



News from the Student Christian Movement

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From the Canada Office



Occasionally I come up with interesting slogans, concepts or jokes that I record in my 'Good Ideas' folder. Earlier this year I passed it over to our summer student for them to develop new memorabilia for the SCM. My favourite are a set of buttons exploring ecumenism through a series of phrases. One says that **"Good Things Happen When Christians Work Together"**. Another reads **"Diversity makes Christianity Beautiful"**.

It's easy to list ways that Christianity in general and Christians in particular have fallen short of these ideals, within our own communities as well as towards other religious and spiritual identities, and it is important for us to maintain that self critique. Nonetheless, we must maintain the vision, aptly named in the SCM Living Prayer:

**Embracing radical ecumenism and interreligious praxis,
we celebrate the paradox of unity in diversity.**

Without the concept that "unity in diversity" is possible, or the space to attempt it, it's tempting to take the easy route, avoiding difference and difficulty, and finding ways to ignore or condemn those who diverge from the perception of the norm. This leaves us spiritually impoverished at best, and leads to the harbingers of oppression; cruelty and cynicism.

It's only in leaving behind our experience of the "ordinary" that we get beyond the belief that has been handed down to us; the "God of our Fathers", and risk encountering the God who created all of humanity. The SCM and our chaplain colleagues know how important the University is for testing, growing and discovering identity. Do you share this story?

Theologians and psychologists alike remind us that identity is formed through encounter with others. It seems that this is part of the Good News too – we need each other to be fully ourselves. And God needs us to be fully ourselves, and so leads us into community with one another – a community of diverse and divergent people. That's the way God made us. To quote another in the #Ecumenerd series: **"God Can't be Locked In A Human-Made Box"**. Amen!

Peter Haresnape, SCM General Secretary, confirmed #Ecumenerd

Cahoots 2018 – Leaning into Discomfort

This summer's Cahoots Festival found a new location, Cedar Ridge Camp near Bancroft, ON in response to previous years' feedback on accessibility and distance from Ottawa and Montreal. This year, we also sought a smaller number of participants for a more intimate retreat-style event, with a more focused programme on the theme of "Leaning into Discomfort".



We were graced by some awe-inspiring weather. The first morning looked out on a foggy lake, accompanied by the unusual yet pleasant sound of ice break-up. That night, a windstorm knocked out the power, inviting us to an acoustic lantern-lit Open Mic Night.

The next day, we were greeted by beautiful sunshine, allowing us to enjoy exciting outdoor activities, including archery and high ropes. A handful of courageous souls even ventured into the lake for a polar bear swim! The power was restored in enough time for the usual last-night-of-Cahoots dance.



It is our belief and experience in SCM that some discomfort necessarily accompanies important conversations and meaningful change. Our theme of "Leaning into Discomfort" brought exciting and engaging speakers and conversation moderators, including LeeAnn McKenna on our theme and Yami Msosa on ensuring that love is at the centre of our social justice work. Conversations on embracing difference, reading hard Bible passages, sharing anxiety around climate change helped lead into practice. We had some difficult conversations, engaged with uncomfortable scripture, and approached some tough social justice issues, both formally and informally.

As always, creative pursuits helped provide fun spaces for processing and artistic expression, including silkscreening, building fairy houses, and sharing songs around the

campfire. Sunday morning worship as well as morning prayer time gave opportunities for singing and dancing.

We are grateful to the staff of Cedar Ridge Camp, the entire collective of organizers and volunteers that made the festival run, and the financial support of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada.



Speaking Out for Migrant Justice

The SCM has been monitoring the US Government's family separation policies at the US-Mexico border, and in July the Canada Office assembled a team of volunteers from across Canada. Together, we have been meeting regularly, researching this issue and looking into ways that we as Canadians can most effectively respond. Here are some facts to consider:

- The vast majority of refugees at the US-Mexico border are fleeing gang violence in Central America.
- Seeking refugee status at an international border is legal under international law.
- Until recently, all minors were separated from parents and treated as if they had arrived unaccompanied.
- Over 1000 minors have been "lost" in the system.
- Due to public pressure, minors are now being detained with family; however, they can now be detained indefinitely.
- Minors that have already been separated from their parents are not being reunited.
- Refugee claimants are not entitled to legal representation, and children as young as three have been required to defend their refugee claim in court without a lawyer.

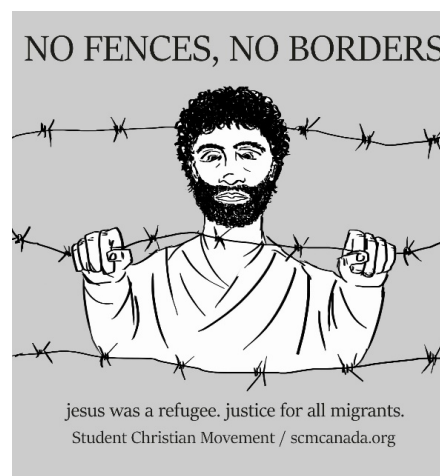
As Canadians observing from a country away, it is difficult to know how we can respond to this violation of rights. The SCM group decided that the most concrete action we can take as Canadians is to advocate for the repeal of the Safe Third Country Agreement.

