

GUARANTEED LIVABLE INCOME

LENTEN REFLECTIONS ON ADVOCACY AND THE PROPHETIC PATH OF DIGNITY



Ash Wednesday - March 5th, 2025
Rev. Barry K Morris

The Word - Ecclesiastes 3:20

All go to one place, all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again

The Good News

Where liturgies for this kick-off day draw due attention to our mortality and our need, thus, to come humbly clean with/before the face of the Holy of Holiest/Great Spirit. And, lo, in the presence of one another (I pray so). Compare Reinhold Niebuhr's classic summary of such verse: "we are mortal, that is our fate; we pretend not to be mortal, this is our sin" (from Beyond Tragedy's "Tower of Babel" volume of sermonic essays, Ch. 2, p. 28).

Relating to the Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) concern and our call to be meaningfully, publicly & prophetically involved: We confess our own need to acknowledge what we all feel summoned to practice: to whomsoever much is given, much is expected and structurally so, such that mere hand-outs or charity do not remain a (convenient) substitute for justice-making and justice-keeping. See also Micah 6: 8 passage.

A hymn suggestion may well be: VU-105 "Dust & Ashes Touch our Face" with accompanying prayer VU-106

Gospel in Action

Poverty can happen very quickly to anyone. A guaranteed livable income would help address the persistent inequities within our country.

Are you familiar with the Guaranteed Livable Income call to action? Visit the United Church of Canada's information page at:
<https://united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/create-guaranteed-livable-income-program>

Moderator Carmen Lansdowne calls for "a fundamental fair level of income security for all, as did the early Christians who shared their resources so there was no need among them." We are all invited to join her in "this historic movement of the Spirit." Play Moderator Lansdowne's GLI message in your congregation or justice group. How does this message resonate with you?

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First Sunday of Lent – March 9th, 2025
Rev. Dr. Kendra Mitchell-Foster

The Word - Luke 4:1-13 (excerpt below)

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

The Good News

Lent is a time of contemplation and fasting, we find the origin of the forty days in this story of The Testing of Jesus from Luke's gospel. In our modern observance of Lent, we are encouraged to take a break from our fasting each Sunday, as Sundays are for celebrating resurrection. Our siblings struggling under the heavy yoke of poverty do not have this luxury. Lenten practices of fasting and kenosis or "self emptying" often are coupled with calls for good works; meaning in our tradition it is not enough to be challenged personally, without bringing ourselves to act justly in the world.

Jesus answers The Tempter's (ie. the devil) invitation to an "easy way out" in the desert, with the response "One does not live by bread alone." Meaning that deeply held values and tradition, intentional relationship with God, and holding one another in sacred community are all integral parts to a whole and good life. It is possible to use our Lenten tradition of "good works" to provide bread to those who hunger, we often do this with food drives, church pantries, and food banks. It is also possible to use our Lenten time to intentionally nourish sacred community, and advocate for all to have the means to live with their needs met.

Guaranteed Livable Income advocacy has long been a part of the United Church of Canada's sacred witness in society; an element of our prophetic voice speaking into God's world to bring about systemic change that would see us all not living by bread alone... but living within networks of community care, having the bread we all need, and nurturing a system that believes we are all deserving of dignified homes, healthier lives and dreams for the future.

Gospel in Action

What values and traditions in your community of faith might reach forward to a time where a Guaranteed Livable Income is reality? What steps can you take to understand the journey from where you are to where you want to be?

Do you currently have a food program in your community of faith? If not, why not? If so, would you hold a conversation table with people who participate in the program to discuss and spread awareness about GLI initiatives?

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Second Sunday of Lent – March 16th, 2025
Rev. Barry K Morris

The Word - Luke 13: 31-35 (excerpt below)

He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me,[a] 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

The Good News

Luke 13: 31-35 where Jesus' determination "I must be on my way..." attests to his plain commitment to practice the above prophetic mandate of a Micah (6:8), a Jeremiah (9: 23-24); an Amos (5:24), and not all, an Isaiah 58: 6-9 and 61: 1-2. This is accompanied by Jesus' lament over the religious-political capital of the nation(s) which sign an unwillingness to put first things first and, yes, share ... share ... share unto fulfillment.

