

Immanuel United Church  
October 17th, 2021

Welcome

*This Sunday is being celebrated as "World Food Sunday" ecumenically around the globe. Also, October 17th is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.*

*The United Church of Canada is encouraging congregations across Canada to learn about Guaranteed Livable Income through a worship on this Sunday.*

*We invite you to join this reflective service for the purpose of learning. We do so in the hope of becoming a Christ-inspired, beloved community holding the concerns on poverty in our prayers.*

Call to Worship:

We gather together  
as grateful people seeking Christ's Word made new  
for this time and this place.

**We gather together  
to do all we can to live the Creator's intention  
of community of right relations,  
of community of peace.**

We gather together  
ready to act as the Spirit guides us.

**With our seeking, our living, our acting,  
we worship God.**

Lighting of the Christ Candle  
(*light the candle*) May the spark of Christ shine in you.

Hymn: VU 603 *In Loving Partnership We Come*

Prayer for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty:

Dear crucified Christ,  
it is you we remember and you to whom we pray.  
In our liturgy and song, we worship you:  
the one who healed the sick and called us to follow.

**You ate at the table of Zacharias the sinner.**

**You befriended Mary Magdalene, an outcast of her day.  
You enjoyed socializing, gathering disciples around the table  
with plenty of wine to drink and bread to eat.**

You read the words of Isaiah in the synagogue and  
turned over the money changers' tables in anger.

**You were a threat to the church and the government  
because you proclaimed the good news.**

You walked with the people who were poor, ate with them, listened to them,  
and loved them until the end.

**We ask to have faith as we travel in solidarity with people who are poor.  
We ask to be given strength to feed those of us who are hungry—  
not with the crumbs that fall from rich tables  
but with quality, dignity, equity, and hope.**

We pray this day, asking not just what the government must do,  
but what does this day of "eradicating poverty" call us,  
the church and followers of you,  
to do and to be. Amen.

### **Theological Rationale for Guaranteed Livable Income developed by GLI Network**

When the pandemic first happened, some people began saying that we are all in this boat together. In fact, we are not all in the same boat. Inequities that existed long before COVID have been exacerbated in the pandemic. Low-income racialized communities have been hit the hardest by COVID and its economic impact. In our commitment to becoming an anti-racist church, we continue to work collectively toward economic justice.

Mutual care and responsibility for one another is part of what it means to be a neighbour. "God has so arranged the body...that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it"(1 Corinthians 12:24–26).

We share this divine imperative of care and responsibility with other major religions of the world. "Do unto others as we would have them do unto us," The

Golden Rule, is a faith principle of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Indigenous Spiritualities, and most other religions.

The Parables of Jesus make it clear that God's economy is inclusive of all. The price of something does not determine its value. All labourers in the vineyard receive the same compensation no matter how great or small a contribution they are able to offer. (Matthew 20:1–15). God instills in every human the desire to contribute to the common good and values each contribution.

Canada's current social welfare system has failed to recognize the value of all persons, the work and contributions of all, denying the dignity of our common humanity. Instead, artists, caregivers, and workers in our precarious gig economy struggle with inadequate incomes that suck the time, energy, and health from our neighbours. This reality contradicts the very justice and peace God envisions for the whole inhabited earth. "[T]hey shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid... (Micah 4:4).

Poverty in a wealthy nation such as Canada is a judgment on the community that creates and allows the impoverishment of its people. It is morally and ethically an affront to the will of God.

A guaranteed livable income replaces the systemic divide between the weak and strong, between the worthy and unworthy, with a system based on our common humanity. It replaces a system built on employability—where the so-called "deserving poor" have to beg for an inadequate subsistence—with a system that invests our taxes in the lives of all Canadians so that all may flourish and live with dignity.

During the pandemic, certain policy measures have been implemented by the federal government to relieve some of the insecurities and indignities over the past year. Thus far, these measures have been interim, not universally accessible, and without the commitment to be seriously and deeply named as abidingly durable.

We thus call for a guaranteed livable income that implements a structure of justice-making and justice-keeping that no longer excuses, rationalizes, and tolerates poverty. We call for a system that expresses a fundamental, fair level of income security for all (as did the early band of Christians who shared their resources so there was no need among them, Acts 4:32–35).

Hymn: MV 62 *There Is Room For All*

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Reflection: Growing perspectives on GLI (Guaranteed Livable Income)

In today's reading Jesus says to his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The former Moderator Very Rev. Lois Wilson shared her sermon on a guaranteed livable income at Christie Gardens Retirement Home, in Toronto, on October 18th, last year.