The Safe Third Country Agreement (2004), requires that asylum seekers make their refugee claim in the first country they enter, whether that be Canada or the United States. Their claim is then processed within that country's system.

Since the United States has recently declared that they will no longer recognise refugee claims on the basis of gang violence or domestic violence, refugees fleeing gang violence in

Central America would be denied status in the United States, while their claims would have been accepted had they arrived in Canada first.

By maintaining the Agreement, the Government of Canada acts as if it considers the United States a safe country for refugees, effectively endorsing family separation, indefinite internment, and reports of deportations without claims being processed. Currently, refugee claimants who present themselves at any US-Canada border crossing will be returned to the United States. Only those who manage to cross over at an unofficial crossing will have their claim processed. This can be a dangerous and expensive journey, especially for families with young children and limited resources, and for individuals unaccustomed to the Canadian climate. The Safe Third Country Agreement forces asylum seekers down an unnecessarily dangerous route and allows Canada to shirk its international responsibilities.



Our working group at SCM is requesting all SCMerS to take a minute or two to sign petition e-1755 on the Canadian e-petitions website, which can be found by following this link: <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-1755> . Any Canadian citizen or resident of Canada is eligible to sign this petition, including those under the age of 18. SCMerS who would like to do more can share this petition among family and friends and/or write to their Member of Parliament. Contact info@scmcanada.org for more information.

Mexico Conference: Migratory Theology

As a part of the WSCF Advocacy and Solidarity Program, we are committed to establishing venues of open ecumenical dialogue about migration and border issues, bringing together a diverse group to discuss the issues of the day from a faith perspective. We are partnering with Christian groups in Latin America to co-organize the gathering in Mexico.

The ecumenical gathering will provide open space for university students and young theologians to reflect collectively on migration and its multiple socio-political, theological, and pastoral dimensions. The goal is to analyze the crossing of theological frontiers in our journey as Christians today and develop materials and an article and reflections for use by denominations in North, Central, and South America.

We have recruited a group of students and young adults from Canada, with help from People in Partnership (United Church of Canada) and are committed to supporting participation of our colleagues coming from South America. You can help us by making a donation to the Migratory Theology Gathering, via SCM Canada or WSCF North America.

Look out for the report in the autumn!

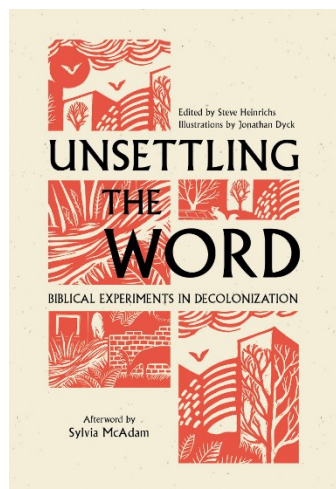
Glory to the Gender-Bending God: A Devotional about Trans Lives

Our newest devotional, *Glory to the Gender-Bending God*, is now available on the SCM website for free download. This daily devotional explores common experiences of trans people as they correlate to Biblical themes. Do name changes, chosen family, and struggling against institutions sound familiar? They should, because all these experiences echo throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. We hope to affirm the lived experiences of trans people and celebrate trans folks as people of faith.

The SCM website also hosts resources that supplement this devotional, including “Tips for a Trans-Affirming Church” and “Trans Terms & Definitions”.

See at www.scmcanada.org/resources, or contact us for a print copy.

Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization



For generations, the Bible has been employed by settler colonial societies as a weapon to dispossess Indigenous and racialized peoples of their lands, cultures, and spiritualities. Given this devastating legacy, many want nothing to do with it. But is it possible for the exploited and their allies to reclaim the Bible from the dominant powers? Can we make it an instrument for justice in the cause of the oppressed? Even a nonviolent weapon toward decolonization?

In *Unsettling the Word*, over 60 Indigenous and Settler authors come together to wrestle with the Scriptures, re-reading and re-imagining the ancient text for the sake of reparative futures. Created by Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations program, *Unsettling the Word* is intended to nurture courageous conversations with the Bible, our current settler colonial contexts, and the Church's call to costly peacemaking. The book can be purchased from CommonWord (<https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/2/19793>).

SCM Canada created a free Study Guide to aid groups in these 'Biblical Experiments in Decolonization', available for free download at www.scmcanada.org/unsettle

Memorial Project Underway

We are currently working on a permanent page to remember the SCMerS who have gone before us. If you know of an SCMer who has passed away and ought to be commemorated, please email memorial@scmcanada.org, including details such as their year of birth and death, cities/towns that they lived in, their involvement in the SCM and university, and social justice or ecumenical work that they contributed to. You may wish to include a

sentence or two about what the SCM meant to them (for example, meeting a spouse through SCM or learning a new way to study the Bible). Please include a picture of the person and a link to their obituary in your email, if available.



