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ACTS of FAITH



Take a behind-the-scenes look at our social justice work through KAIROS Canada



PLUS: Criminal 'Justice' + Staying Open to the Unknown + Loving Your Enemies

COVER STORY

December 2011



10 Strength in Numbers

Public advocacy, such as this ecumenical march for climate justice, is just one way KAIROS is fighting for social change.

On the cover, clockwise from top left: Chantal Bilulu (right), KAIROS partner from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Jill Harris, a leader and activist from Penelakut First Nation participate in the Living Courage tour (photo courtesy of KAIROS). Drummers march in Ottawa for indigenous rights (photo by Suzanne Ure). Children from an indigenous Cofan community in Ecuador, which is resisting oil exploration on its territory (photo by Sara Stratton). One of Suncor Energy's oilsands operations (photo by Sara Stratton).

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Uniting, Deliberating, Advocating

War, hunger, poverty, and ecological degradation. These are just some of the reasons we support KAIROS.

As an ELCIC member, it's important for you to know which organizations you're supporting, what they do to advance the mission of the church, and how they do it. That's why, over the past few years, we've featured some of our long-standing partners on the cover of *Canada Lutheran*.

Chances are you're familiar with the name "KAIROS Canada," but I wonder how much you really know about the nature and scope of the organization's work here in Canada and around the world. This issue we're inviting you to learn more about this vital partner in mission.

Just as you know Canadian Lutheran World Relief as the ELCIC's relief and development partner, I want you to think of KAIROS as your vehicle for social change. This organization—a coalition of churches and religious organizations working together for justice—is at the forefront of preserving dignity, human rights, and ecological responsibility, among other things. Rather than providing an emotional knee-jerk response to injustice, KAIROS favours an informed and measured approach.

For example, in its "countries of concern" (Palestine and Israel, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Colombia, and the Philippines), KAIROS examines the external forces shaping and sustaining the regional conflicts, political crisis, sexual violence, and poverty it hopes to abate.

In northern Canada, team members are listening to their Inuit, First Nations, and Métis sisters and

brothers who testify that climate change is endangering their cultures and livelihoods.


In communities across the nation, KAIROS staff members are facilitating workshops on the topic of peace in the Middle East. And in Ottawa, as part of the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, KAIROS is advocating for legislation that would hold Canadian corporations accountable for abuses committed internationally. It's an organization that is



By Lucia Carruthers
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Just as you know Canadian Lutheran World Relief as the ELCIC's relief and development partner, I want you to think of KAIROS as your vehicle for social change.

helping to build social movements and give the most vulnerable in our society a voice.

Our cover story on page 10 will help explain in greater detail the work KAIROS undertakes with our co-operation and support. Whether the organization is conducting research on climate change or marching on Parliament Hill, the end goal remains the same: to bring about social transformation in order to create a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. In other words, to *do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:8) 

Lucia

Acts of FAITH

Learn how KAIROS Canada uses research, education, and action to unite churches in a common response to social justice.

By Geoff Kirbyson

Chances are you know KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives for its advocacy work: carrying banners through Ottawa promoting indigenous rights. Supporting an interfaith call for action on climate change. Leading a fact-finding delegation to Alberta's oilsands. But, frankly, that's just the tip of the iceberg for

this Toronto-based organization. Supported by the ELCIC and 10 other churches and church organizations across the country, KAIROS carries out some of our most important work in the areas of social justice research, education, and—yes—advocacy.

The organization is focused on two inseparable issues: sustainability and human rights. “In the Global North and South, you can’t have sustainability when you don’t have human rights, and if you don’t have human rights, you can’t have sustainability,” says Mary Corkery KAIROS’s executive director.

Named for a Greek word meaning “a critical moment,” KAIROS has also given special attention to the rights of indigenous people around the world—and in Canada in particular.

National Bishop Rev. Susan Johnson says the activities that KAIROS undertakes are merely an extension of the church. “It’s the work that our church is doing. Instead of doing it on our own, we’re doing it with partners,” she says. “It’s not a separate organization; we’re a member of the organization.”

