

SING FIRES OF JUSTICE

2020/2021
Community
Discussion Guide

Written by Laura Benjamins & Laura Enns

Territorial Acknowledgement | We acknowledge that Wilfrid Laurier University and Martin Luther University College are situated on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The College was built on the Haldimand Tract, land granted in 1784 to the Six Nations that includes 10 kilometres on each side of the Grand River from its source in Dundalk to its mouth at Lake Erie. The land was granted to support the Six Nations in perpetuity, but this did not happen. As a multifaith festival, we humbly seek a new relationship with the Original Peoples of this land--one based in honour and deep respect for Indigenous spirituality in its own right (TRC Call to Action #60). As we join our voices together, may our song be a clear call for justice for Indigenous peoples and the land.



Kanata Centre for Worship and Global Song



Laurier Centre for Music in the Community

Sing Fires of Justice is an annual multifaith festival of song and word that promotes social justice. It is a program of the Laurier Centre for Music in the Community and the Kanata Centre for Worship and Global Song at Martin Luther University College. The following discussion guide is intended for community groups that wish to reflect together on our 2020 “Home” and 2021 “Still@Home” events.

Part 1: Home - [Video Recording](#)

On Sunday, October 4th, 2020, we gathered on Zoom for a virtual program of discussion, song, poetry, and prayer, focusing on the theme of “home.” It featured a variety of choirs, musicians, and spoken-word artists, including: Waterloo Region Mass Choir, Carlos Morgan, Rachel Lee Cousineau, Sebastian Meadows-Helmer, and Bashar Lulu Jabbour. A roundtable of Jean Becker, Bashar Lulu Jabbour, and Nathan Stretch explored the topic of what makes “home” for people in our Region. The event specifically featured Water Street House, a project of the Working Centre in Kitchener that is a new support for those facing drug addiction issues. Thank you to our video editors, Gerard Yun & Dawud Wharnsby.

General Discussion Questions

1. What does “home” mean for you? What images/sounds/feelings/tastes/scents does the word evoke for you?
2. “A home is not simply a building; it is the shelter around the intimacy of a life. Coming in from the outside world and its rasp of force and usage, you relax and allow yourself to be who you are” (John O’Donohue). In what contexts, if any, do you allow yourself to be fully who you are? Is this similar or different to what “home” means for you?
3. Mary (Joy) Philip states, “Home is a place I arrive at, where I’m enabled to be who I am. Home is where I’m emboldened to live my identity. I am home when I can be who I am called to be. Created in the image of God” (54:18). In what context do you feel empowered to live into your identity or calling?
4. What does it mean for you to make your home on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Six Nations in perpetuity? What do you know about treaty relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples in this region, and how do you understand your responsibilities as part of those treaties (i.e. [Dish with One Spoon, Two Row Wampum and Covenant Chain](#))? How can learning about, and living into these treaties help to build peace between settlers and Indigenous peoples?

5. Listen to the musical excerpts:

Gerard Yun – “Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations” by R. Wagamese (2:10)

Sebastian Meadows-Helmer - Bach violin sonata (7:48)

Hymn - “Shelter me” (11:36)

Laura Pudwell - “I walk a stranger in this land” (19:18)

Rachel-Lee Cousineau - “Not alone” (29:39)

Hymn - “The earth does not belong to us” (50:54)

Hymn - Audrey Saparno - “A way to you” (54:47)

Carlos Morgan - “Have a little faith” (58:23)

Waterloo Region Mass Choir - “Wade in the water” (1:04:21)

Is there a particular piece that stands out for you, or reflects/challenges/expands your understanding of home?

6. In what ways has your sense of home or community shifted during COVID-19?

Roundtable Discussion Questions

Roundtable Participants:

- **Jean Becker:** Senior Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Associate Vice-President of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, University of Waterloo
- **Bashar Lulu Jabbour:** Spoken word poet, Kitchener-Waterloo
- **Nathan Stretch:** The Working Centre community, Kitchener
- **Debbie Lou Ludolph,** Moderator, Director of Kanata Centre, Martin Luther University College

7. Bashar Lulu Jabbour states that when one is displaced from home in terms of a physical location, they must actively work to produce “home” where they are. Home, then, becomes an action or a verb, such as hosting people for dinner and trying to be part of the immediate community by fostering relationships (32:30). What actions have you taken, or could you take to create a sense of home for yourself and others in our community?
8. Jean Becker quotes Jesse Thistle who writes about homelessness. Jesse Thistle states that homelessness for Indigenous peoples is not simply a lack of having a house to live in; it is one’s disconnection from family, land, culture, and identity (35:50).