In her reflection, Wilson shared her memory with Ted Scott, the Primate of the Anglican Church, asking him the difference between faith and belief. He replied, "Think of a person at Niagara Falls turning to you and saying, 'Do you believe I can walk across the falls on that high wire and not fall in?' 'Yes,' you respond, 'I believe you can do that.' That's belief. But if he should turn to you and say, 'Hop on my shoulders and I will take you across,' that is faith!"

Lois Wilson's memory leads me to remember a quote my husband shared with me. He was with Adrian Jacobs, the Keeper of the Circle at the Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, and asked what Adrian meant by saying, "Denominationalism is another name for colonization." Adrian responded, "Originally Stan MacKay said this, and he meant that people should be the agenda. People are the agenda. Nothing else."

If we might feel that learning about Guaranteed Livable Income is the agenda from our denomination, the United Church, that will concern us. It is a valid concern. Promoting GLI from GCO (General Council Office) can obviously lead to a top-down denominational, political agenda. But, really, in my faith, I witness that the learning

agenda here is *people*. People are our agenda. There should be no agenda, but people. Faith is companionship, opening us to the risk and hope of solidarity. And it never starts from the GCO. In 2020 to 21, candles and hopes were lit by both lay and clergy members of the United Church and other denominations who, together, make up the body of Christ, along with non-faith sectors and grassroots. The lights of the vigils spread across Canada, joined by 50 Senators.

Good News to the Poor, Lois Wilson's sermon in 2020, begins with the Bible story that comes right after our Gospel reading today from the Gospel of Mark about Jesus calming the stormy sea. The story is about Jesus' encounter with two women of very different backgrounds. One is Jairus' daughter. She is 12 years old and belongs to a family of great privilege. Her father, Jairus is a big man in the synagogue. The second story is of a woman who is ostracized because of a flow of blood, which she has had for 12 years. Jesus is at the seashore, mixing with the "ochlos", the street people, illegal immigrants, etc. Among them is Jairus, socially important and wealthy, at the centre of Jewish privilege. He is seeking Jesus because his 12-year-old daughter is in desperate need. Mark says she is dying. In the Book of Luke which was written later, it says she is dead. Jairus implores Jesus for help, and so the two set out to go to Jairus's house. Suddenly the story is interrupted with ANOTHER story. The story of the woman who has been menstruating for 12 years. Why did Mark do this?

The second story immediately establishes a symbiotic relationship with Story # 1 of Jairus's daughter - who is 12 years old. The second story pictures three strokes against the woman: First, she is ritually unclean, as it is taboo for her to leave her home during menstruation, according to the laws of Leviticus. Therefore, she is ISOLATED from her community. Second, she is barren in a culture that prizes fertility. Third, she is poor. So, barren, poor and excluded from community, she is desperate. We all know how inclusion is so important to mental health. She joins the crowd surrounding Jesus. If she could only creep up from behind and touch his garment, she believes it will connect her historically with the Hebrew tradition of wearing the tallit, the tasselled garment Jewish people wear that connects them with their history of liberation under Moses. This audacious woman knows that if she can touch him, she will be liberated from her troubles. So she reaches out and immediately "she knew herself freed from her troubles."

"Who touched me?" Jesus says, knowing immediately that some energy has left him. She tells him the truth. And then comes the crucial line by Jesus in the story. According to several translations of the Bible:

In the Revised Standard Version it is "Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace, freed forever from this disease." In the King James Version it is "healed of that plague." In the New English Bible it is "freed forever from your trouble." In the Jerusalem Bible it is "your faith has restored you to health, freed forever from your complaint." Asian Liberation theologians translate it, "Go in wholeness, freed forever from your bondage." — i.e., your taboo and exclusion. She broke the taboo, reached out, and appropriated the spiritual energy of Jesus.

All agree that it is the initiative of the woman that releases the spiritual power of Jesus. But he responded to the excluded woman immediately, while Jairus had to wait.

Mark 4 and 5 (Mark 4:35-41; 5:21-43) tell the sequence of the stories that interrupt the others. The disciples' peaceful sailing on the sea was unexpectedly interrupted by the weather's change. The storm terrified the disciples. They interrupted Jesus's sound sleep prompting Jesus to quiet the storm's power. The urgency to go out and heal Jairus's twelve-year-old-daughter was interrupted by the woman whose bleeding for twelve years has meant the total loss of her community's support and inclusion.

