

MICAH CENTRE

NEWSLETTER ADVENT 2021

IN THIS EDITION

- ▶ A Note from Our Director
- ▶ Justice Fellowship Student Conversations
- ▶ Community Garden Wrap-Up
- ▶ Day of Truth & Reconciliation
- ▶ Spotlight on ASJ

Advent Sight

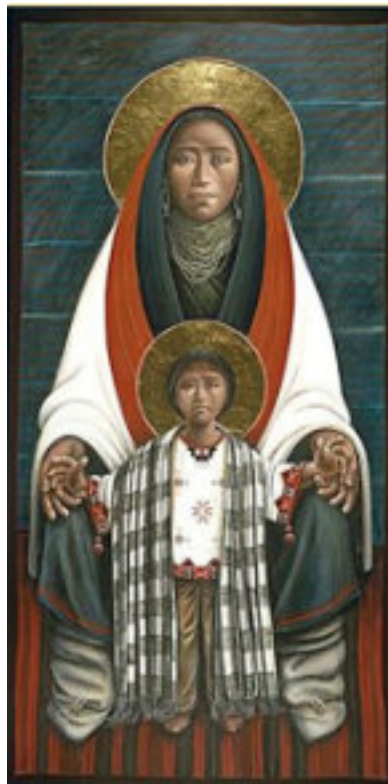
Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning

Micah Centre Program Director

If there is one verb associated with the Advent season, it is waiting. During Advent we are invited to wait in expectation and anticipation, to wait with hope and with longing.

Lately I've been thinking about Advent as a time of seeing. The story of the incarnation prompts me to ask how and where I see God's incarnate presence today. As Oscar Romero put it to his congregation of peasants and workers in El Salvador in 1978, 'If Christ became incarnate now and were a thirty-year-old man today, he could be here in the cathedral and we wouldn't know him from the rest of you.' If Christ became incarnate now, in 2021, would I recognize him? Would I recognize him in the strained faces of those fleeing Afghanistan, in the determined faces of Indigenous matriarchs around the world sacrificing their comfort to protect their land, in the urgent faces of women and men on Canada's streets struggling through a raging opioid epidemic?

To help me in my Advent practice of (re)learning to see, I've turned to artists. Artists like Jamea Richmond-Edwards and Fr. John Guliani, whose insightful paintings (see images above) insist on God's surprising presence beyond convention and expectation. Their work, and the work of other creative kingdom disrupters, unsettles my unspoken assumptions about



*Hopi Madonna,
Fr. John Guliani*

where I may see Christ's movement today and – maybe more importantly – where and with whom I need to place myself to see Christ more faithfully.

Oscar Romero spent much of his energy in the last years of his ministry inviting his community to see differently – inviting the powerful to see God's movement among the forgotten poor, and inviting the poor to see themselves as God's image-bearers. Here are his words from

an Advent sermon in 1978, as relevant as ever:

Christ became a man of his people and of his time: he lived as a Jew, he worked as a laborer of Nazareth, and since then he continues to become incarnate in everyone. If many have distanced themselves from the church, it is precisely because the church has somewhat estranged itself from humanity. But a church that can feel as its own all that is human and wants to incarnate the pain, the hope, the affliction of all who suffer and feel joy, such a church will be Christ loved and awaited, Christ present. And that depends on us (Oscar Romero, The Violence of Love).

*Madonna
Jamea Richmond-Edwards*



The Power of Perspectives: Coffee and Conversation with Students

Ellen Algera

Micah Centre Administrative Assistant

In early November, I had a chance to catch up with two Micah Centre Justice Fellowship students in our campus café. While the air was crisp outside and the leaves were crunchy underfoot, The Level was cosy and warm with scents of cappuccino alongside echoes of frothing milk; students and faculty were abuzz in conversation between classes. Nathalie and Maria were delightful coffee companions. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading their insights.

Why pursue the Justice Fellowship?

Nathalie Singh is a third year Chemistry major and Justice Fellowship student. While in her first year, Nathalie enrolled in the Justice Fellowship's "Treaties and Truth" seminar, a class that included presentations from Indigenous perspectives. Course highlights that really left an impression on Nathalie included a blanket exercise led by Dr. Long, a visit to St. Faith's Anglican Church with Ven. Travis Enright, a guest lecture on the discovery of residential school graves by Dr. Kisha Supernant (Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Alberta), and a visit to the Stan Daniels Healing Centre in Edmonton. Nathalie shares that she was intrigued with hearing about the Indigenous experience from a new point of view: "I think it made me aware of a bias that I didn't know I had." She liked this new awareness. These important conversations were so different from her typical chemistry classes; so much so that she became intrigued with the Justice Fellowship through the Micah Centre. She wanted to continue these conversations and eventually find a way to link chemistry with justice.

