

# Stirrings



Clifford Harper

A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Winter 2020

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## Decolonial Aspirations in Education

*A Reflection from the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation  
and the TA'AN KWÄCH'ÄN Council (Whitehorse, Yukon)*

By Mark Connell

“Canada is removing Indigenous people from their territory today. Colonialism is alive and well. Reconciliation never got a chance to live.” – Jesse Wenté, Feb 12th, 2020.

For the past 20 years I have been a teacher in Canada’s Yukon Territory. Informed by Catholic Social teaching and based on a commitment to justice and peace, I entered this profession with the noblest intentions. Unfortunately, as one of my Tlingit students pointed out early in my career, good intentions do not undo or end the violence enacted through schools. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes clear the role educators and churches played in enacting cultural genocide within Residential Schools against Indigenous peoples, the fundamental questions becomes “How am I (you/we) any different now?”

In 1973, the landmark document *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow: A Statement of Grievances and an Approach to Settlement by the Yukon Indian People* declared that “the land has always been home to us and...if we are to survive as a unique people, we must have rights to the land (*Council for Yukon Indians*, 1973 p. 8).



Mohawk Land Protectors  
photo: Murray Lumley

Offering a critique of the multidimensional and ever-pervasive violence of colonialism, *Together Today* linked the various ways Settler Canadian institutions undermine Yukon First Nation agency, capacity and sovereignty. In regards to schooling, *Together Today*

identified curriculum irrelevancy, the lack of indigenous teachers and pedagogical approaches that were incongruent with Yukon First Nation epistemology. The document proclaimed “the schools are the most Canadian aspect of the entire country ... they have a strong resemblance to the jails in that incarceration in them is also involuntary and joyless and the program encourages stupidity and insensitivity” (*Council for Yukon Indians*, 1973, p. 49).

This quote exemplifies a deep understanding of what resurgence scholar Glen Coulthard describes as a salient feature of Settler-Colonial domination. In no uncertain terms, *Together Today* implicates teachers as apparatuses of the state that continuously dispossess “Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). Nonetheless, *Together Today* advocated for a pluralistic model of public education that would stimulate pride in

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## Decolonization in Education

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one's culture and background while developing the skills and knowledge required for full participation in modern life (*Council for Yukon Indians*, 1973, p. 56).

For the last five years of my career I have had the honour of working with the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP) in Whitehorse. Informed by the hopeful vision and powerful critique articulated in *Together Today*, YNTEP was initiated to offer a decolonizing framework through which future teachers could develop a way of teaching that reclaims and affirms the aspirations of Yukon First Nation(s) governments and communities. Speaking from her perspective as a Teslin Tlingit Citizen, experienced Tlingit Language Teacher and YNTEP student Khagane Jules succinctly declared that the success of Yukon schools, and thus teachers, will be determined by their ability to prepare Indigenous youth to become leaders who will protect and sustain their language and land for future generations.

In many ways, the vision of education articulated by Khagane creates ample space to envision a response to the question posed in the first paragraph – “How am I any different now?”. **I can be different by:**

- Developing an understanding of Settler Colonialism, the history of colonialism, of historical treaties and modern treaties.
- Considering on a daily basis my own privilege and position, particularly the ways in which I benefit from Settler Colonialism.

- Building meaningful and reciprocal partnerships with First Nation communities on whose land I live.
- Building meaningful, respectful partnership with Elders and knowledge keepers and ensure that my classroom is a place where those perspectives are given space and honoured.
- Being open to being challenged and transformed via partnerships.
- Being accountable to First Nation(s) Governments in whose territories I am working.
- In the courses I am teaching, privileging indigenous scholarship.
- Respect, honour and work to sustain indigenous sovereignty and treaty rights.

As I write this, Canada's RCMP are forcibly removing the Wet'suwet'en people from their traditional territory as they protest the building of the Coast Gas Link Pipeline on their lands. For many observers, this move from the Settler state destroys the possibility of reconciliation. The current transparency of relationships begs the question, How are we any different now?

