

## **The Vocation of the Laity: Canada's Contribution to the Ecumenical Conversation**

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“The ministry of the laity is to be the Church in the World.”<sup>1</sup> So says Hans-Ruedi Weber in his 1963 booklet *Salty Christians*. “The ministry of the laity views the whole being and work of the Church under a particular aspect, namely the aspect of the Church meeting the world, the Church participating in Christ’s ministry *in and for the world*.”<sup>2</sup>

The vocation of the laity is a huge topic. Interestingly, its postwar emergence as a significant priority for Protestant churches in Europe and North America contains many connections to the work of the Student Christian Movement (SCM). In previous papers presented at the Canadian Society of Church History (CSCH), I have explored some specific instances of the Canadian Student Christian Movement’s contribution to the vocation of the laity or Christian faith in daily life, particularly through the SCM summer work camps<sup>3</sup> and then Howland House.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I explore another instance in Canadian church history led by another SCMer, Lois Wilson, which was an exciting initiative in civic and lay education in Canada’s Centennial year, 1967, and very much connected to the wider ecumenical movement to lift up the vocation of the laity. But first some background.

### ***The Ecumenical Movement and the Vocation of the Laity***

The 1948 creation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from the joining together of the “Life and Work” and “Faith and Order”

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Movements of the early decades of the twentieth century was a foundational event which helped lead and support this emphasis on the vocation and role of the laity in the postwar Protestant church. The “Life and Work Movement” focused on the implications of Christian faith for the political and economic realities in which Christians lived. The first “Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work” met in Stockholm in 1925, the same year as the United Church of Canada (UCC) was formed, and the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The second Conference was in 1937 in Oxford and J.H. Oldham expressed its emphasis on the role of the laity in these words:

If the Christian witness is to be borne in social and political life it must be through the action of the multitude of Christian men and women who are actively engaged from day to day in the conduct of administration, industry and the affairs of the public and common life.<sup>5</sup>

The “Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches in Process of Formation” created at the Oxford Conference led to the creation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), although the Second World War delayed its creation for a decade. When the WCC was formed in 1948, “Life and Work” along with “Faith and Order” became permanent Commissions.

Many theologians have written on the vocation of the laity during the ecumenical height of the churches in Europe and North America. Hendrik Kraemer’s 1958 book *A Theology of the Laity* is seminal. Kraemer, who served the Netherlands Bible Society in Indonesia from 1922 to 1937, was a prisoner of the Nazis in Holland during the Second World War before becoming the first Director of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, from 1948 to 1955.

Hans Ruedi Weber, another key leader in the vocation of the laity in the mid-century ecumenical movement, was General Secretary of the Swiss SCM and WCC Staff for the Department of the Laity from 1955 to 1961. Author of *Salty Christians*, along with over twenty other books, Weber helped prepare and then implement the formative actions of the Second World Council of Churches General Assembly in Evanston, 1954, where the Commission’s “Report on The Laity: The Christian in His Vocation” was adopted along with many other church-shaping directions.

In *A Theology of the Laity*, Hendrik Kraemer acknowledges that the opening to the “Report on the Laity” contains the elements of a genuine theology of the laity:

Clergy and laity belong together in the Church; if the Church is to perform her mission in the world, they need each other. The growing emphasis in many parts of the world upon the function of the laity since the Amsterdam Assembly is not to be understood as an attempt to secure for the laity some larger place or recognition in the Church, nor yet as merely a means to supplement an overburdened and understaffed ordained ministry. It springs from the rediscovery of the true nature of the Church as the People of God.<sup>6</sup>

Kraemer argues, however, that the Christian understanding of work in the “Report on the Laity” was a distraction from the necessary ecclesiastical rethinking that a true appreciation of the vocation of the laity would require.<sup>7</sup> In *A Theology of the Laity*, Kraemer traces some of the history of the laity in the Church. He observes their consistent role as initiators of reform and change in the church from the monasteries to the Reformation and more recently the missionary movement. He observes that much of this lay ferment has taken place through organizations alongside the church, not within the church.