Jumping to today, Nathalie is working on a self-directed research project concerning microplastics in the ocean. Specifically, she is focusing on the impact that the presence of microplastics in ocean waters has on communities - tourism, local economy and health, and other population sectors. This project within the Justice

"Our broken relationship with the earth is influencing our broken relationships with other people."

*-Maria Ringma,
Justice Fellowship
student*



Fellowship is a perfect way for her to explore the marriage between chemistry and social justice issues.

Maria Ringma, a fourth year Environmental Science major with a Biology concentration, is also enrolled in the Justice Fellowship program.

Maria shared that environmental science classes by nature are very interdisciplinary, and a student can choose an arts or science emphasis during their course of study. She noted that a friend of hers earned an arts degree within the Environmental Studies program, bringing entirely new points of view to this field. Maria loves science, and although it can lead to determinate conclusions, she sees other views that can add layers to a factual, scientific base. Like Nathalie, she enjoyed seeing new perspectives from other disciplines. She was intrigued with the Justice Fellowship; she specifically wanted to see other ways of thinking within environmental studies.

For Maria, it was easy to bridge environmental studies and biology, but the strongest link she has found so far is thinking about environmental racism and environmental justice. Maria grew up in a small town in B.C. When she was 12, her family was in Sierra Leone where she saw social justice issues first-hand. Now in Edmonton, she sees even more connections. She wanted to learn how to use her experiences to become more intentional with how she lived her life.

Dr. Joanne Moyer's unit on Voluntary Simplicity bridged social justice issues with environmental science. Maria discovered the strong correlation between our highly consumeristic culture and broken relationships. This led her to the realization that "Our broken relationship with the earth is influencing our broken relationships with other people." She used to see two distinct issues to be addressed; one must solve people-to-people relationships OR solve people-to-planet relationships. By listening to different perspectives, she discovered the interrelationship. She has a new desire to add the people relationships to the people-planet relationship.

Do you have a dream vocation?

Nathalie is anticipating enrolling in graduate studies next year. She has learned from her internship that she would like to move beyond traditional research. She loves learning, and she desires to help other people with what she has learned, taking that knowledge into further studies. The Justice Fellowship helped guide her towards research that would have direct impact. This interdisciplinary approach has become a priority as she seeks graduate school options, thanks to the Fellowship.

As a whole, Nathalie has found that King's does a good job guiding students towards seeking multiple perspectives as they relate to one issue. She is inspired to continue in this vein. She loves the interdisciplinary nature of this type of work. The best collaboration involves bringing people together with different perspectives, sharing what she has to offer, and valuing all other perspectives as well. She enjoys the humbling aspect of assigning value to other views rather than trying to impose her view on others. She sees graduate school as an arena to further refine this approach.

Though she is looking forward to graduate school, Nathalie commented that there seem to be plenty of jobs available for her in various fields, using her Chemistry degree.

For Maria, she sees a wide-open playing field. She loved her internship with Parks Canada at Elk Island National Park. She heard from co-workers that competition for environmental science jobs can be tight, though. As entry-level jobs are posted, new Bachelor degree graduates are known to compete with applicants who hold Masters and Doctoral degrees, so she realizes that she may need to be patient in her vocational search.

COMMUNITY GARDEN WRAP-UP

Despite global record-setting temperatures this past summer, including periods of extreme heat and little rainfall in our corner of the world, King's community gardeners enjoyed the fruits of their labour. It's hard to believe we just finished our tenth season! Improvements have been made over the years, including the addition of a shed, good access to water, fence rehabilitation, and lessons learned with organic pest control (coyote urine pellets, anyone?). The beds are dormant and ready for winter, and there promises to be plenty of compost in storage for next spring. Reflections from our student worker, Julia Slomp, indicate that the garden continues to be a success. If you'd like to secure a spot on our list for next spring, contact Ellen at the Micah Centre: Ellen.Algera@kingsu.ca.