### Recommend Reading:

- *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy – Art Manual*
- *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations – Leanne Simpson*
- *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada – Lowman and Barker*

## Free, Prior and Informed Consent



CPT at Tyendinaga Territory in Ontario  
photo: Murray Lumley

On 15 February 2020, day ten of the Mohawk railroad blockade in support of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation's protection of their traditional territory in British Columbia from the building of a pipeline, Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) members, as human rights observers, were asked to be present for the meeting of the Mohawk leaders with Marc Miller the Canadian Minister of Indigenous Services.

The meeting was continued indoors on the reserve. After seven hours the Minister said that “modest progress” was made and that his advise to his colleagues is, “Let's be sure we get to a peaceful solution. That involves dialogue.”



Report by Bob Holmes CSB  
Marc Miller (right) meeting with Mohawk leaders at the railroad camp in Tyendinaga.  
photo: Real Peoples Media

## Stirrings

A Peace & Justice Newsletter  
A project of the Basilian Centre for Peace & Justice

Stirring: (noun) the act of moving or putting into motion, activity

# Basilian Peace & Justice Committee

Each Basilian-led parish, school and college has been invited to recommend a representative to this newly formed committee and in this special issue of **Stirrings** you will find articles from several of our Basilian Colleges and Parishes giving witness to their commitment to working for peace and justice.

## St. John Fisher College Alternative Spring Break

By Juliette A. Miller

Almost three years ago, after Hurricane Harvey hit the southeastern coast of the United States, many organizations at St. John Fisher College in Rochester collected hygiene products, clothing, and monetary donations to send to those in need. As a pharmacy student leader, I organized my own donation collection within the pharmacy school. The Office of Campus Ministry reached out to the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, who identified a family that we chose to sponsor.

However, we felt that our efforts were not enough. Over spring break, six students (including myself) and three Campus Ministry leaders travelled to Houston to personally help the father of the family rebuild their home. While on the service trip, we also served at the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen and visited the University of St. Thomas, the chaplains at the Port of Houston, and the Casa Juan Diego Catholic Worker House. Prior to the trip, I did not know the other students, but by the end I became very close with them and consider several of them my best friends today. We brought back many stories and



memories, with the resolve to continue doing service trips over spring break in the future.

The following year, we chose Tampa, Florida as our destination to generate a large amount of student interest. There was so much interest, in fact, that about twenty-five students ultimately participated on the trip, over four times as many as the previous year. It required significant fundraising and planning, but we were so thankful for the number of students eager to serve. Four of the students who attended the first trip to Houston also attended the service trip to Tampa; two of them (myself and another girl named Emily) were selected to be team leaders for the Tampa trip.

In Tampa, we served at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore, several Habitat for Humanity building sites, the Feeding Tampa Bay food bank, and several soup kitchens/homeless

outreach centers. For me personally, serving at the soup kitchens was the most inspiring because my role was to talk to the people we were serving and make them feel welcome. It was wonderful to not only meet and connect with so many diverse people but to also see as a team leader how the experiences influenced other students. The trip fostered new conversations and relationships between all of the students that will undoubtedly have a lifelong impact.

Going forward, we are excited to be taking a similar number of students to Knoxville, Tennessee for this year's upcoming spring break trip. This year is especially unique because one of our student Peer Ministers is in charge of the planning, and we have already been more successful in our fundraising than last year. We hope to continue to hold these spring break trips to continue to establish connections all over the country, as well as right in our own school among each other.



Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

## Assumption Parish in Windsor



## An Active Justice Presence

By Freda and Ken Jones

In the recent past we have initiated a program called Assumption Cares...compassionate care of Windsor's West end. A partnership of Assumption Parish, Windsor Essex compassion care community, and Hospice of Windsor and Essex county.

Assumption Cares offers a variety of programs for people living in the West end of Windsor. programs are available to anyone living in the West end of Windsor and are free. This is an outreach program and participation is not limited to parishioners or members of the church. All are welcome.