His book suggests that the emergence of the ecumenical movement and its exploration of Church doctrine is an opportunity to rethink the ecclesiology of the church and return the laity to its appropriate place alongside the clergy. This would reclaim the Biblical understanding of laos as the whole church, a royal priesthood, rather than the hierarchical and institutional meaning that has separated clergy and laity.<sup>8</sup> Kraemer challenges the Church to embrace the Bible’s witness to God’s burning concern for the world and its needs as the location of God’s self-disclosure. His vision is of a missional and ministerial church sent to the world and intended for service in the world. The key for Kraemer is the conversion of the church to the world, the place of God’s self-disclosure, and not its own institutional survival.

### ***Evanston General Assembly***

The second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at

Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, 15-31 August 1954, was a watershed moment for this commitment to Christian engagement in everyday life. Among other things, the General Assembly declared that:

the real battles of faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in the press, radio and television, in the relationship of nations. Very often it is said that the Church should “go into these spheres,” but the fact is that the church is already in these spheres in the person of its laity.<sup>9</sup>

Much has been written about the impact of this General Assembly, held in North America for the first time and taking place in the height of the McCarthy period. The preparatory documents were many and widely circulated, introducing the Assembly to topics such as “Ecumenical Studies,” with an opportunity for input prior to the Assembly: “Faith and Order: Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches”; “Evangelism: The Mission of the Church to Those outside her Life”; “Social Questions: The Responsible Society in a World Perspective”; “International Affairs: Christians in the Struggle for World Community”; “Intergroup Relations: The Church and Racial and Ethnic Tensions”; “The Laity: The Christian in his Vocation.”

The Report of the Assembly was shared in its entirety in *The Evanston Report- The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, published by the SCM Press in 1955 and other books such as *Evanston: An Interpretation* by James Hastings Nichols and *Evanston Scrapbook* by James W. Kennedy. Almost 1300 people attended the Assembly. Of the 500 delegates there were forty-four women and seventy-five lay people, along with the clergy representing 132 member churches in forty-two countries. There were almost an equal number of accredited visitors as well as consultants, fraternal delegates and observers. The Assembly was covered by 646 press people almost half of whom represented the secular press. Dr. Kathleen Bliss chaired Section VI on The Laity, the only woman chair of six sections or any committees of the General Assembly, and the only woman on the Message drafting group of nine members.

### ***The Canadian Student Christian Movement***

The training and engagement of the laity of the church for ministry in the world was a consistent theme throughout this era, as the hegemony of Christendom diminished and the overseas missionary movement was curtailed and rethought in the face of national independence movements and a growing awareness of Christianity's alliance with imperialism and colonialism.

At the time of the WCC's second General Assembly in Evanston, these ecumenical conversations and the activities that grew from its theology were well underway in the Canadian SCM. The denominations and ecumenical movement in Canada were influenced by and contributed to this global ecumenical conversation through many concrete initiatives and experiments. The connection between worship, work, and learning was a key theme in these efforts. The Lay Education and Training Centres established in the 1940s, 50s and 60s were a direct response to this understanding of church. The connections between Europe and Canada were embodied in many individuals and opportunities for exchange. For the Canadian SCM, Lex Miller and Bob Miller were key in this period. Lex Miller was a New Zealand SCMer who directed the first work camp in Welland, Ontario, in 1945 as the Second World War was drawing to a close. The SCM work camps themselves, in the case of Bev Oaten, founder of the Five Oaks Christian Worker's Education Centre in Paris, Ontario, had connections to the Work Camp movement in Europe after First World War and then the establishment of the Lay Education and Training Centres in Canada.<sup>10</sup> As Director of the SCM's first work camp, Lex Miller helped create the framework for Canadian SCM summer work camps, building on the principles of the Cooperative movement and including the radical "wage pool" concept where people's summer earnings were pooled and people left at the end of the summer with a share, based on what they needed for the coming year, not on what they had earned.

As Dorothy Beales observed in her December 1945 article in *The Canadian Student* about Lex Miller's impact on the Canadian SCM, the question on the lips of many SCM students was "What shall I do with my life?" Lex's challenge was to resist seeing ministry as the only specifically Christian option. In "The Christian at Work in the World," Lex Miller suggested that, "the challenge to undertake foreign mission work which

created the Student Volunteer Movement should be broadened to awaken Christian students to the urgency of service in every secular calling.”<sup>11</sup> In his 1959 book, *Christian Vocation and My Job*, he stated: “This gives us our starting point when it comes to the Christian choice of a job. The test is, not our own satisfaction in the first place – far less our own financial or social advancement – but social service in terms of our own capacity to *give* service. That’s what it means to talk about *vocation* at all.”<sup>12</sup>

Bob Miller returned to Toronto from post-graduate theological studies in Europe in 1951 to join the Student Christian Movement’s national staff as Study Secretary. No relation to Lex Miller, Bob brought the next ingredient to shape the Canadian SCM’s engagement with Christianity and daily life: books by German theologians and an experience of the Evangelical Academies established by the German Protestant churches after the war.