Bishop Johnson says there is strength in numbers when working for compassionate justice for the underprivileged. “It’s a



After declaring a state of emergency, the Attawapiskat First Nation is asking the federal and Ontario governments to provide safe housing, clean drinking water, and a new elementary school, which has been promised for years.

PHOTO BY PHIL FONTAINE

multiplier effect. When several churches and organizations get together, we can do more in a cost-effective way and get more bang for our buck,” she says. “With KAIROS we have a louder voice. We’re a medium-sized church in Canada, and by combining with others, we can make a greater impact.”

Through its work for human rights and sustainability, KAIROS has identified a number of priorities, including:

- promoting sustainable energy policies on the national and international level,
- inspiring more Canadians to seek climate justice,
- linking women of courage around the world in common actions to end violence,
- urging companies to respect human rights and ecological integrity, and
- joining supporters across denominations in worship that inspires faithful justice.

So how can one relatively small organization make such a large impact? To address these priorities, KAIROS focuses on three areas: research, education, and advocacy.

RESEARCH: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

KAIROS employs a team of researchers to conduct social policy research from a faith-based perspective. It is compiled through literature reviews, meeting with experts and the affected parties themselves, identifying the important issues, and naming its theological inspiration for future strategies.

The research piece feeds KAIROS’s education and advocacy work, Bishop Johnson says. “These are people who follow different issues and explore all the avenues they can so that we as churches can make informed decisions together.”

The churches believe they have a moral and ethical voice, and combining forces gives them the strongest means of putting forward their views on what the world could look like, says Rev. Paul Gehrs, assistant to the national bishop and KAIROS board chair. “The research is vital because it helps ensure that the church can speak with some degree of integrity and information. We can say, ‘yes, this is a reasonable



KAIROS was part of the Roll With the Declaration campaign last June in Ottawa, in which Canadians made banners encouraging the federal government to support the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

and effective position’ rather than pursuing pie-in-the-sky ideas,” he says.

For example, KAIROS recently partnered with another group to publish a report called, *Honouring the Child*, which examined the state of children’s rights and welfare on reserves. Such research can inform the organization’s work on indigenous rights and poverty in Canada.

EDUCATION: SPREADING THE WORD

Through their written resources (www.kairoscanada.org) and public education events, KAIROS tries to raise awareness of

crucial issues facing the planet, including world economics and the environment.

Part of this component involves its staff conducting workshops. But KAIROS supporters can learn about issues in a variety of ways. There’s no substitute for gaining first-hand knowledge; that’s why KAIROS recently sponsored a tour for human-rights educators from such countries as the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Congo to meet with Canadians interested in learning more about human-rights issues.

Here at home, the recent state of emergency at the Attawapiskat First Nation is a vivid example, Corkery says, of why

GET IN ON THE ACTION

The KAIROS website offers several ways you can learn more about—or get involved in—social justice issues. Visit www.kairoscanada.org to:

- **Find a local KAIROS group or become a KAIROS companion:** click on “Get Involved”
- **Find a KAIROS event near you:** click on “KAIROS Events”
- **Access online, print, and DVD resources for use in group meetings, classrooms, and worship:** click on “Resources.”



National Bishop Rev. Susan Johnson with (left to right) Fabricio Guaman, Mike Karikpo, and Rev. Bruce Adema view Alberta's oilsands on the way to Fort Chipewyan as part of a KAIROS-led delegation in 2009. Global partners and church leaders were there exploring the theological, ethical, and social implications of fossil fuel extraction.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

KAIROS has dedicated itself to improving the lives and rights of indigenous people in Canada, a task that many would consider to be a waste of time.

After all, how do you change relationships and stereotypes that, in some cases, have been ingrained since European settlers arrived? The answer: one step at a time.

The church is no stranger to David and Goliath struggles. Consider its role in freeing Nelson Mandela, the world's most famous political prisoner of apartheid. Many authors have compared South Africa's political system to Canada's treatment of its Aboriginal Peoples.

"There were days when many people said Mandela was a terrorist or he wouldn't be in jail," says Mary

Corkery, executive director of KAIROS. "When he was released as democracy came to South Africa, he thanked Canada and the churches for their role."