"It [hearing Indigenous perspectives] raised a bias in me that I didn't know I had."

*-Nathalie Singh, Justice
Fellowship student*



National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Orange Shirt Day



On Thursday September 30, over 100 students, staff, and faculty gathered in a circle of self-reflection and learning led by Rev. Enright and elder Russell Auger titled 'Reclaiming Our Losses, Reviving the Circle'. With the help of Enright's young daughter and Auger's knowledge-keeper apprentice, our community was asked to face Indigenous communities' loss of land, rights, language, and way of life.

We were also invited to consider what it means to share common ground and build new futures with Indigenous communities, newcomers to Canada, and those whose families have lived here for many generations. Rev. Enright concluded the session with the question: What will we build together?



On September 29 and 30, 2021, the Micah Centre partnered with King's Indigenous Initiatives Circle to host a series of events on campus to mark Orange Shirt Day and Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Both events were led by Rev. Travis Enright, a local Cree leader, pastor of St. Faith's Anglican Parish, and the Archdeacon for Indigenous Ministries for the Edmonton diocese.

On Wednesday September 29, Rev. Enright led a chapel entitled 'Facing our Losses'. Students and faculty prayed to the four directions, in keeping with Cree teachings about the circle of creation and wholeness. Through song, prayer, and reflection, we were invited to face the loss of life and culture faced by Indigenous communities as a result of Canada's Indian Residential School system and to ask what role we may play in justice and reconciliation.



Partner Spotlight: Asociación para una Sociedad Más Justa (ASJ)

Association for a More Just Society



Jo Ann and Albertina prepare for cooking video featuring arroz con pollo and discussing life in Honduras during the pandemic.

“God wants us to do this (work), but also gives us the creativity and the power to get it done.”

Dr. Kurt Ver Beek, ASJ Co-Founder

The ASJ web site is a treat to explore. Personal stories bring justice issues in Honduras to life, through numerous snapshot articles filled with photos and videos. In particular, their video “What does justice look like?”, illustrates the desires of our Honduran friends and provides a primer we can all relate to:

Justice looks like...

- A good education
- Medical needs met
- Feeling safe in my community
- Leaders I can trust
- A good job
- A future for my family

Over the past two decades, as relationships were built and stories shared, new areas of justice work opened up for ASJ. Numerous stories reveal that ASJ understands the strength of alliances, working together with local churches, schools, and nonprofit organizations to address significant social issues.

Vaccine Rollout

Remember where we started with our King’s students, who were completely online a year ago, learning by zoom? Access to vaccinations in Canada assisted in bringing our campus in Edmonton back to life this year. Such is not the case for our friends in Honduras, where access to vaccines was impeded.

ASJ is typically known for research, planning, and preparation. As the pandemic unfolded, ASJ was concerned about COVID-19 preparedness, so watching the Honduras government’s response became crucial. ASJ staff painstakingly monitored the government’s procurement processes with the goal of ensuring that all Hondurans would be prepared for COVID-19’s imminent arrival. Specifically, the procurement of PPE supplies, COVID test kits, syringes for immunization, and the building of additional hospital space was tracked by ASJ. The unfolding story proved frustrating.

As an example, due to corruptive practices, mobile hospitals were purchased at inflated prices (millions of dollars) in spring 2020 and never put into operation; COVID tests were purchased

without swabs, rendering them useless. Staff at ASJ was pleased that their work revealed these gaps, but the results of these early government actions were very difficult to live with. Co-founder Jo Ann noted that she has watched many friends become critically ill with COVID, and she shared that as the pandemic lingers, vaccine inequity has become the new story.

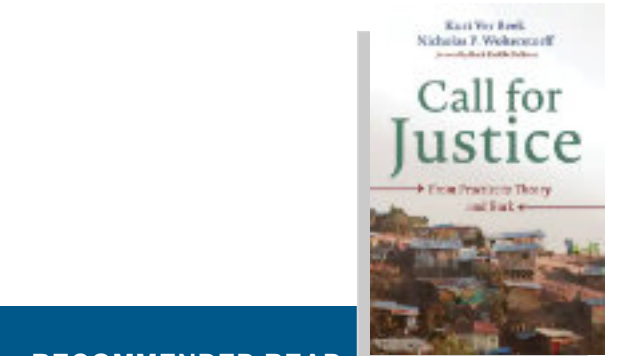
Jo Ann lives in Honduras with her family. She and her husband Kurt are from the United States and travel back frequently to ASJ’s office in Michigan. In early 2021, Jo Ann was in the United States and like many of us, found it quick and easy to get her COVID vaccine. She noted that every eligible American had access to the COVID vaccine, and by April 2021, about 40% of Americans had already received their first dose. In contrast, as of June 8 this year, only 1.38% of Hondurans were vaccinated. Ten million people live in Honduras; the country only received 50,000 vaccines at first, which were mostly given to frontline workers. Distribution was good, but the quantity was clearly not sufficient. Many other countries find themselves in this dilemma.