In his memoir of Bob Miller, *The Messenger*, Douglas John Hall observes that, “Bob Miller was among the first intellectuals in Canada to have read the works of scholars who, during the remainder of the century and beyond, would dominate the Protestant theological scene in the West.”<sup>13</sup> In a letter to Doug Hall, prior to his return to Canada, Bob asserts:

There have to be much more radical experiments in the life of the church than there have yet been. Some of us have to get onto the frontier, where there are no beaten paths of how or what to do . . . The “other” world of the working man that has grown up here in Europe is completely isolated from the church . . . God will have us where the people are, with them in their life and work . . .<sup>14</sup>

For Bob, the decision to establish a permanent “industrial mission” after the 1953 Bathurst St. United Church work camp in Toronto, later known as “Howland House,” was a start. The SCM Summer Work Camps and “Howland House” were strategies to address and support people’s personal vocational choices.

“Town Talk,” initiated by Lois Wilson, an SCMer who had never attended a work camp, also had its roots in Europe and the postwar commitment to empowering and mobilizing the laity to be the church in the world. It is a companion to the theme of personal discernment and vocational choice of the 1940s and 1950s as it inspired the church to mobilize civil society in conversation and dialogue about key community

and urban issues. This exciting experiment in “saturation evangelism”<sup>15</sup> on the northern shore of Lake Superior had its roots in the Evangelical Academies that sprang up in occupied Germany in 1945.

### *Evangelical Academies*

The Evangelical Academies grew out of a devastated landscape, literally and spiritually. While much of the German church retreated into its own world during Hitler’s rise to power and the Second World War, the “Confessing Church” declared its opposition and resistance to the National Socialist government of Adolf Hitler in the 1934 Barmen Declaration. Many Christians in Germany and throughout Europe were imprisoned and executed during the war, with theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer among the most famous. As the allied forces gained victory in Germany, the liberated “Confessing Church” leaders initiated actions which created spaces for Germans to discuss and discover what had happened and why and what could be a way forward. To quote one of the Evangelical Academy Directors:

The spiritual and political catastrophe of the Third Reich and the end in 1945 had destroyed all continuity so that a simple resumption of the form of life before 1933 was not possible. It was necessary not only to create anew political and economic forms but to find new self-assurance, a sensible judgement about oneself. To help establish these and with the standards of Christian revelation to guard against both arrogance and dejection, were the tasks in which the Academy took part.<sup>16</sup>

Eberhart Mueller and Helmut Thiecke, members of the “Confessing Church” and both imprisoned during the war, are considered the founders of the Evangelical Academies. With the support of church leaders in Wurttemberg they planned a two week conference in October 1945 entitled “Justice in Social and Political Life” to bring together lawyers, economists and others for free discussion about what had happened in their country and what was the way forward. The American occupying force supported such initiatives as part of the “de-nazification” of the country and provided an old Resort Hotel at Bad Boll as the venue for 150 to gather. With no telephones or postal service, invitations were delivered by hand.

The structure of this first encounter became the model for future Academies. The day included opening worship, Bible study on a specific theme, presentation on a topic by experts, open discussion and evening worship. There was plenty of un-programmed time during the day to allow for informal conversation and recreation. It is astonishing to conceive of this vision taking shape and reality months after a devastating war, defeat, and occupation. But it did and it set in motion a whole new role and relationship between the German churches and their communities. The purpose was:

not to convert participants to Christianity or to expound the Christian viewpoint against all challenges, but to spur exchange of opinion in a friendly, neutral atmosphere – between right and left; between the tradition-bound and the emancipated; above all between the church and the estranged. The result is honest probing for workable solutions, therapeutic reconciling of differences, stimulation of respect . . . Throughout all this, however, there is a pervasive religious aura, neither self-consciously inserted, nor compulsory.<sup>17</sup>

