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The Danger and Opportunity of Crisis

It is often in times of crisis that we learn the most about ourselves. How we respond to the challenges before us tells us a lot about who we are, and also shapes who we will become. In the Chinese language, the word “crisis” is formed by combining the two related words of “danger” and “opportunity”.

When we are faced with a crisis we are confronted with both danger and opportunity and it is up to us to choose which one will emerge.



Grasping the opportunity present in a crisis requires resilience. As we know, Canadians are an extremely resilient lot. We saw that clearly in the floods that devastated Calgary six years ago, not unlike those affecting eastern Canada today. Faced with a deep crisis, people rallied around each other and got through a disaster in a way that was only possible by coming together as neighbours. As one affected resident put it on a sign outside their flooded home *“I lost some stuff. But I gained a community.”*

The eminent Canadian community builder Paul Born says that people and communities have 3 possible responses to crisis. First, we can withdraw; we retreat into our own space and tune out the noise and distraction of a world that seems out of our control. Or, secondly, we can turn against each other. In situations of danger, stress and complexity,

it is easy to find others to blame for our plight and descend ever deeper into a world divided between “us” and “them.”

In our country today we are troubled by both of these responses. In the pitched fever and aftermath of an election it is easy to withdraw on the assumption that “there is nothing we can do”, or that “politicians are all the same”. This has disturbing implications for our democracy.

More disturbing, however, has been our growing willingness to turn against each other. Over the past few years we have seen a concerning rise in hate speech, Islamophobia, homophobia and other actions that further divide our society. All of these responses are contrary to what we need to do as a country to survive and thrive. Herein lies the danger of crisis.

Fortunately, Paul Born offers a third possible response to crisis – coming together. This reflects the best of who we are and is the strength that has allowed humans to flourish for thousands of years. Throughout history, the ability to cooperate is what has made for successful societies, particularly in times of crisis. This really is the heart of resilience.

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Launch of the Canadian Poverty Hub

In April, the Canadian Poverty Institute was pleased to announce the launch of the Canadian Poverty Hub. The Poverty Hub is a new online repository of research and resources about poverty in Canada. Developed in partnership with the Homeless Hub at York University, this new resource provides free access to a range of reports, research papers, tools and policy documents.

Connecting knowledge and practice is a key objective of the Canadian Poverty Institute. By improving access to information about poverty to researchers, government officials and community workers, actions to address poverty may continue to be more evidence-based. The Canadian Poverty Hub can be accessed at www.povertyhub.ca. If you have reports or resources you would like to submit for inclusion in the Poverty Hub, please complete the form at www.povertyinstitute.ca/the-canadian-poverty-hub.

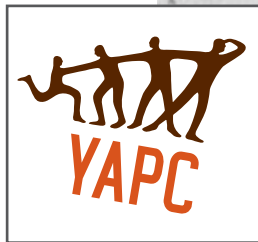


Hearing the Voice of Poverty

“Nothing about us without us.” That has long been the call of people who have experienced marginalization to those in power.

Although governments and service organizations agree with this in principle, putting it into practice can be challenging, particularly for those working for poverty reduction. In March, the CPI welcomed Kate Mechan and Kerry Nolan from the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition who led a workshop on *Centering the Lived Experience Voice in Planning and Decision-making*. Over 50 people gathered at the United Way Social Impact Lab to learn from their practice and share their own experiences and insights.

Emerging from this discussion was the primary importance of listening. Arundathi Roy once said *“There is no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately ignored or preferably unheard.”* In that vein, Kerry Nolan recounted her experiences of domestic abuse, homelessness, incarceration and losing her children to Child Protective Services. Prefacing her remarks



to by government officials, and people from whom I asked for help.” Said Kerry *“Now, I can’t help but realize that if somebody would have listened to me sooner, I would have been helped a lot sooner.”*

This lack of listening, sometimes reduced to the inefficiencies of “the system,” is a sentiment professionals and service seekers alike are well aware of. Diverse service seekers



around listening, Kerry dotted her account with examples *“of where I was dismissed or not listened*

are frustrated, angry and despondent about their chances with the social services sector, and practitioners are frustrated, angry and despondent that sometimes they are not able to help as far as they would like. Missing in this incomplete triangle is decision making — the quantity that could actually make a difference in our approach to working with people with lived experience, toward ameliorating the pain, suffering and deprivation of those experiencing poverty.

The Danger and Opportunity of Crisis (continued from front page)

Resilient communities have some common features. Research tells us that such communities are highly diverse, they welcome dissenting voices, are cooperative and share power with others. Underlying these traits is a strong foundation of trust, which can only be developed through relationships based on dignity and mutual respect. When these characteristics are present we are better able to weather the crises that confront us and even emerge stronger at the end. Herein lies the opportunity of crisis.

During the 2013 Calgary flood, over 100,000 people were displaced from their homes. This is about the same number of people that live in poverty in Calgary today. In response to the flood Calgarians rallied together and served each other without distinction, emerging a stronger community as a result. We can do so again today. This our moment. Do not withdraw. Do not succumb to those who would seek to divide us on the grounds of where we come from, how we worship or who we love. We are Canadians and we will always be stronger together.