How have social, economic, and environmental injustices contributed to homelessness, or a sense of disconnection/marginalization for some people in our society? Or more specifically, for:

- People who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour (BIPOC)?
- People experiencing homelessness or other forms of housing insecurity?
- Refugees or other migrants?

9. How has COVID-19 impacted the most vulnerable people in our society and community?
10. Nathan Stretch states that home and the ability to retain shelter have not always been available for everyone in society. He suggests that we need to stop moralizing the access to resources that people need in this community and instead focus on concepts of reciprocity, community-building/togetherness, and access to resources (40:24). In what ways do we moralize around access to housing, food, money, land, and other basic necessities of life? How does this contribute to poverty, disconnection, and homelessness?
11. Nathan Stretch suggests that as a community, we can take communal responsibility to continue to work in our systems to make them more inclusive over time. Yet sometimes we need to work outside of our norms, and come with shared compassion, a shared understanding of complex humanity, and work to bring resources to particular groups that have been dislocated (42:35). In what ways could faith groups and other community groups work within, or outside of existing systems to create change?
12. Jean Becker talks about being a good neighbour and trying to do what we can for others, extending the helping hand. Yet there is a need for some significant structural change to take place, addressing those structures that support inequality and elements of discrimination or racism (44:39). What does it mean to work for structural change? How does this relate to your understanding of what it means to be a good neighbour?
13. Bashar Lulu Jabbour refers to a redistribution of resources on a global scale (47:27). What examples have you seen of effective grassroots social action?
14. Jean Becker mentions that we need to start talking about living in a principled society. The Indigenous community specifically needs to be connected to the land and their culture, and yet they are a landless people - for land in which they can live a culturally authentic life (46:20). What connections do you see between our relationship with the

land, and our relationships with other people? Is our care for people also reflected in the way we care for the land, and vice versa?

15. Jean Becker states that we live in a society today that fosters “scarcity thinking.” Our cultural norms lead us to a sense of fear of being “without” (49:40). During this time of crisis, how has a fear of scarcity created barriers between people, or brought them together? What would “abundance thinking” look like?

Part 2: Still@Home - [Video Recording](#)

On Sunday, March 21, 2021, we met again on Zoom for a follow-up program of music, insight, and discussion, further exploring the theme of “home.” It included contributions by Sebastian Meadows-Helmer, Kay Brown, Janelle Lightborne and Steve Johnston, and Holy Heart Chamber Choir. It also featured a conversation between Nadine Green of [Lot 42 A Better Tent City](#) and Father Toby Collins of St. Mary’s Church in Kitchener.

Discussion Questions

1. Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said: “I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things.” Fr. Toby Collins and Nadine Green also talk about authentic integration of faith and action (26:30-28:36). What is the importance of prayer or reflection *and* action in creating peace? How are they connected?
2. Event participants suggest that new technology has helped individuals connect with those outside of their home (35:28). What is the role of technology in creating a sense of home or displacement for individuals in our community? How does access to technology impact people’s experience of home or community?
3. Event participants describe “home” as a place of love and security, belonging, and safety, where one does not have to be “on guard” (35:11). How might we practically create a sense of home, specifically in terms of the above characteristics, in our conversations and interactions with others?
4. What can we learn from Nadine Green’s example of compassion for others, and personal responsiveness to those in need of housing and care (17:42)? What has been the impact of her actions?

5. Nadine Green talks about Lot 42 as an example of “Social Entrepreneurship” (23:56). “Social Entrepreneurship” can be defined as “the practice of combining opportunity, innovation, and resourcefulness to address critical social and environmental challenges” (Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, University of Oxford). How is this similar to, or different from the concept of entrepreneurship that you may be more familiar with? What are the possibilities and/or limitations of applying entrepreneurial thinking to social and environmental challenges? What happens when we move beyond addressing symptoms of a problem and look at the whole system? Where do you see people working effectively across sectors (industry, government, public sector, non-profit organizations, etc.) to achieve positive systemic change?

Visit us online for more information and resources:

singfiresofjustice.ca