In her 1960 book about the Academy Movement, *Bridges to Understanding*, Margaret Frakes reported that there were eighteen Evangelical Academies in Germany, including four in the Soviet Zone. On an average they sponsored about 600 conferences a year with a total attendance of 48,000. Through the Evangelical Academies, Christians engaged with their communities in addressing and understanding community issues with the institutional resources of the church. In his 1964 book, *Church and World Encounter*, Lee J. Gable called them a “halfway house where church and non-church feel free to meet and where each will hear the other.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Story of Town Talk***

Lois Wilson, a Winnipeg SCMer, was inspired to transpose the German Evangelical Academy experience to northern Ontario. Lois and her husband Roy arrived in Fort William, Ontario, in 1960, ten years after her graduation from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Winnipeg where her father, E.G.D. Freeman, was Dean, and ten years after her marriage to fellow classmate, Roy Wilson. When Roy was called to serve



First United in Fort William, it was a return home for Lois whose parents had served the neighbouring community of Port Arthur when her father was minister at St. Paul's United from January 1930 until September 1938, the years of the depression and her childhood. The return to the Lakehead ushered in formative years for Lois and her ministry. Their son Bruce was born in November of that year, rounding off their family of four, born in the span of eight years.

A few years later, Lois approached the Church Board at First United with the suggestion that she could work with Roy in a part-time position with an emphasis on working in the community. This was in the midst of the United Church's heyday. The congregation had a Sunday school of 700 and Lois reported and Roy was in great need of assistance. But congregational ministry was not her passion, although she led many congregationally based programmes including Bible studies with 200 women in attendance. Her canoeing and camping ministry with teenage girls is recounted in her book *Streams of Faith*. The congregation agreed that her formalized part-time ministry as a lay pastoral assistant could focus on connecting to the community.

In her thanks to the congregation when she and Roy left for a team ministry in Hamilton in the spring of 1969, Lois Wilson stated:

Instead of expecting me to fit into a pre-determined position, First United left my part of team ministry in a fluid state so I could respond to any demands that seemed appropriate. Some must have wondered from time to time, what on earth I was attempting to do as it became more and more appropriate for me to spend more time in community activities than in congregational events. Yet I always felt support from all of you as we worked together to make the Christian presence visible in all areas of the city.<sup>19</sup>

As a theologically educated laywoman, daughter of the manse, and steeped in prairie social gospel theology, Lois was committed to empowering laity to live their Christian faith in their daily lives. Her University of Winnipeg experience in the Student Christian Movement reinforced this formation:

For me, the SCM was and remains a foundational orientation for my life, with its emphasis on Biblical literacy, spirituality, global international perspective, inclusion and equality of all genders and

racess in community, openness to the faith and spirituality of others, and social and economic justice, particularly for the poor and marginalized.<sup>20</sup>

An article in *TIME Magazine* describing the work of Loren Halvorson in the Lutheran Church in the United States (US) became the catalyst for mobilizing Lois to put her theology and vision of the vocation of the laity into action.

Loren Halvorson, an American Lutheran was a contemporary of Lois. He graduated from Luther Seminary in 1953 and returned to teach there as Professor of Church and Society from 1959 to 1992. In a 2010 Luther Seminary *Story* magazine article following his death, Gary Koutsopoulos wrote, “Professor Halvorson was a man of great vision, peace and commitment to the community. He foresaw the need of pastors to one day be ‘worker/priests,’ both in partnership with all humankind and in affinity for those who practiced their lives, faith and vocations in one humble movement.”<sup>21</sup>

Halvorson worked with the Lutheran World Federation in Europe after the Second World War to find homes for Baltic refugees and came in contact with the Evangelical Academies. He wrote his 1958 doctoral thesis for the Divinity School at the University of Chicago on the Evangelical Academies entitled, “German Protestantism in dialogue with the world: The development and significance of the German Evangelical Academy.”

In 1960, Dr. Halvorson was appointed Associate Director of the Board of College Education for the American Lutheran Church and was able to try out an adaptation of the approach of the Evangelical Academies. He launched the Minnesota Project, which understood the development of lay adult education as its primary function. The work of the project, “is to help the church understand the actual world of the laity, to equip them for their ministry, and to develop permanent strategies for the education and involvement of the laity in their vocational and social communities.”<sup>22</sup>

After reading the *TIME Magazine* article about a week-long “Faith in Life” Dialogue in Fargo-Moorehead, Lois heard from Rev. Ray Hord, Secretary of the Board for Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, about an opportunity to observe a weeklong Duluth-Superior “Faith in Life Dialogue” in 1965.<sup>23</sup> She was able to inspire five others from the Lakehead to join her, and following that experience they were galvanized to try something similar in Fort William-Port Arthur.