We at Assumption through Assumption Cares are able to empower people of Windsor West through our programs, which encourage mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing by active discipleship. Some of our programs include: Feeding Windsor community meals (open to all), conversation English, health screening, exercise for chronic

pain, walk and talk, and many more

Through Development and Peace we are able to support our partners in the Global South who promote alternatives to our unfair Social Political and Economic structures, and educate Canadians about the cause of poverty and mobilize Canadians towards actions for change,

One of our recent actions was to participate in the *Share the Journey Campaign*. Our goal was to show solidarity with the millions of displaced people of the world. Collectively as Canadians we took on the challenge of walking 40,075 Kms, which is the equivalent of the circumference of the earth.

We organized a group to walk in Windsor Saturday June 1 2019. We had 40 people walk including politicians and clergy. As a group we walked 176 kms. As well, we presented the challenge to our local schools, where 790 students participated and covered 2969 Kms.

Our group of walkers were greeted by two local Federal members of Parliament, who spoke of the plight of refugees coming into Canada. They also shared of the role Canada is playing in the current crisis of accepting Syrian refugees.

The day was a great success. Our realization is that our need now is to spread the word, and to continue to work of justice locally and globally.

## St. Anne's Parish in Houston

## The Need for Justice in Healthcare in the USA

By Mary Schultz

Cynthia's husband, age 57, suffered a sudden, massive stroke 4 months ago, leaving him brain damaged, totally disabled, and with recent complications sending him back to ICU. As primary wage-earner, he was a self-employed artisan, but never consistently made Social Security payments. Only \$30/month disability income was available. Working full time in retail gave Cynthia shifts that varied, day to day.

Living in a "social services desert" she located the only 2 possible sources of emergency financial support there, but was told to return in 3 weeks. Because her income was now critical, and her work schedule unpredictable, she didn't even know if she'd be able to keep an appointment to apply for help. In the meantime, she was spending all non-work time attending her husband.

The cost of in-home care, medical services, supplies, oxygen and a helper while Cynthia was at work consumed available money and caused the bill for electricity to jump. Cynthia had paid current rent by over-drawing her bank account; and paid utility bills by failing to pay monthly car



notes. Eviction was on the horizon, and debt loomed everywhere. In the end, she found the St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Anne's parish by referral from the United Way emergency hotline.

St. Anne's is a parish with financial resources that allow its SVdP conference to help folks like Cynthia to cobble together a small grant from its budget, with small grants from other churches and social services. But that help is restricted to emergencies within the parish boundaries. This call was coming in from a "friend" 20 miles from the parish and the financial crisis was immediate. Two Vincentians from the St. Anne group visited Cynthia outside ICU at her husband's hospital, and were emotionally, spiritually and concretely "there for her".

This story highlights the injustice of a complex and unequal healthcare system in the United States, and lop-sided government budget priorities that leave public "safety-net" systems with huge deficits. Meeting smart and hard-working friends like Cynthia in crisis quickly inspires a drive to work for system changes that might have prevented her crisis from being so dire.

## St. Michael' College Challenges, Hopes and Dreams

By Emma Graham

At the University of St. Michael's College, 2020 marks the beginning of a new program which seeks to highlight the stories, struggles, and desires of students from a breadth of personal experience, through a new social media campaign, *#soulsofSMC*. Second Year student, Oghogho Abigail Iyekekpolor came up with this idea while working as a Work Study student in the Office of Student Life at St. Mike's.

The program launched featuring the two co-presidents of the Christianity and Culture Club, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Fittingly, each of the student features will not only ask students what they love about University, or their extra curriculars, but each week student's will be invited



Abigail

to share some of the deeper challenges they have faced in pursuing higher education, or some of the challenges they see in the world around us.

Maryrose Doucette, in her feature, noted that "Christian Unity is not about ignoring our differences, but focusing on what we share, and on relationship with each other, and having that as the common ground from which we talk about everything else." In sharing their stories, these students give a face and a voice to what it means to be a student who desires more for their community than simply superficiality.