The Yin and Yang of the New Economy

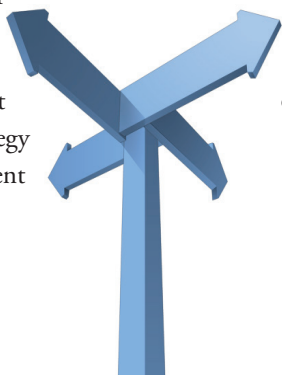
Like the rest of the world, Canada's economy continues to evolve, bringing both opportunities and challenges. The advent of Artificial Intelligence, the emergence of a truly global labour market and the shift to a service economy has led to increasingly precarious employment for many workers as well as growing social inequality. At the same time, new technologies and new business practices are opening up new opportunities for business to play a positive role in social development. Exploring the yin and yang of this new economy has been the focus of a research partnership between the Canadian Poverty Institute and the Ontario Trillium Foundation over the past year. As the culmination of this work, a roundtable of 15 community stakeholder organizations gathered in Toronto in March for a one-day summit to deepen our understanding of this new economy. At the end of the day, those present discussed ways that we can continue to work together to grow a new and more inclusive economy. If you are interested in learning more or participating in an emerging community or practice, please visit <https://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-and-the-new-economy>.



Poverty and the Church: Old and New Directions

Historically, churches have played an important role in alleviating and working to end poverty in society. Not only have they been an important provider of charity, they have also often been a powerful voice for social justice and change. Over the past century, however, as social services became more professionalized and the social welfare state grew, many churches shifted their focus away from social to more strictly spiritual concerns.

Yet, poverty persists and there is a growing interest in how the church can and should respond to this ongoing reality. In 2018, the government of Canada released the first ever national poverty strategy which envisions involvement of all sectors of society in working to end poverty.



This offers the Canadian church a unique opportunity to reflect on its role in poverty reduction, both past and future. Led by CPI Faculty Associate Dr. Jim Cresswell, the CPI is undertaking a research initiative designed to articulate the possible role(s) for the church within this national poverty strategy.

Working in partnership with the Canadian Council of Churches, Dr. Cresswell and his team are engaging in conversations with faith leaders from various denominations across the country to reflect on a faithful response to poverty and imagine what a positive role for the church could be.

Meet the Institute

Dr. Jim Cresswell

Dr. James (Jim) Cresswell is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Ambrose University and a Faculty Associate of the Canadian Poverty Institute. A member of the Ambrose community since 2017, Dr. Cresswell has a deep commitment to education and enhancing the student experience. The kinds of courses he teaches include ones about culture, immigration, and identities in an increasingly globalizing world. Courses such as social psychology and interpersonal communication also fit within his repertoire. Other teaching areas include child psychology and human development.

Dr. Cresswell loves to have students involved in research and welcomes inquiries from people interested in working with



him. Jim's research interests draw on many sources ranging from cultural psychology to cognitive science and literary theory. He is also part of a large grant provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: a multiparty effort at describing the role faith-based organizations play in the resettlement of newcomers to Canada. One area of ongoing research is developing theory about the relationship between mind and culture, which can lead to exciting reconsideration of psychology as an art as much as a science. Currently Dr. Cresswell is leading the CPI's research on the role of the church in poverty reduction in Canada.

Support the CPI

- Join the 2019 Ride for Refuge. Once again the CPI will be participating in this annual fun event to raise funds for the ongoing work of the Institute. We are looking for team captains, riders or sponsors. If you would like to run or walk or just help out, please email us at povertyinstitute@ambrose.edu.



- The Canadian Poverty Institute is a community partner of Sponsor Energy. Customers of Sponsor Energy can direct a portion of all profits from their utility bill to the Canadian Poverty Institute. For more information, please visit: www.sponsorenergy.com/charity/cpi/
- The Canadian Poverty Institute welcomes individuals and organizations who wish to support the Canadian Poverty Institute financially. If you wish to become a supporter, please visit <https://www2.ambrose.edu/donate> and indicate you wish to designate your gift to the Canadian Poverty Institute.



New Reports and Resources

The following report has recently been published by the Canadian Poverty Institute.

- a Poverty and the New Economy - Working Paper Series.** This series of working papers presents the results of the Canadian Poverty Institute's ongoing poverty and the new economy research project. Available online on the Ontario Trillium Foundation Prosperous People Knowledge Hub. <https://share.otf.ca/tags/new-economy>
- b Healing Poverty – A Reflection of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches.** Available online: www.councilofchurches.ca/news/healing-poverty/
- c Poverty 101: Looking for Answers.** This new resource is intended to promote understanding and reflection. It is developed to assist the reader to learn more about poverty issues in Saint John, and how as a professional, volunteer or student you can contribute to actions that create change. Produced by Living Saint John in partnership with the University of New Brunswick with support from the Canadian Poverty Institute. Available online: www.unb.ca/saintjohn/_assets/documents/promise/poverty101.pdf
- d Stovell, B. (2019) "The Gospel as Good News for the Poor: God as the King of Justice and Reconciliation,"** in *Is the Gospel Good News?* Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Hughson Ong. Pages 280-309. Written by CPI Faculty Associate, Dr. Beth Stovell. Available online: <https://wipfandstock.com/is-the-gospel-good-news.html>

About the CPI

The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary research and teaching institute housed within Ambrose University in Calgary. Our mission is to contribute to the healing of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and public education.

We are grounded in the Christian tradition of extending compassion while seeking justice and reconciliation for the marginalized and oppressed.

The Canadian Poverty Institute is a member of:

- Vibrant Communities
- Canadian Council of Churches, Commission on Justice and Peace
- The Metro Alliance for the Common Good



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