What happened in the interrupted story was healing in its broad sense — body, mind, and spirit, and restoration to full community. Jesus established a new relationship with this woman who went through triple barriers: socially excluded, barren and poor.

So, the woman is restored to her community after 12 years. Now, the story is interrupted again with the story # 1 about Jairus' daughter. Jesus and Jairus immediately set out and Jesus tells him not to be afraid as she is only asleep. He clears the crowd from her room, and reaching out, says to the 12-year-old girl, "Get up!" She does, and is restored to wholeness and to community. Rather than suggesting they all fall on their knees and pray, Jesus says, "Give her something to eat!"

At this point, Wilson turns the story to us and asks a question for us to ponder. "So why does Mark INTERRUPT his first story?" Wilson continues. "I think it may be because he can't bear to see the one at the centre be made well until those at the edge are reconnected to full community."

"I watched Steve Paikin's *The Agenda* show on TVO the other night, and they were discussing the issue of poverty. They kept endlessly quoting, "The poor we will always have with us," though nobody knew where the quote came from. I was so mad I e-mailed Steve and pointed out they were misquoting Deuteronomy 15:4-5, which says, "There will never be any poor among you IF only you obey the Lord your God by fully keeping my commandments."

“Today there ARE many more poor among us because of COVID. ...

COVID is a major INTERRUPTION. Might it mean a fundamental change in relationships between those of us at the centre and those on the edge? What might be our response to this major interruption? Not, surely, a return to normal.

Recently the United Church joined with the Anglican and Lutheran churches nationally as well as some major secular groups, such as 50 senators, to ask the federal government to make a structural change in Canadian society. Would it will all the temporary financial benefits (CERB, etc.) into a permanent Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) for people earning less than \$2,000 per month? Based on tax rolls, a cheque would automatically arrive in one’s bank account. No applications, no stigma. Pilot projects in Hamilton and Thunder Bay revealed that people on this benefit paid fewer visits to the doctor, got themselves better jobs, and joined in community events more. ...

May we not return to normal... If our understanding of scripture is that the well-being of those at the centre depends on those at the edge, then can we forge new relationships, particularly economic ones? Today we are needing a radical reordering of our social and economic institutions as radical as medicare once was. COVID gives us that opportunity. Your church is urging the federal government to act now! Can we become companions with the poor? So that the peace and wholeness that God wishes is restored to your neighbourhood and to our world? There are blessings in interruptions. Maybe even good news to the poor!”

Here ends the quote.

Does GLI sound to be an impossible hope? The passion for the impossible? If distributing the wealth equitably is considered to be the same as to “move the mountain from here to there” or “walk across the falls and not fall in” it might fall as an unguaranteeable belief — or a miracle we cannot reach. However, if we take this call more seriously and try to learn about the cause and the life reality of poverty, it would present to us as a matter of faith, which Jesus calls in so many stories, for us to “have/hold/share” Jesus asks us even today, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:35-41). “Hop on my shoulders and I will take you across.”

Hymn: VU 701 *What does the Lord require of you*

Prayers of the People as:

**Declaration of Collaboration:**

God of justice, we confess that we have not done enough to challenge the deadlock of inequalities and to break the cycles of poverty. We confess that we have not challenged ourselves, our communities of faith, and our governments more.

Give us courage to face our fears and with one another be the people of faith, to bear witness to the prophetic summons to do justice and walk humbly with you.

Give us the desire and the tools to summon power-sharing; to free up the resources we all need to reshape structures that oppress.

Give us grace to accept with serenity that which we cannot change, at least right now, but also the courage to change what we ought to.

We ask for the gift of sincere empathy, so that we will not be content with offering mere sympathy.

**Declaration of Re-creation:**

We declare that as disciples of Jesus, we will study and work for a new economic system in which the abundance of creation is distributed and shared more equally.

We declare that we will no longer be merely passive in seeking the end of poverty.

We declare that by our witness, and as possible through our actions, we will seek to hold those in power accountable to those they claim to serve (and even live off of).

May we, as people identified with Jesus the Christ, be known as his servant friends. Amen.

Hymn: MV 178 *Who Is My Mother*

Commissioning and Blessings:

*(Barry Morris is a minister with the Longhouse Council of Native Ministry in east Vancouver, BC, and throughout the city)*

Here, take these offering plates/baskets and our Mission & Service offerings  
**to feed hungry, homeless, and sinned-against people.**

Embrace the richness of your holy kingdom, O God, via Jesus:

**for that is where true justice and commonwealth is.**

Take care of our neighbours, as ourselves and our families.