So, “What happened?”

Early in the pandemic, wealthy countries like the US were first in line with pharmaceutical companies to secure abundant pre-orders of vaccines (more than they would ultimately need). Less wealthy Central American and African countries did not have buying power to secure orders until early 2021.

In a minority of cases, countries have mismanaged vaccine distribution. However, the major reasons for vaccine inequity are large-quantity pre-orders by wealthy countries and pharmaceutical patent privacy. Understandably, companies have patents on their vaccine formulas, preventing the free distribution of formulas and vaccines. However, in the context of a pandemic, it is important to look at the situation from another perspective. In essence, taxpayers in wealthy countries such as the United States ultimately paid for the vaccines. Now that there are reports of “leftover vaccines”, a conclusion can be made that the people who paid for them should have a voice in the decision of how to dispose of or share the extra supply.

Right: Albertina receives her COVID-19 vaccine.



RECOMMENDED READ

Kurt Ver Beek’s book *Call for Justice*, written with Nicholas Wolterstorff, is available on Amazon. Small group reader guides, as well as an opportunity to dialogue with the authors, can be requested on ASJ’s web site.

Moral, economic, and health arguments can be made for the case of sharing vaccines with the world in an equal fashion. The reality is that the pandemic will surge as long as there are pockets of the world that are unvaccinated. ASJ is promoting The People’s Vaccine, a movement where wealthier countries share their oversupply of vaccines and patents with countries still in need. Jo Ann shared that it has been hard for her to return to Honduras as a vaccinated person, being surrounded by friends who do not have access to the vaccine, yet.

“What happened next?”

ASJ organized 200 Honduran civic organizations—churches, schools, businesses, and nonprofits—to petition the Biden administration, sharing local stories exhibiting the need for world leaders to work together in vaccine rollouts. As a result, Honduras received 3 million vaccines from the U.S. & COVAX, bumping up the vaccination rate from 6.5% to 30% (first doses). Thankfully, as of November 2021, Honduras reports a vaccination rate of almost 40% of the population, thanks in large part to the work of ASJ and affiliates of the People’s Vaccine.

For the full conversation with Jo Ann, watch “Cooking with ASJ, hosted by Jo Ann and Albertina” on ASJ’s web site or Facebook page. You’ll also discover the secret to making authentic arroz con pollo!

To get involved, see the People’s Vaccine for Honduras link on ASJ’s web page.

Last winter, students in the Justice and Global Relationships seminar engaged with prominent justice leaders during Friday afternoon zoom sessions. Though the pandemic forced the classes online, rich conversations were possible with remote guest lecturers. One highlight was a presentation by Dr. Kurt Ver Beek, Co-Founder of the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ). We’d like to shine the spotlight on ASJ this season, sharing details of their history and focusing on some of the work they are involved in today.

ASJ’s story began in 1998 in a garage, with one part-time employee and the donated services of its founders, Kurt Ver Beek and his wife Jo Ann Van Engen. Kurt and Jo Ann had spent time working in development with partners in Honduras. They came to see that their collective efforts failed when confronted with laws, policies, and systems in Honduras that did not respect the needs and rights of the Honduran people, especially the poor. One of their first partnerships was with a local group seeking land titles for Hondurans who lacked any right to the land on which they lived. ASJ advocates for residents in poor communities by providing legal representation in the courts when unjust land seizure is imminent. Over 70,000 land titles have now been secured for these vulnerable residents.

As ASJ’s influence and work diversified, ASJ-United States (US) was formed to educate friends back home in North America. In response, teams in the US and Canada offer financial and prayer support. ASJ continues to educate Christians regarding what justice looks like, and how to respond.



Micah Centre

at The King's University

The Micah Centre is located on land governed by Treaty 6. We acknowledge and celebrate all the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands.

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.