They gathered small denominational groups to test the idea and build energy and consensus. The commitment was sealed following a gathering on 28 May 1966 where Loren Halvorson addressed about 150 people and then met with an enlarged Steering Committee. “Centennial Town Talk,” often shortened to TOWN TALK was adopted as the name for this month-long Canadian city-wide dialogue planned for November 1967.

“[We] created a public forum in the two cities where questions of urgent social concern could be aired. We used almost every known means of communication, and worked through every existing private or public agency in the community.”<sup>24</sup> This was a risky, innovative, and brilliant example of what can be achieved when a community and all its resources are identified and empowered. A mother of four working part-time along with a Steering Committee of twelve composed largely of lay church members from all denominations accomplished this over eighteen months.

The strategies that contributed to its success included seeking the support of Presbytery and support of the civic hierarchies. “Centennial Town Talk in November promises to be an excellent opportunity for all our citizens to reflect and converse responsibly on the most vital issues of the community,” said Fort William’s Mayor Reid.<sup>25</sup> “Frank and open discussions on factual material can remove barriers of misunderstanding and bring people into a new sense of community. Since Centennial Town Talk embraces this concept, I can readily commend it to all our citizens” Mayor Saul Laskin of Port Arthur declared.<sup>26</sup>

The intention was to mobilize all the existing church and community organizations and networks to buy into the intention to have the month of November focus on issues of concern to the community. The first step was to invite two representatives from each organization to a meeting at Lakehead University in May 1967 where the topics would be identified. More than 600 invitations were sent to community and church organizations and individuals as well as simultaneously circulated in newspapers, television, radio, church bulletins, and community newsletters. Lois Wilson recalled that they sent the invitation to the formal head of each organization as well as to a church member and asked them to ensure it made it to the agenda and to support it when it did.<sup>27</sup> It worked. Three hundred and fifty people arrived at the Great Hall at Lakehead University on 3 May 1967 to participate in The Town Talk Assembly, an innovative process of table group discussion identifying issues and shared on overhead projectors.

This massive exercise in bottom-up education and decision-making was facilitated by Rev. John Klassen, Secretary for Christian Education for the Manitoba and Northwest Ontario Conference of the United Church of Canada. He had followed Lois at United College in Winnipeg before being settled with his wife, Betty Jean (BJ), at Sioux Lookout in 1954. Both Lois and John, in separate interviews, observed that without the amazing response of that 350-person gathering at the University to identify important civic issues, TOWN TALK would not have succeeded. From where did this large group pedagogy come?

The 1950s and 1960s in the United Church and elsewhere were a time of educational ferment and experimentation. Christian Education represented a large sector of the Church's investment in both children and adults. With the postwar baby boom, many denominations, including the United Church, were building Sunday school wings and, in 1952, the UCC General Council agreed to produce a new Sunday School Curriculum. This was a massive project, following the three-year Lectionary and publishing hardcover books for all ages, starting with Don Mather's book for adults, *The Word and the Way* in 1962. Many scholars, ministers, and teachers were involved in developing and testing the curriculum. Olive Sparling, of the national church's Board of Christian Education, initiated Observation Practice Sunday Schools across the country, inspiring and training the laity to understand their faith and use the most effective pedagogical approaches to share it with children and youth.

After their time in Sioux Lookout, John and BJ had gone to Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1958. John's focus was preaching and BJ's Christian Education. They were both influenced by Christian Education Professor Mary Tilley and BJ's experience of going out as pairs into field placements. Professor Charles Dinnett taught a course in human relations, a form of experiential education originally developed after the Second World War for use in industry to help people understand group processes and their role and impact on others when working on common projects. The United Church and others picked this up and offered weeklong residential Human Relations Labs at the Lay Education and Training Centres across the country. John Alvin Cooper, also national staff with the United Church's Board of Christian Education, was a key instigator of this new, intensely personal, and transformative education. John Klassen recalls more than one minister saying that the Human Relations Lab experience changed their lives.<sup>28</sup>

As Conference staff for Christian Education, John was able to draw on all these resources and energies to design a large group process that would lift up and affirm the experiences and concerns of ordinary citizens. He recalls that it took several of them two or three days following the Assembly to organize the many pages of input from the gathering into six main areas of concern and thirty-nine topics for discussion in November.