In February, for instance, we chose to use *#soulsofSMC* as a platform for Black History Month, and featured

black student leaders on campus who shared their hopes and dreams for the future of our College, and our country. Miriam Dilindi, a fourth year Immunology and Human Biology international student shared she didn't have the home support she needed, with her family being in a different country, but that through serving in leadership roles, and committing to new friendships, she was able to learn more about herself and others, and find a way to make a home here.

This campaign will continue to run throughout the academic year, and summer months, hopefully inspiring incoming students, as well as faculty, staff, and alumni, to consider how the varied experience of our students, are essential to what gives our community vibrancy, and that their vulnerability in sharing the barriers they have faced will move us to desire to eliminate those barriers.

*Emma Graham is Student Life Associate University of St Michael's College in the University of Toronto*

## How Trump, Brexit and Facebook broke Democracy

Brittany Kaiser, Cambridge Analytica's (CA) whistleblower, explains how big data is collected when we click "accept" on terms of service and cookies and how it is analysed to provide behavioral microtargeting on individuals. Millions of individuals were given "OCEAN" scores to determine the degree that they are "open" (O), "conscientious" (C), "extroverted" (E), "agreeable" (A) or "neurotic" (N).

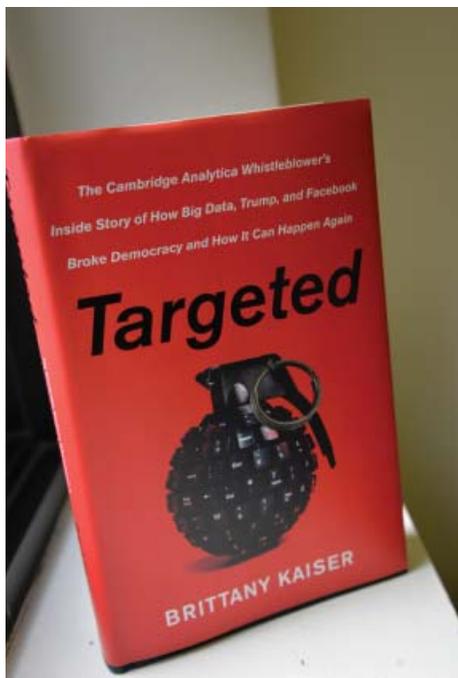
Next they added in the issues they have shown an interest in and using algorithms to predict how they are likely to vote, belong to a party, etc. AC then utilized the best platform by

which to reach each person - Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, print - and designed ads, articles, etc. especially for them. CA found ways to constantly test and improve the effectiveness of their targeting.

CA was looking for "individuals' underlying motivations and their levers of persuasion." They offered "the right message for the right target audience, from the right source on the right channel at the right time. And that's how you win."

And win they did! Although Cambridge Analytica has been forced to cease its operations this book is an essential read for understanding how our data is being used to subvert democracy.

Robert Holmes CSB



St. Joseph's College

# Learning in the Land Where Jesus Taught

By Mark Dickens

St. Joseph's College, on the University of Alberta campus, has been running a course called "Christian Scriptures in the Holy Land" for the past two years (2018 and 2019). Students on the course spend 3 weeks living in and travelling around Israeli and Palestinian territory while getting a basic introduction to the New Testament. The goal is to learn about the Scriptures in the land where many of the events in the life of Jesus and the early church took place. The students are accompanied by Fr. Terry Kersch CSB and the instructor of the course.

A great opportunity to start to see the world through different eyes

Course participants spend much of their time in Bethlehem, where they stay in a Christian guest house and gather for class discussions in a seminar room kindly provided by Bethlehem University. In addition to seeing sites in and around Bethlehem, roughly a third of the time is spent visiting important historical and cultural sites scattered throughout the Palestinian territory and Israel. Two days are spent in Jerusalem and separate tours take the students north to Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast, Nazareth and various locations around the Sea of Galilee, as well as east to Qumran, Masada and other sites near the Dead Sea.

