

MICAH CENTRE

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2020

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ATTENTIVE HOPE: AN ADVENT CALL

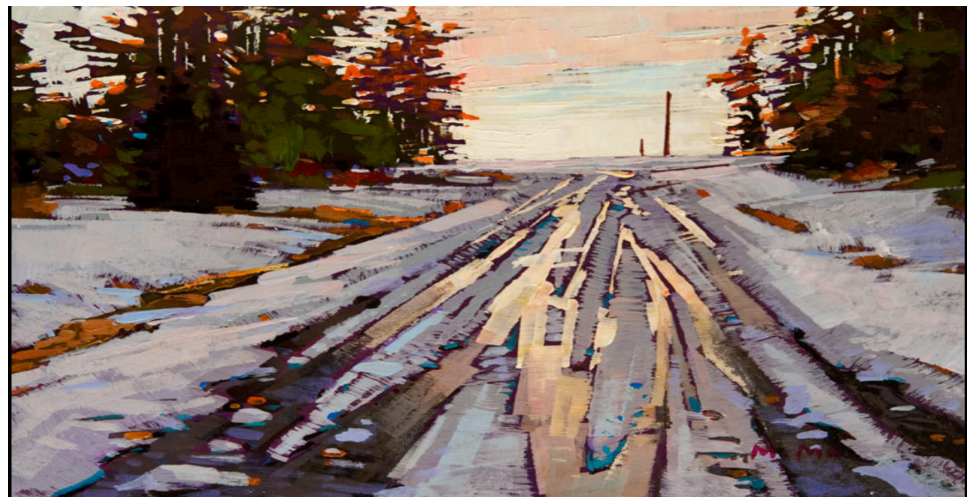
Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning
Micah Centre Program Director

Slanting beams of sunlight cast long shadows on the wall of my office, a sign that the fall semester is coming to a close and the season of Advent is here. The slanted light warms my room, enlivens my spirit . . . and exposes the dust that is normally well-hidden.

The winter light in Edmonton is not unlike the spirit of Advent itself. The light of God's now-and-coming kingdom for which we wait gives great comfort: All is not lost! The darkness will give birth to light, pain to joy! But God's arrival also exposes those things that still grieve us: the hungry have not yet been filled, the lowly not yet lifted up, the powerful still sit comfortably on their thrones, and Mary's song in Luke 2 seems to be unfulfilled.

How do we go about witnessing to the advent of God's upside-down kingdom when our longing is equal parts despair and hope, especially in these uniquely strange times?

A more contemporary Mary might help us. In 'Instructions for Living', the poet Mary Oliver invites us to



A Warm Afternoon, Min Ma (whiterockgallery.ca)

'Pay Attention//Be Astonished//Tell About It'. I usually read those words as an invitation to pay attention to the wonder of creation. But lately I've heard Oliver's poem differently, as an invitation to attend to the world's suffering, to remain startled and angered by it, and yet to remain firecely hopeful. To gloss on the words of another poet, Oliver's words prompt me to be hopeful, though I've considered all the facts.

To see the world's glaring suffering, and to remain hopeful: that is my work this Advent. Stories of the Micah Centre's kingdom co-conspirators – like the ones in this newsletter – are a good place to start cultivating hope. The other? The One whose coming is still a thrill of hope for a weary world.

WHAT WE'RE READING:

'WHEREAS', by Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier is a poetry collection written in response to the attempted apology to Indigenous peoples in the USA in 2010. The poems articulate pain, joy, and hope with generosity and honesty. Especially beautiful is the poem 'WHEREAS my eyes land on the shoreline'.





Luke with mentor Loren Balisky, Director of Engagement at Kinbrace in Vancouver, BC.

Building Community with Kinbrace

Luke Greidanus, B.Sc. '21
Micah Summer Intern

Editor's Note: Siblings Kaleigh and Luke Greidanus interned this summer through the Micah Centre with organizations in Vancouver and Edmonton. Here are their stories.

This summer I had the privilege of working with the refugee claimant organization, Kinbrace Community Society. It was an amazing experience.

My time was spent supporting refugees in the various ways Kinbrace does. Sometimes this meant helping residents find new housing, getting them set up with internet, TV and bank accounts, and taking care of the Kinbrace grounds. Often what I did changed very quickly, adapting to the needs of the residents in the moment.

I also spent a significant portion of the summer helping plan and facilitate Vancouver's annual World Refugee Day celebration with MAP (a coalition of refugee claimant organizations).

