

**CCSAC AGM
April 4, 2019
Ottawa, ON
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Executive Director, CPJ**

It is a delight to be here this evening. As the new Executive Director for CPJ, I have the challenging task of following in the footsteps of Joe Gunn, a friend and tireless advocate for justice.

The task given to me this evening is to:

- Talk about yourself – background
- Your vision for CPJ
- Update on National Poverty Strategy
- Provide post budget analysis and election strategy
- What can CCSAC do?

Thank you for your kind invitation and thank you for your partnership in the cause!

Your coalition of 23 churches in Centretown representing 9 different denominations is a commendable initiative. You have responded well to your vision of responding to social needs in Centretown area. Over the past 42 years your work in welcoming new comers, providing English as a second language, the employment support programme and of course your emergency food and clothing centre are examples of your serious commitment to the community. You have also demonstrated advocacy leadership in providing submissions to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel, participated in the Chew On This Campaign and most recently submitted a letter to Minister Duclous requesting that provision be made in the federal budget for an immediate allocation of funding to encourage an early increase to the stock of affordable housing.

Centretown Churches Social Action Committee is an important initiative for Citizens for Public Justice (or CPJ for short). Indeed, without initiatives such as this, the work of CPJ would be much more difficult. As a faith-based public policy advocacy organization focusing on poverty in Canada, ecological justice and refugee rights, CPJ is dependent on local initiatives striving for social justice. It is the accumulation of local action that can become the catalyst for federal policy change. The more local initiatives that CPJ can point to, the greater the likelihood that elected leaders will pay attention. So, it is an honour to be with you this evening.

My past roles as a parish pastor, a director in World Vision Canada and the denominational leader for Mennonite Church Canada have taught me the importance of faith communities' engagement with issues of social justice. I have prayerfully longed for the reestablishment of faith in Canadian culture. But it has become evident to me that Canadian culture has two clear expectations of the church. The first is that churches get along. Even non-religious people know intuitively that if it feels like congregations are competing against each other – that this is wrong.

And secondly, Canadian culture expects the church to be on the leading edge of addressing issues of poverty and social justice. Again, even non-religious people know intuitively that if there is such a thing as a divine loving being, and the church is to be the representation of that divine loving being, that the church then should be on the cutting edge of addressing issues of poverty and social justice. It appears to me that faith communities will not receive a hearing unless these two expectations are met. That is why organizations like CPJ and initiatives such as this are so vitally important. They will help strengthen the integrity and respect for faith in Canadian culture.

I hope to build on CPJ's respect as a faith-based policy advocacy organization. CPJ is noted for its leading research and policy analysis. I hope to strengthen CPJ's positioning as a collective catalyst across Christian and interfaith circles.

We also have a growing interest in outreach to youth and finding ways to tap into their energy and enthusiasm about faith and justice issues.

At CPJ, we are building our capacity to have an increasing influence on the development of federal policy.

I am delighted to announce that we have just hired Stephen Kaduuli as our new Refugee Rights Policy Analyst. Stephen has lived experience as a former refugee and also has considerable experience working with Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH). Our work on refugee rights has always been attended to by interns. This new hire in Stephen will now provide a full time focus on this important file.

As citizens concerned about just policies, there is much work to do. The threatening concern of ecological justice requires rapid response by government. The rights of refugees must be strengthened so that newcomers to Canada are able to face and overcome barriers with language, sustainable employment, and travel loan repayment.

And that Canada has 5.8 million people living in poverty must be addressed. Compared to other developed countries, our poverty rate is shocking: Canada ranks 24th out of 34 OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

While CPJ has an important role to play in addressing elected federal leaders, we must be equally concerned in providing forums for Canadian citizens to become educated and engaged. It is my hope that CPJ's platform for meaningful engagement on the critical issues of eradicating poverty in Canada, refugee rights and ecological justice can be enhanced and broadened so that more and more Canadians become active in seeking and demanding federal policies that will help create a Canadian society that provides justice for all.

I look forward to the challenge and honour of being the new Executive Director of CPJ. The thorough work and dedication of a committed staff team serves our causes well. And organizations such as Centretown Churches Social Action Committee are critical partners in the work. Your partnership with CPJ is especially important in our effort to eradicate poverty in Canada.

CPJ was delighted to see the Canadian government begin to take action on the concern of poverty in Canada.

The Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS) was launched in August 2018 and included a number of pieces that CPJ was pleased to see. These include:

- Targets and timelines that commit the federal government to a reduction of poverty by 20% of 2015 Market Basket Measure (MBM) rates by 2020 and 50% of 2015 MBM rates in 2030.
- A commitment to legislation of the strategy;
- A recognition of the need for better measurements of progress, what is being called a “dashboard of indicators” that will be publicly accessible;
- An Advisory Council on Poverty that will monitor the progress of the strategy in reaching its targets and that will engage the public in the ongoing implementation of the strategy. This council will include a range of experts, including people with lived experience of poverty.

What the strategy did not include was any new funding or programs. It also was not clear what the implementation plan was for the strategy and when the data would be available to view its progress.