Related to the GLI issue and campaign, it has been the witness of several generations of the UCC (1940s, 1970s, 1980s, and currently during Covid and its daunting aftermath) that a meaningful -- i.e. guaranteed and livable -- redistribution of income has the best opportunity to reduce inequalities and poverty's indignities.

The hymn comes to mind: "All God to God" (originally titled "Men Go to God" from the 1970s Anglican and United Church shared hymnal

Gospel in Action

Gather together people in your community of faith, congregation or justice group. Looking at a map of your city or town, mark neighbourhoods, landmarks, areas and structures that are conventionally labelled as "impoverished" or those places that may be marked for "gentrification or "rejuvenation". What communities live in these areas? How might the lives of these people be improved through the Guaranteed Livable Income program?

Like Jesus, disrupting the status quo of social injustice requires working for change outside of what is expected or what has already been done. Are there other groups in your community that may be interested in collaborating on GLI activism? Can you find community connections with other groups that are willing to put first things first?

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Third Sunday of Lent – March 23rd, 2025
Rev. Dr. Kendra Mitchell-Foster

The Word - Luke 13: 1-9 (excerpt below)

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7 So he said to the man working the vineyard, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.'"

The Good News

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree is a story about the folly and arrogance of expecting life to grow and to burst forward without tending to the needs of the living beings in our midst. Agrarian metaphors and images help us to understand ourselves as responsible to other living beings around us - we are responsible for their thriving just as we are responsible for our own. The owner of the fig tree is contemptuous of its lack of production of fruit, but has not taken the time to learn about the fig tree and to support it in a way that it can thrive. When the needs of the fig tree are met, fruit will naturally grow from its blossoming. The vineyard worker knows the fig tree, and cares for its needs. He is telling the owner of the vineyard what needs to be done - to provide for the basic needs of this tree that is so maligned by the callous owner.

In this parable Jesus tells us that if we would like our neighbourhoods, communities and all our relations to thrive, they must be cared for. Not just in word, but also in deed. A guaranteed livable income would meet the basic needs of those who live at and below the poverty line. With these basic needs for food, shelter and medicine met, our neighbours and siblings in Christ will have a chance to live a dignified life as they want to live it. The fertilizing of the soil is advocating for and pushing our government toward approving and implementing a Guaranteed Livable Income program nationwide.

Gospel in Action

In your community, what would a Guaranteed Livable Income be? Calculating a monthly income based on housing prices, utilities, telephone/communication, food prices, transit & transportation, medication and clothing is a project that anyone can do. Putting together a budget with your community of faith or justice group is a great process to bring deeper understanding of how important a GLI can be in the life of individuals, families and whole communities.

Does your municipality have an interest in or policies about GLI? Have you heard the positions of your MLA or MP on the GLI program? Getting in touch with the people in government in your area is an excellent step in strengthening action on Guaranteed Livable Income initiatives.

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Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 30th, 2025
Rev. Barry K Morris

The Word - Luke 15: 1-3 and 11b-32 (excerpt below)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

29 But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him! 31 Then the father[d] said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

The Good News

And what a parable that has been artistically portrayed (Rembrandt) heart-felt pondered (Henri Nouwen), and what one of our late UCC Moderators (Bill Phipps) has felt to be as close a profession of faith that could possibly be: that this is what God is like – that is, God is the father's plain welcome back "home" presence to the raw, thoroughly humbled son. What if the father had not rushed to welcome the prodigal son when first seen at the far-off gate of the farm – might the son have lost his nerve and fled in shame?

What if we lose our collective nerve, pray tell, to advocate (and stay the course) – while walking beside – those in plain need of accompaniment for a timely moment, structurally sustainable for justice-making-keeping - i.e. a right-wising of unfair, unequal scales such that, as Paul writes in the Corinthian correspondence (II Cor. 9 chapter) out of our grace-given abundance, we move to share and provide likewise, for the shared long haul of our steadfast shared existence.

Hymn suggestion could well be: "Will You come and follow me" VU-567.

Gospel in Action

" Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?"

This line in VU 567 brings home the message that we, as followers and disciples of Christ must allow ourselves to be transformed by His example. Will we leave ourselves (all the comforts of complacency) behind and move into this space of costly solidarity?