"If you ever have the opportunity to build community, stop what you're doing and go do it". That is what Loren Balisky, one of the directors of Kinbrace, told me when I started. And this summer I did just that.

Sometimes this meant assisting a resident, and other times it just meant having a conversation and building relationships. Kinbrace really embraces community and it's quite powerful. It makes a summer intern like me feel like I've just gained a new family after three short months.

But more importantly, it makes people who've been forcibly displaced from their homes feel like they've just found a new one.

A note from the Micah Centre:

Luke is the first Micah intern to do an internship with Kinbrace, an organization we have long admired.

Kinbrace Community Society is an inspiring refugee housing and support organization in Vancouver, BC, whose focus is refugee claimants. Their values – welcome, trust, mutual transformation, celebration, and prayer – inform their work of housing & integration, community building, and refugee protection.

You can learn more about their good work at kinbrace.ca

"[I was told] 'If you ever have the opportunity to build community, stop what you're doing and go do it.' And this summer, I did just that."

– Luke Greidanus

EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN WITH THE MICAH CENTRE IN 2021

Beginning January 8th, we are partnering with our friends at WorldRenew to host a free series of conversation-style gatherings to discuss important questions related to pursuing just relationships with our global neighbours.

We will host a gathering every other Friday at noon (MST) called **Justice in Global Relationships**. We will be joined by leaders and practitioners from around the world who will share their wisdom and respond to your questions on some of the most pressing issues of our time: gender justice, creation care, disaster relief, the role of governments in development, & more.

Who is joining us? The Association for a More Just Society in Honduras, MP Heather McPherson, Central American theologian Ruth Padilla-Deborst, Loren Balisky from Kinbrace, & more!

Interested in joining us? Visit <https://worldrenew.ca/justice-and-global-relationships-virtual-experience>

“This experience has shown me the power of relationships in promoting healing – both relationships between individuals, and to the land.”
– Kaleigh Greidanus



Kaleigh helping plant at Lady Flower Gardens, and the fruit of her labour.

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY?

Kaleigh mentions the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD) in her reflection. What is that? The DoD set forth a principle that justified colonization and codified racial hierarchies in the law, placing European, Christian nations in the position of power in the Americas and elsewhere.

The doctrine began with a series of papal bulls that granted dominion of Catholic nations over non-Christian peoples and lands.

It evolved as a legal construct alongside colonial history, was encoded in the judiciary of settler nations, and continues to influence legal and policy decisions today.

For a helpful introduction to the Doctrine of Discovery, including its harmful effects on Indigenous communities today and the way it continues to impede the journey of reconciliation, you can visit the CRCNA's website and search 'Doctrine of Discovery: A Circle of Conversation on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.

You can also read the excellent book by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, **Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery**, published by IVP books.

To Learn From the Land, On the Land

Kaleigh Greidanus, B.Sc. '20
Micah Summer Intern

This summer I had the opportunity to volunteer with two amazing organizations – The Mustard Seed and Lady Flower Gardens.

With the Mustard Seed I spent some of my time helping facilitate their DemoCrew program, but I spent the majority of my time doing research related to the Doctrine of Discovery (see sidebar). Through this experience I learned a lot about the history of colonization in North America, and the impacts it had on Indigenous peoples in both the past and present.

At Lady Flower Gardens I helped with the day to day of the garden – planting, weeding, harvesting, etc. – but the most rewarding part of my job was building community with the member agencies that visit the garden.

The Lady Flower Garden community is something really special. It is a supportive, respectful, inclusive, and refreshing environment that empowers its members and provides opportunities for experiential learning.

I am extremely thankful for the

relationships I was able to build this summer with the LFG staff, and the member agencies. And of course, for the opportunity to be outdoors and working with the land.

This experience has shown me the power of relationships in promoting healing – both the relationships between individuals, and to the land.

A note from the Micah Centre:

Lady Flower Gardens has been a friend of the Micah Centre for many years. Since 2012, Lady Flower Gardens has supported supervised access for experiential learning opportunities on 5 acres of agricultural land to local agencies that build community with Edmonton's disadvantaged citizens. They also have access to a beautiful 75 acre old growth forest nestled in the oxbow of the North Saskatchewan River.