Winnipeg – The Cloud of Unknowing

Gladiola, an SCMer currently living in Winnipeg, reflects on her experiences as a person with a disability, approached by strangers with unsolicited advice and opinions, through the lens of the Transfiguration.

“Sitting there in this increasingly awkward and dehumanizing encounter I was struck by the fact that as distorted as her theology was, that she wasn’t afraid to make a large request of God. It never occurred to her that God did not have the power or would not want to answer her prayer. As I was sitting there, trying to glean some valuable insight from an event I might otherwise dismiss, I remember thinking that I wished I could trust God as implicitly as this young woman appeared to do. However, the more I thought about it, the more I found her faith and trust lacking. The more I found it to be too small.”

Read the full reflection on the SCM website.

Toronto – October Ecological Justice Retreat

SCM Toronto is planning a one-night event on Friday, October 19, the eve of the Toronto People’s Assembly on Climate Justice (October 20).

Come explore Christianity’s relationship to ecological justice and the impact that climate change has on social justice issues, such as poverty, migration, and exploitation. The event will take place at the University of Toronto (room TBA), beginning at 6:00 pm. It is free to attend, though donations are always welcome and appreciated.

This event is flexible – participants may wish to attend the SCM event, the People’s Assembly on Climate Justice, or both. Please attend according to your own interests, comfort, and energy levels. If you are interested in attending or otherwise connecting with SCM Canada, please RSVP by emailing Esther at esther@scmcanada.org.



Vancouver – Spirit Pride

In Vancouver, Vivian Gietz represented the SCM at the Spirit Pride LGBTQ2+ spirituality conference this July. Here is an extract from her report:

*“The overall theme of Spirit Pride was **Celebrating Our Gifts**. Keynote speaker Matthias Roberts brought the idea of queerness as spiritual gift and talked of the gifts that LGBTQ+ people bring to Christian space. From my seat in the second pew, beaming ear to ear, I soaked up every word of Matthias and the other speakers, fully at home and blessed to hear aloud what God has been teaching me over the past few years: queerness is a spiritual gift. I know it is true; I am consistently a better and happier Christian and person, closer to God and able to more fully love and appreciate those around me, because I am bisexual.*

This weekend was a reminder that queerness allows us to access our deeper spiritual selves, frequently in moments and places we least expect. With deeper awareness, the lessons, ideas, and people which formed our lives in the past can reappear in unexpected, important, and more beautiful ways. In the same way, queerness can bring forth gifts in mundane, unplanned moments, not structured or surrounded by talks, work days, panels, or systems.”

Read the full reflection on the SCM website.

World Student Christian Federation 2017 Report

The 2017 “Red Book” has been released, highlighting the ongoing work of the global regions of building peace, restoring the dignity of life, creating inclusive communities and healing the wounds of division.

The Program section presents the outcomes of programs in Ecological Justice, Identity Diversity and Dialogue, Peace Building and Overcoming Violence, and Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation. 400 young people from around the world benefited from these programs, contributing and making a difference in their churches and local communities with renewed commitment to work for justice and peace.

Peace Building and Overcoming Violence in the Middle East was the focus of the June Youth Conference in Cairo, Egypt, providing a platform for the voices of the church youth, to pray and strengthen one another and to increase youth participation in peace building efforts in the region. In the later part of the year, we organized our first global program on Identity Diversity and Dialogue (IDD), laying the groundwork for further dialogues on building inclusive communities for all people of different sexual orientation and gender identities.

The Africa region responded to youth unemployment and the need for civic and peace education in the social and political life of the people. Europe launched “A Year with No Hate” campaign to combat hate speech against migrants, refugees and minority groups.

The Governance section explores the ongoing progress of organizational transition work, highlighting our experience and the results of our first Online General Assembly held on May 22 to 28. You can read the full report at www.wscfglobal.org

New SCM Canada Buttons!



"Is that Jesus with the Trans Pride Flag? We should be friends" - coffee shop worker to their button-wearing SCMer colleague.

One of the easiest ways to boost the profile of the SCM is through the creative and humorous aesthetic of our 'swag'. Each year we create buttons, stickers, booklets and distribute them at tables on campus, via chaplains, and mailed out to friends across the country.



It's also one of the ways that we support the artistic and theological gifts of students, giving them the satisfaction of seeing their work in print in the various devotionals.

This year we have a bumper launch of three new collections of button designs. The **#Ecumenerd** cluster was already introduced (see page 1), and is joined by a range of **Social Justice Warrior** buttons. This phrase is used online to dismiss or disparage, but has been claimed and expanded to emphasise both the diversity and the sense of fun of anti-racist, feminist, decolonization-minded communities.



As well as these we continue to produce materials challenging mainstream depictions of Christians as hate-filled or anti-intellectual. Contact the Canada office to arrange a shipment!

We have also created a set of buttons to honour SCMerS who have taken on leadership roles or have overcome obstacles in their time with the Movement. We can now award **The SCM Badge for Excellence** in everything from **Public Speaking**, and **Poster Making**, to **Leading a Service**, or **Interfaithing**, and of course, the ever-important **Surviving Church Politics**.

Contact us to nominate a recipient or propose a new award!