Living in another culture, even only for 3 weeks, is a great opportunity to start to see the world through different eyes, whether that experience is gained through talking to local residents, eating the local cuisine or just taking in the sights, sounds and smells of the local market. All these experiences, compounded by visiting sites that are held sacred by not only Christians but often also Jews and Muslims, help to put biblical events into their historical, social and cultural context. Indeed, there are some things that have changed little in the Holy Land since the time of Jesus.

Studying scriptural texts in the place where they occurred - a land with a history

One of the highlights of the trip each year has been visiting the orphanage which is located near the guest-house, where students learn about the plight of orphans in the local culture. This is typically a heart-rending experience for those of us who come from a very different cultural context. Israel and Palestine are complex places with complex histories; the past has a direct impact on the present. Although there was little that we could do directly to address social justice issues, perhaps studying scriptural texts which are often more complex than we appreciate in the place where they occurred, a land with a history that is much more complex and nuanced than many realize, is a first step towards not only interpreting the text more faithfully but also interpreting the Holy Land and its people to others back home, where misconceptions about this topic often abound.

*"Dr. Mark Dickens teaches "Christian Scriptures in the Holy Land," for St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta."*

## Basilian Peace & Justice Pilgrimage to the Holy Land



We have been brought not only to the Holy Land but also to meet the Holy People and to hear their stories.

We return home to the comfort and relative safety of our North American homes, but we return changed.

We return enraged by the injustices that we have seen with our own eyes and heard about through their stories.

We return humbled by their ability to live with dignity in the face of a bureaucratic nightmare designed to frustrate and humiliate.

We return inspired by their passion in resistance and their *sumud* (steadfastness).  
a Previous Pilgrim

29 Sept.-13 Oct.  
2020  
contact:  
[rhoimes@basilian.org](mailto:rhoimes@basilian.org)

# The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes

*Jesus lived in a territory occupied by the army of the Roman Empire. He was not a Roman. His family and people were subjected to Roman rule. This understanding is important to understanding his teachings and the Gospel.*

*On our Basilian Peace and Justice Pilgrimages to the Holy Land we have met with Mitri Raheb. He is a Palestinian Christian and Lutheran pastor who lives and works in Bethlehem. His book, Faith in the Face of Empire, offers an interpretation the Gospel that recognizes that the Holy Land has a history of being under occupation by many Empires. Recognizing this context is important to interpreting the message of Jesus today.*

*Below are some quotes from his book which relate to understanding the situation of today's Palestinian Christians under Israeli occupation.*

*Bob Holmes CSB*



Mitri Raheb

photo: Facebook Page

As a Palestinian Christian, Palestine is the land of both my physical and my spiritual forefathers and foremothers. The biblical story is thus part and parcel of my nation's history, a history of continuous occupation by succeeding empires. In fact, the biblical story can best be understood as a response to the geo-political history of the region.

Jesus was a Middle Eastern Palestinian Jew. If he were to travel through Western countries today, he would be "randomly" pulled aside and his person and papers would be checked. The Bible is a Middle Eastern book. It is a product of that region with all of its complexities. While it might seem that I am stating the obvious, I firmly believe that this notion has not been given enough attention. In fact



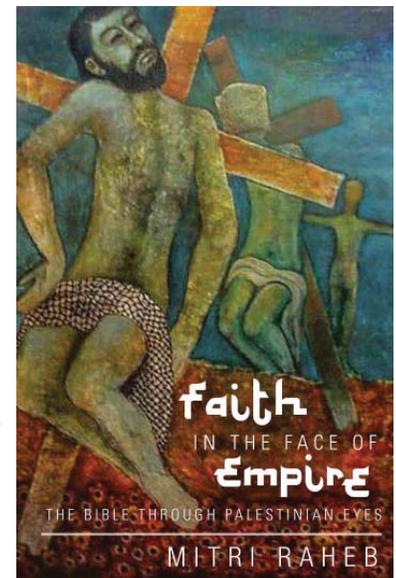
Pilgrims joining weekly vigil of Israeli  
"Women in Black" in Jerusalem

and in spite of being a Middle Easterner, I have come to discover the importance of the geo-politics of the region only in the last ten years. I began to sense that it was not merely by chance that the three monotheistic religions and their sacred scriptures, for good or for bad, hailed from the same region. . . . For me, as a Palestinian Christian, the realization of this fact made for a fascinating discovery.

