that you can learn from their perspectives and stories. Pledge your solidarity to help support them. If you want help imagining what this could look like, reach out to Flossie or Robin.

3) Pray - Make sure that Old Growth Forests are on the church's prayer list as much as possible! We need to make sure this issue stays at the front of people's hearts and minds over the summer.

4) Write a Letter - to the Editor from your church (way more effective than sending it as an individual).. Or write to your MLA/ Union Leader/ Forest Corporation CEO from your church and request a meeting with them. If they agree to meet and you want some help with planning that agenda, reach out to Jane or Flossie.

5) Diocesan Level - Meet and discuss if anything can be done at a Diocese level.

6) Follow "Tuesdays for Trees" - On social media and share the posts as much as possible. Or -- follow on Twitter: [@ActingGreater](#) and [Greater Victoria Acting Together's Facebook page](#).

7) Connect With "Wild Church Victoria" - Wild Church Victoria seeks to foster a community of those who love Creation and struggle to hold together both the gratitude and grief, the love and longing for our natural world. [Follow them on Facebook](#).

8) Summer Visits - Spend time in an Old Growth Forest. Robin suggested going to Goldstream Park with intention and practicing mindfulness when you get there. Elisabeth recommends: Francis King, East Sooke or John Deane Parks too.

9) If You Are Artistic - (even mildly), join Sierra Club BC's 'Artists' group this summer: <https://www.invitetoaction.ca>

10) Other Resources (including on-line petitions) can be found at the following sites:

- Sierra Club BC - <https://sierraclub.bc.ca> Ancient;
- Forest Alliance - <https://www.ancientforestalliance.org> ;
- Wilderness Committee - <https://www.wildernesscommittee.org>

"I think of the trees and how simply they let go, let fall the riches of a season, how without grief (it seems) they can let go and go deep into their roots for renewal and sleep.... Imitate the trees. Learn to lose in order to recover, and remember that nothing stays the same for long, not even pain, psychic pain."

From: May Sarton's Journal of Solitude

A Liberating Theology *

Brazilian Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara (1909–1999) was a truly saintly man and one of my heroes for the Gospel. Although many are not familiar with him today, he was well-known in his lifetime for his love for the poor and his embrace of nonviolence. His teachings have shaped many of my thoughts on the nature of evil and our freedom to choose how we respond to the suffering and injustice present in the world. He wrote me on the twenty-fifth anniversary of my ordination, so I have a personal gratitude toward him. Here he writes:

When you look at our continent [of South America], where more than two-thirds of the people live in sub-human conditions as a result of injustices, and when you see that the same situation is repeated all over the world, how can you help wanting to work towards human liberation? Just as the Father, the Creator, wants us to be co-creators, so the Son, the Redeemer, wants us to be co-redeemers. So it is up to us to continue the work of liberation begun by the Son: the liberation from sin and the consequences of sin, the liberation from egoism and the consequences of egoism. That is what the theology of liberation means to us, and I see no reason why anyone should be afraid of a true, authentic theology of liberation. [1]

The people already understand that we have no right to blame God for the problems that we have created ourselves. As if the Lord were responsible for the floods or the droughts [Richard Rohr: or the pandemic]! No! It would have been very easy for our Father to create a universe that was already perfect. But it would have been terribly boring for us to come into a world where everything had already been done, and done well, where everything was complete. So the Lord merely began the creative process and entrusted [humans] with the task of completing it. It is up to us to control the rivers. It's a question of intelligence and integrity. If we had shown sufficient intelligence and integrity in the past the droughts and the floods would already have been controlled. Nowadays deserts are being watered and rivers diverted. It's our own problem, not the Lord's. [2]

Liberation theology as Dom Hélder Câmara describes it is applicable to many of the problems we face. For good or for ill, our choices as individuals have a collective impact on others and future generations. How we treat each other is a marker of our freedom in God. Câmara reminds us: *"We all believe that all human beings are children of the same heavenly Father. Those who have the same father are brothers and sisters. Let us really treat each other as brothers and sisters! . . . We all believe that freedom is a divine gift to be preserved at all costs. Let us liberate, in the highest and most profound sense of the word, all the human beings who live round about us."*[3]

* From: Richard Rohr/CAC Daily Meditations – Jan. 20/21

[1] Hélder Câmara, *The Conversions of a Bishop: An Interview with José de Broucker*, trans. Hilary Davies (Collins: 1979), 170–171. [2] Câmara, *Conversions*, 124. [3] First address as Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, April 12, 1964. See *Dom Hélder Câmara: Essential Writings*, ed. Francis McDonagh (Orbis Books: 2009), 41.