They aim to build a healthy agricultural community with people who have experienced serious obstacles in developing adequate health and wellness. Learn more at ladyflowergardens.com

Special Essay: Pekiwewin Has What Canada (and the Church) Needs

Jeremiah Bašurić, B.A. '13

Editor's Note: Jeremiah is a King's grad, a friend and alum of the Micah Centre, a pastor, and a community educator in Edmonton's urban core. Jeremiah's piece was written in October; for an update on Pekiwewin, see the sidebar on the opposite page. A version of this essay with active links is available upon request from the Micah Centre.

I drive or bike by the prayer camp often on my way to my work at The Mustard Seed. Some of my friends live there. At an Indigenous Lives Rally one of the organizers of the prayer camp said that it would be best not to visit so as to protect the camp from transmission and, perhaps, treachery. When I did finally visit and told the volunteers I was writing this article, one of the leaders came to escort me around the perimeter. This leader was firm but kind. He said he just wanted to make sure the community was protected. I biked to the camp and the first person I saw was a King's grad who was coming to volunteer to cook the meal that evening. It was good to see him.

The next people I saw were two members of the community. One was an Indigenous person looking for a shopping cart. This person was in the process of moving homes after a conflict with their neighbour. The other person was a man I had seen around the inner-city. He gladly wanted to give me a tour of his home. This is where the leader of the camp also joined us as our escort. Through my experience at Pekiwewin, I discovered three things the prayer camp has that Canada and the church need when it comes to addressing the issue of homelessness.

Community

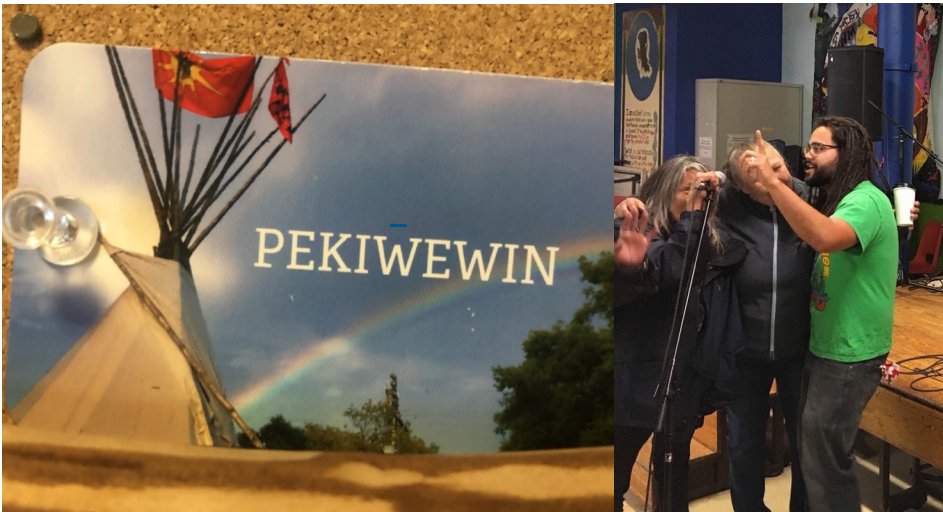
The first is community. My community guide said that he feels safe and connected to others at Pekiwewin. He showed me where his tent was. His friend had given it to him and now they were neighbours in the camp. As we walked we saw that the Indigenous person I had previously met had found a cart and was enlisting others to help with the move. The leader of the camp told me that Pekiwewin is a true community. There is harmony and joy, but also conflict and general craziness.

This is key for those experiencing homeless. According to the [Building a Better Life](#) research study in Edmonton, community and connection (social capital) is so important when it comes to one's well-being. This is especially true for those who move from homelessness to a sedentary house. People who are housed are often placed into an isolated room where bringing friends over is highly discouraged. It can be lonely. Programs like [Welcome Home](#) recruit volunteers to visit and support individuals who are recently housed, but it is not enough.

We can learn from the real community of Pekiwewin. Instead of separating ourselves from each other through fences, neighbourhoods, and garages, we should get into each other's business. We should carry each other's burdens. We should care. During a [Forge Canada](#) conference, Paul Sparks mentioned that a key to community is forgiveness. Then he asked a question: are you rooted enough in a community that forgiveness is a constant issue? Are you vulnerable enough and spend enough time with others that they get on your nerves or rub you the wrong way? Conflict and the need for forgiveness is a marker of true community. Pekiwewin is such a community.