The next step was to invite all involved to contribute to the resourcing of these discussions. The University's Convocation speaker, the library's book displays, the Church's national resource people, the government's citizenship branch, the Rotary Club's business expert – all were mobilized to contribute to the resources for the focused discussions in the month of November. TOWN TALK's purpose and invitation were published in all the papers, radio, and TV media. The schedule of events for each week was widely distributed and the sixty-page Discussion Manual with resources for each topic was available in bars, grocery stores, and barbershops. Phone-in-radio discussions following the TV screening of films was one of the most innovative initiatives. Rev. Ken Moffat, another United Church minister in the city, was a key contact and facilitator of the media connection. The theological touchstone was Jeremiah 29:4-7.

Lois's description in the 1968 *Town Talk Report Back* captures something of the scope and energy:

The "talk" took place in every conceivable setting: on radio hot lines; over television; in 20 mixed citizen's discussion groups; regular meetings of service clubs; university and high school classrooms; meetings of professional groups, sororities and church organizations; and at special open forums which drew a wide cross-section of citizens.<sup>29</sup>

TOWN TALK was intended to precipitate concern about basic social issues rather than to save souls; to explore with members of religious communities the implications of their private convictions in a public setting, rather than to discuss doctrine. "The care of the city" was the theme, not "The care of the churches."<sup>30</sup>

Lois reflected in a May 2019 interview that her experience engaging the whole city in a month-long dialogue about critical issues converted her to a future of ecumenical ministry engaging the world. She wrote her

Bachelor of Divinity thesis on the process and experience in 1969: "TOWN TALK: A Case History in Lay Education." In it she observed:

TOWN TALK came about because of the social partnership of civic groups, churches, educational resources and mass communication media. Only such a partnership of existing sectors, pursuing what they "saw in it" for themselves and thereby fulfilling their proper "role," provided the dynamics that stimulated an entire community to involvement.<sup>31</sup>

Her leadership of TOWN TALK and the connections she had made to people doing similar work in the USA and Europe, resulted in many invitations to tell the TOWN TALK story, including at the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, her first travel to Toronto and Ottawa respectively. In 1972 she was invited to the WCC Consultation on "Centres of Social Concern and Related Christian Movements in Crete." Lois wrote to her sister that, "the meetings were eighteen times better than she expected."<sup>32</sup> The contacts she made and the profile she gained in the world ecumenical movement led her to many opportunities, including her election as one of the eight Presidents of the WCC at the Sixth Assembly in Vancouver in 1983.

### *Vocation of the Laity Today*

Is the church today continuing this conversation about the vocation of the laity and the church's engagement in the world? Grappling with our own complicity in colonialism and our relationship with First Nations in Canada has caused the church to rethink its appropriate place as an institution of Christian power and privilege in an inter-religious and secular world. While churches still believe their members can be leaven in the world, institutional preservation and adaptation of structures to reflect reduced numbers and resources appears to be dominating the self-understanding and actions of the Canadian churches. Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative remains the ecumenical expression of the Canadian churches' engagement in, with, and for the world. But the mobilization of Canadian Christians around local, national, as well as global economic and social issues is greatly diminished.

Churches can still be a catalyst in their communities. They have

space, staff, history and experience. Even though the church's former unchallenged authority is contested as the human limitations of our imperial Christianity is evident, churches and church leaders and members still have lots of power and can place it at the service of continuing efforts for free and open exploration of ideas and the choices we make as citizens and community members. The Evangelical Academies were a remarkable response to the history of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. It is so important for the church to continue or recommit to be a place, in partnership with others, where the conditions of respectful dialogue, debate, and discernment can take place as together we build a common vision of justice, peace, and abundance, rooted in many religious and faith traditions and none. With such a commitment, the church can help to resist the scarcity and fear rhetoric growing in our politics as we transition to the new green and knowledge economies. "God so loved the world, not the church," Lois Wilson is fond of saying and as an invitation to worship, "I greet you in the name of Christ, whose body you are."

### ***Endnotes***

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