

SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK OF ONTARIO REGION (SJNOR)

The Social Justice Network of the Ontario Conferences (now Regions) was created to collaborate and provide a collective presence of the United Church of Canada concerning socio-economic issues and concerns which impact Ontarians. The Network supports the work of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) with which one of its members, the Rev. Susan Eagle, has long been involved. The Network has a tradition of meeting in person at Church House twice a year. However, the COVID pandemic has driven the meetings onto the ZOOM platform.

Members of the Network met by ZOOM on January 24, 2023. The Canadian Shield Regional Council was represented by the Rev. Jeffrey Dale and by Dr. Ernie Epp; the latter served as Recorder. The meeting was quite short and was focused on the grant that the Network has been making for years to support the work of ISARC. (The Network's financial resources are based on annual contributions by Regional Councils.) After some discussion about the work of ISARC—as well as the Network—for new attendees, a grant of \$5,000 was approved. The Network also resolved to seek a contribution of \$1,000 from each Regional Council.

ISARC hosted its traditional annual gathering at Queen's Park on November 23, with presentations under the rubric, "Returning to Humanity: Human Rights and Dignity through Income Security and Housing." The speakers were Tom Cooper, Jeff Schlemmer, and Shannon Down. Rabbi Ryan Leszner offered the opening theological reflection. He serves Darchei Noam Reconstructionist Synagogue in Toronto. Mr. Cooper is the Director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and co-founder of the Ontario Living Wage Network. Mr. Schlemmer is Executive Director of the Community Legal Clinic of York Region. And Ms Down is Executive Director of Waterloo Region Community Legal Services.

The Network met again by Zoom on November 29, 2023. Dr. Epp represented the Canadian Shield Regional Council and served as recorder again. Reports were received from the various Regional Councils of Ontario. Dr. Epp's report for the Canadian Shield Regional Council included attendance by ZOOM at a meeting of the Manitou Intentional Learning Community on November 15, 2023. He also noted his participation in the United Church Guaranteed Livable Income Network, which spans the country. And he celebrated the work of Poverty Free Thunder Bay, where he represents the United Church, which had just been awarded a Community Wellness and Safety Award. (Thunder Bay was one of the Basic Income demonstration sites cancelled by the Ford Government soon after it came to power in 2018.) The Network made the customary grant of \$5,000 to ISARC. Members also agreed to meet early in the New Year to consider the Network's covenant, which calls for three representatives from each Region.

Respectfully submitted,
Ernie Epp