Care

Secondly, we can learn to care. Pekiwewin is a place where people care for each other. In addition to community members looking out for each other, Pekiwewin garnered resources and support from the wider community. Volunteers came and went in regularly. Meals, clothes and other needed items were given out. My community guide gave me a comb from a toiletry bag just given to him; he invited me into his home. It seems that the rise of isolation in Canada caused us to care less for each other. (Continued on next page)



Left: A photo of the PekiweWIN prayer camp, pinned to Jeremiah Bašurić's desk
 Right: Jeremiah (in green) shares a song with friends from The Mustard Seed

“Amid policy amendments and the undulating market, we must strive to care in both our attitudes and actions. . . It [will require] sacrifice. Is this not the call of the gospel of Jesus?”

According to [Michael Shapcott](#), Canada was top in the world for low poverty rates and homelessness up to the 1990s. Starting in the 1970s the poverty rate was cut in half and 600,000 units of affordable housing were created. Then things changed. Values changed and policies changed. The National Housing Program and the National Income Assistance Program were both cut. When a Premier was asked how people previously benefiting from these programs would be able to pay rent, he said they should negotiate with their landlord and start buying dented cans at the grocery store. This kind of sentiment reveals that peoples' hearts became cold towards their neighbours.

Whether it was values or policies which first instigated the change, the results were devastating. In 2008 the [OCED](#) did a report on inequality. In this report it concludes this about Canada: “After 20 years of continuous decline, both inequality and poverty rates have increased rapidly in the past 10 years now reaching levels above the OCED average.” According to a [Shapcott lecture in 2015](#), in the past 25 years the population of Canada has gone up 30% while housing investments have decreased by 46%. In 2017, Canada began a National Housing Strategy, but the damage was already done. Today Canada's [housing affordability](#) is way below the OCED average. Homelessness in Edmonton is increasing tremendously. In Edmonton [50,000 renters](#) spend more than they can afford on rent making them vulnerable to poverty and homelessness.

These changes also represented an internal bias of Canada – let's leave it to the markets. Early on in something called the Dominion

Housing Act, the government believed that large companies are best suited to deal with housing concerns. As a result, [95% of Canadian housing is through private business](#). Only 5% of Canadians live in non-market housing which is the smallest amount of social housing in any Western country other than the United States. However, according to the OCED, Canada spends [less than the OCED average on public social spending](#) and even lower than the United States. Ouch.

It seems to me that, through all this, we have lost the capacity to care. We either leave it to governments or the markets to solve the issue. Though they have significant roles to play, these entities cannot care in the full sense of the word – only humans can. Amid policy amendments and the undulating market, we must strive to care in both our attitudes and actions. Caring means being willing to have (and own) less and it means being willing to have our rights infringed for the sake of others. It means sacrifice. Is this not the call of the gospel of Jesus?

Courage

The final thing we can learn from PekiweWIN is courage. The leader I met from the camp told me that the word 'pekiweWIN' comes from an assortment of words. One of the meanings could be 'brave one'. Those in the camp are brave. According to the leader, the camp is planning to swap out each tent for more hardy canvas in order to endure winter until their demands are met. Though I may not agree with all the demands of PekiweWIN, I admire their bravery. True community and honest caring require great courage.

PekiweWIN perhaps gives an imagination of what Canada (and humanity) could become. Personally, it helps me reimagine the Kingdom of God here and now. Instead of seeing God's reign in the tall skyscrapers, I see it inside a little tent. My community guide ended the tour at his tent. There we prayed. We quoted our favourite bible verses. Mine was Psalm 23. His was John 1.

After a renewed imagination, it takes courage to take the first steps toward that vision. If anything, may PekiweWIN urge us to pray during this difficult season. May it help us pray the dangerous words 'Your Kingdom Come Your Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven'. May our hearts be open to what God may be saying through PekiweWIN and may the Spirit give us courage to walk in his Kingdom.

WHAT IS PEKIWEWIN?

In its own words, the PekiweWIN Solidarity, Prayer, and Resource Camp was a collective of frontline workers, community organizers, and those with lived experiences of homelessness who occupied space in downtown Edmonton as a protest against the city's slow action on homelessness and a living call to Edmonton to take meaningful action. In late November, community members were moved to their preferred accommodation.



Micah Centre

at The King's University

The Micah Centre relies on the support of our partners to continue our work: building a global vision of justice and renewal with King's students and community.

Thank you for your continued gifts of prayer, time, and encouragement to us and our students.

If you are interested in supporting us financially, you can use the envelope included with this newsletter. You can also visit kingsu.ca/give, and designate your gift to the Micah Centre.