We also had some concern about the decision to create an official poverty line based on the Market Basket Measure (a low-income measure based on costs of a set “basket” of necessities in a range of communities). Instead, we want to see a range of measures used for analysis that would provide the most fulsome picture of the complex reality of poverty. In addition, the MBM requires an ongoing rebasing to adequately reflect the actual costs it measures and what is included in the basket.

Finally, the goal that CPJ and the Dignity for All campaign has pushed for over the past decade has been poverty eradication. We hold that this strategy does not go far enough to identify ending poverty as the goal (which is a commitment we’ve made by adopting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals).

Since the launch of the CPRS, the federal government introduced legislation, Bill C-84, An Act respecting the reduction of poverty. This legislation was tabled in November. In December, CPJ and Dignity for All, along with our partner, Campaign 2000, were asked to submit recommendation for amendments to the legislation. We decided to use this opportunity to build support for a stronger bill, so we developed an open letter to Minister Duclos with our recommendations and gathered over 530 signatories, including organizations and individuals.

Our recommendations highlighted the need to ensure the legislation included the goal of poverty eradication, included a range of measurement options to track progress of the strategy to reach these goals, a regular review process for the MBM, and a strong role for the Advisory Council to monitor progress and provide public reporting and accountability.

You can read the open letter on the Dignity for All website (under Latest News).

We are now waiting for the legislation to move to the HUMA (Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities) committee and then the Senate for study, where possibly amendments would be recommended. Our concern at this point is that given the short timeline the legislation might not be passed before the end of this Parliamentary session. This means it might be lost entirely, depending on the outcome of the next federal election.

This does not mean that the CPRS is lost, as it does not require legislation to be implemented. It does, however, make it more vulnerable to not reaching its targets. This is especially important to monitor given that this is an election year.

Budget 2019 offered a few helpful boosts to social funding in a few areas. However, given that there is a poverty strategy and a housing strategy now launched, it is disappointing to see the continued piecemeal approach to programs and funding.

CPJ is pleased to see a recognition that housing affordability needs to be addressed with further programs directed to first-time homeowners and new rental construction funding (additional \$10 billion over nine years). However, the rollout of the spending for the National Housing Strategy has been too slow to address the current housing crisis. The National Housing Strategy is one of the legislation pieces attached to Budget 2019, but it is not clear that it will be rights-based and include needed accountability mechanisms, something that anti-poverty groups have strongly called for.

- Budget 2019 includes important first steps to develop a national pharmacare program. However, the creation of a Canadian Drug Agency (provide Health Canada with \$35 million over four years, starting in 2019–20), a national formulary, and a national strategy for high-cost drugs for rare diseases (\$1 billion over two years, starting in 2022–23, with up to \$500 million per year ongoing) must reflect a level of urgency to meaningfully address the needs of people in Canada struggling under crippling costs.
- There are also some important investments for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities, including increased funds to implement Jordan’s Principle (\$1.2 billion over three years, beginning in 2019–20), enhancements to infrastructure for safe drinking water (an additional \$739 million over five years, beginning in 2019–20, with \$184.9 million per year ongoing), investments in Nutrition North and mental health and Inuit suicide prevention supports (\$50 million over 10 years, starting in 2019–20, with \$5 million per year ongoing), and supports for urban Indigenous residents (\$60 million over five years, beginning in 2019–20, to support capital infrastructure investments in Friendship Centres). However, again, these needs are so urgent that implementation and immediate rollout will be key, along with additional investments.

As for the federal election, CPJ will be developing an Election Bulletin resource that will include our assessment and recommendations related to poverty eradication, climate justice, refugee rights, and democratic reform. We will also provide a range of questions to ask candidates at debates or at the door to ensure that these areas are priorities for each party.

We will also be organizing a fall tour around the Election Bulletin to engage CPJ members and the public in general in these issues that are so important. This will be a cross Canada tour involving CPJ staff.

In addition, the Dignity for All campaign will organize our annual *Chew on This!* events on October 17th, just ahead of the fall election (Oct 22), with a particular focus on the federal election and making poverty eradication a priority.

What can Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC) do?

CCSAC can support these initiatives in a number of ways.

There will likely be an opportunity to submit briefs to the HUMA committee when it studies the poverty legislation. This should be happening in the next few weeks. CPJ and Dignity for All will submit our own briefs along with the open letter recommendations.

Also, you can make use of the Election Bulletin when it is out (around June) and organize discussion events in your churches, or even all-candidates debates on poverty issues. It would also be great to see you out for our tour event in Ottawa!

You can also participate again in *Chew on This!* to make sure our voices are loud and clear just ahead of the election calling for action to end poverty. We do not want to lose the progress we have made over the last several years.

I'd also like to invite you to our AGM Plenary address by Dennis Gruending, an Ottawa based author, blogger and former MP who will be speaking on "Reframing Populism: restoring civility in the public dialogue" That will be 7:30 p.m. on May 30th at the Woodside Hall in Dominion Chalmers Church, 355 Cooper Street.

Thank you again for this opportunity to meet with you this evening. I look forward to becoming better acquainted with Centretown Churches Social Action Committee's work, and to see how we can continue to be a support to each other.