There is no silver bullet for Canada's problems, however. Instead, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people need to be brought into the discussion so a collaborative solution can be found, Corkery says. "Generations of injustice have created the conditions we have now. It won't be solved overnight or in a year or two. It will require us to build a new relationship," she says. "Collectively, we need to figure out how to address the needs of our indigenous communities so we don't just put a Band-Aid on the problem."

education is so important to KAIROS's mandate. In early November, at the onset of winter, this northern Ontario community declared a state of emergency because many of its residents were living in tents, trailers, and temporary shelters. In addition, it is reported that children, the elderly, and the sick are sleeping in rooms just a few feet away from raw sewage. This, Corkery says, shows that too many Canadians are unaware of the plight of indigenous people.

"There's a momentum growing," she says. "It's not enough for us to feel badly about these things. We need to get to the root causes of the problems and look at the inherent rights of indigenous people."

Attawapiskat's school wasn't replaced when it was found to be located on a highly contaminated site. This kind of discrimination is hardly an isolated case. "Few people realize that indigenous schools receive \$2,000 to \$3,000 less funding per child per year. It's a huge injustice," Corkery says.

ADVOCACY: TAKING ACTION

Advocacy is KAIROS's highest-profile activity. In recent years, it has alerted Canadians to the subsidies and tax breaks that large oil companies receive and to the atrocious living conditions on many reserves.

"Advocacy means voice," says Corkery. "It means we bring forward the voices of the people who aren't being heard, people who are living in poverty; the Earth, which is groaning in pain; and those suffering human-rights abuses."

Last June, KAIROS was part of the Roll With the Declaration campaign, in which Canadians from across the country made banners encouraging the federal government to support the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. "The Canadian government was one of the last in the world to sign on to the declaration. Our next step is encouraging the government to implement the actions," Corkery says.

Bishop Johnson spoke at the June event; she was also part of a church leaders' investigation of the Alberta oil-

sands. She met with aboriginal groups, officials from both government and industry, people in the community, and environmental organizations to learn about the issue from as many different viewpoints as possible.

As a result, KAIROS is asking for objective scientific observation and monitoring of nearby water sources, most notably the Athabasca River, which provides water for thousands of people in northern Alberta. KAIROS also requested that industry groups delay the start of new projects until a full environmental assessment of the oil-extraction process can be done.

“We want the rights of indigenous peoples to be protected and listened to in this process of development,” Bishop Johnson says. “And KAIROS is the vehicle through which that—and so much more—can happen.”


MOVING FORWARD

Two years ago, the Canadian International Development Agency rejected KAIROS’s funding application, leaving the organization with a huge financial void. But KAIROS isn’t going to let a \$1.6-million funding cut get in the way of promoting human rights and sustainability both at home and abroad. There’s no question the hit has impacted the

ability to conduct research, education, and advocacy work, but it hasn’t lessened the organization’s resolve, says Corkery.

In response to the federal cuts, KAIROS set out to diversify its funding sources and has found willing partners—from churches, individual donors, religious communities, foundations, unions, teachers’ federations, and a justice fund—to help support its work. “We’re more varied in our funding

than we were before,” Corkery says. “But our partners have still lost out on our work. We can’t make up \$1.6 million.”

There is still much work to be done, and people’s lives depend on it, she says. They’re counting on KAIROS to bring their voices forward. 

Geoff Kirbyson is a Winnipeg-based freelance writer.



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Canada



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Truth, Reconciliation & Equity: *They Matter to Us!*

KAIROS CAMPAIGN 2011–12



Truth, Reconciliation & Equity Matter to Bishop Susan! *Show that they matter to you as a Covenant People: In Mission for Others.*

Indigenous peoples in Canada suffer enormous social and economic inequities. The KAIROS campaign for 2011–2012 wants to change this. Join the campaign by taking a picture of yourself or your church group with a sign like the bishop's. Send it to photos@kairoscanada.org and we will use it in our public witness campaign.

For more action opportunities, educational resources, worship material, and a campaign video featuring Bishop Susan, visit www.kairoscanada.org/take-action/truth-equity-reconciliation.