In your community of faith or justice group, draft a mission or vision statement describing i) what you collectively believe about GLI initiatives, ii) why this advocacy and solidarity work is important to you and your faith, and iii) what you hope your GLI vision and work will bring to your community and those in need across the country. Share this statement in your newsletter or in the Sunday announcements, and put it out there... perhaps you can welcome others fully and wholeheartedly back into this sacred work.

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LENTEN REFLECTIONS ON ADVOCACY AND THE PROPHETIC PATH OF DIGNITY



Fifth Sunday of Lent – April 6th, 2025
Rev. Dr. Kendra Mitchell-Foster

The Word - John 12:1-8 (excerpt below)

3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it[b] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The Good News

"You will always have the poor..." Jesus' reminder to Judas is also a reminder to us. Although the gesture of selling the perfume and donating the proceeds to the poor would have been a good one, and an action that could have addressed some needs, it would not have fixed the systemic problem of inequitable distribution of resources and wealth. When we witness the needs of others, we are often moved to donations and programs that would fill the gap. It's very true that these gaps need to be filled now, when people are hungry, in need of housing and in need of care. Jesus' reminder would have us add to these stop-gap measures by addressing the larger issues of inequality at the source: we need a more equitable sharing of the economic, infrastructure, and housing resources in Canada.

As we fund our food banks, overnight shelters, warming stations and longer-term shelters, we must also begin the longer journey of anti-poverty activism at the community, municipal, provincial and national levels. We must ask ourselves the questions: Why is poverty an issue in a country that should have more than enough? Why is there a housing crisis when large homes sit empty? Why is there a crisis in the increase in food prices, when supermarkets and restaurants discard food by the dumpster load?

Gospel in Action

Until we are able to address these systemic inequities, poverty will always be with us. Those who would qualify for and benefit from a Guaranteed Livable Income often face challenges and barriers on multiple fronts as they make their way through the day.

Watch the short video "Young Adults Speak About Guaranteed Livable Income" on the United Church of Canada YouTube channel, or copy this link into your browser: <https://youtu.be/bp71CgozPfA?si=chKSrgGu6ycHJYn5>

In this video you will hear more about how GLI could address not just poverty, but also poverty-related social issues such as child poverty, child hunger, freedom from domestic violence, disability justice, underemployment, health and wellness, and mental health. Are there currently anti-poverty groups and agencies in your area working on these issues? Connecting with people working on poverty-related issues can help to bolster your own Guaranteed Livable Income advocacy and action. Who can you learn from? Who can you invite to join?

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Palm Sunday – April 13th, 2025
Rev. Barry K Morris

The Word - Luke 19: 28-40 (excerpt below)

37 Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

The Good News

In this brief but amazing glimpse of Jesus' seeming triumphant entry, finally, into Jerusalem we are brought up short with the raw reality of threatened power about to squash and forever "deport" this would be anointed One into oblivion. What then, pray tell – what then for all of the prior decades, really generations of hard advocacy for a meaningful GLI as part and parcel of Canadian society? Has it – have we – been witnessing in vain, and maybe only in too small closed-off circles if even that, pray tell? And what is prayer if not harnessed, conjunctively with an animating genuine hoping for justice?

Consider the hymn: "Lord/Christ Jesus of You I/we will sing as we Journey" VU- 641

Gospel in Action

Many who are comfortable with the current economic scheme will want us to silence our voices. Jesus' reminds us that "even the stones would cry out" - meaning everyone can see what is good, what is right, and what should be. If one or two voices are silenced, there will still be voices persistent in their crying out for equality and justice.

Evelyn Forget's books are a great place to start in understanding Guaranteed Livable Income, and how it can affect real change in our neighbourhoods and communities. A book study in your community of faith, congregation or justice group for beginners will encourage others to use their voices in this advocacy.