This discovery did not come to light in an academic setting somewhere in the West, and it was not the outcome of a study I undertook in a research center. It was, instead, the gradual accumulation of knowledge I gained "in the field" by observing the movements and processes occurring in Palestine over a prolonged period. In short, I was observing, analyzing, and trying to understand what was happening around me.

Empires create their own theologies to justify their occupation. Such oppression generates a number of important questions among the occupied: "Where are you, God?" and "Why doesn't God interfere to rescue people?" When, under various regimes, diverse identities emerge in different parts of Palestine, the question arises, "Who is my neighbor?" And finally, "How can liberation be achieved?" is a constant question. . . . These questions and the differing responses can be found in the Bible, just as they are found in Palestine today.

As a pastor I refuse to separate the reality of this world from the reality of the Bible by preaching a "cheap gospel" that neither challenges reality nor is challenged by it.



Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

St. John Fisher College  
**Bearing Witness:  
 Life and Justice for All**

By Kevin Mannara CSB & Michael Lilholt

Over 650 participants attended the annual **Catholic Social Ministry Gathering** entitled *Bearing Witness: Life and Justice for All* held January 25-28 in Washington, DC. Ninety-seven of those participants came from colleges and universities across the US, including three from St. John Fisher College.

The Gathering included talks, workshops, advocacy training, sharing of best practices, transformation through restorative justice, as well as Mass and other prayer services.

In his opening keynote address entitled *Our Call to Holiness: Life and Justice For All*, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, the archbishop of Chicago, quoted Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* stating, "we are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, where people are defined first of all by their responsibility to their brothers and sisters and to history." (55)

Inspired by the current papacy, Cupich continued "What is needed is an integrated and consistent approach, with the priority being our attention to what Christ is doing, saving us by bringing us together, bringing about the Kingdom of God by creating a people. Absent this focus, we risk our call to holiness."

He then quoted Pope Francis' 2018 apostolic exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad*, "We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty." (101) The Cardinal concluded, "For it is in encountering the poor and the marginalized that we are mutually enriched, that we respond to the call to holiness as we take up the social ministry of the Church."

Other powerful speakers included Terri Steinberg, the mother of a wrongfully convicted prisoner previously on death row. Her personal testimony was a powerful way to convey her message that there should be an end to the death penalty.



Advocacy skills were taught to the Gathering's participants. On the final day, participants of the conference went to Capitol Hill to speak with their senators and representatives on domestic and international issues that were discussed during the Gathering. Topics included legislation to address gun violence, nuclear weapons, racism, and care for the environment.

St. John Fisher students put their newly learned advocacy skills to work while visiting the offices of Senator Charles Schumer and Rep. Joseph Morelle, where a SJFC grad is Chief of Staff and a current student is an intern. They were able to take a stand on how to best achieve this new form of humanism through peace and justice.



**CARDINAL FLAHIFF BASILIAN CENTRE**

95 St. Joseph Street, Toronto

**FEATURING**

**JOHN DEAR**

Renowned Peace Activist, Author, & Nobel Prize Nominee

**SYLVIA KEESMAAT**

Biblical Scholar, Author, Teacher & Organic Farmer

**ANDREW WESLEY**

Elder-in-Residence, Indigenous Student Services, U of T

**ESTHER WESLEY**

Anglican Fund for Healing & Reconciliation

**TICKETS: [EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com)**

Early Bird \$75 (until 31 March), Regular \$95, Students \$25

Includes Friday Evening Reception

& Saturday Refreshments and Lunch