Basic Income for Canadians: From the COVID-19 Emergency to Financial Security for All by Evelyn Forget, 2020

Radical Trust: Basic Income for Complicated Lives by Evelyn Forget & Hanna Owczar, 2021

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Good Friday – April 18th, 2025
Rev. Dr. Kendra Mitchell-Foster

The Word - John 18:1 - 19:42 (excerpt below)

The High Priest Questions Jesus

19 Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. 20 Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. 21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." 22 When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

The Good News

Speaking truth to power in service of justice is a pillar of Jesus' teachings, and of Christianity as a whole. In Jesus' reply to the authorities who would condemn him, He speaks with conviction about the lived truth of his experience. Jesus' life illustrated the importance of living with humility in relationship with all of those around you, with all the relations, and in this humility ensuring that all know the truth of God's creation: there is enough for us all, and we do not have to give into fear, greed, hoarding or violence. In God's creation, we are to take care of one another and speak this truth to those who would claim more than their fair share in the name of progress or power. Even after Jesus was struck by the police, the most pressing task was to speak and live this truth.

Gospel in Action

Police presence is commonplace in neighbourhoods where people's lived experience includes poverty, being unhoused, underemployment and lack of access to basic social, health and everyday services. In many cases, people living under these aforementioned conditions also experience arrest and criminal charges as they try to meet their needs. This has led to a movement to **decriminalize poverty**. Pivot Legal society has a long running campaign that seeks to shed light on this oppressive and destructive dynamic that reinforces the poverty cycle and contributes to oppression.

"Pivot's approach to policing and criminalization focuses on the impact of municipal and provincial police forces as they relate to our cross-campaign goals. This approach emphasizes the need for systemic change, rather than piecemeal reform. Pivot looks to elected officials as well as law- and policymakers to enact decisions that reflect calls for equity and justice.

Currently, this includes advocacy related to ending the criminalization of poverty, through an amendment to the BC Human Rights Code that would protect people on the basis of social condition. As an advocacy organization we will continue to pressure the provincial government and municipalities to uphold the rights and dignity of the most-marginalized members of our communities."

Pivot Legal Society Website https://www.pivotlegal.org/decriminalizing_poverty

A national Guaranteed Livable Income program would absolutely contribute to the breaking of this pervasive cycle of oppression. Advocating for a GLI is connected to this advocacy for liberation from both criminalization and poverty, so that we all can have what we need and the systems of oppression will no longer drag down our friends, families, neighbours and beloved communities. Visit Pivot Legal Society's website to learn more about these efforts

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Resurrection Sunday – April 20th, 2025
Rev. Barry K Morris

The Word - John 20:1-18 (excerpt below)

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir,[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,[c] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

The Good News

Yet again, we come to the original/originating first witnesses of breaking open the empty tomb and heralded by the bold(est) of witnesses who just have to confess (including verses 19-31, which follow this passage). The message is deeply and indelibly tied to the original proclaimers; from Jesus' concise re-cognition (know again) of "Mary!" (by her name let us remember) to the assurance of peace, thrice-repeated for emphasis, as if tattoo'd into the hearts of those present and via them, we later, as now in 2025. Cf. Isaiah 49: 15-16)'s promise to the exiles that they will not -- cannot be -- forgotten since their names/beings are carved/tattooed into the hands of the homeless but homeward-bound-people, God's people. We are among (and indebted to) them. Cf. Psalm 85: 8-13.

Consider the Hymn: "The Servant Song," VU-595

Friends, brother & sister GLI advocates, let us dig into our UCC history as long and as brief, really, it is: biblical and reformation faith traditions on into the 1925 formation of our UCC and its beholders of the Social Gospel, eventually Liberation Theology witnesses, and not all, on into the 21st century of companion-travellers. They pass the right-wising torch of justice-making-keeping.

Gospel in Action

When we sing "Let me be as Christ to you..." in the servant song, we are reminding ourselves that we have dedicated our lives and spirits to walking in the path of Jesus, a path of liberation for all. In this resurrection passage from John, Jesus appears again to Mary Magdalene after she had thought he was gone forever. Jesus comes back, again and again, and abides with Mary The Apostle to the Apostles, and with the other Apostles as they grow in their understanding of what it truly means to follow Jesus. This is a lesson for us too, we must not think of advocacy for a Guaranteed Livable Income as a one-and-done event. Anti-poverty advocacy and action is a lifelong pursuit, we are called to appear again and again at the sides of our siblings who are experiencing poverty and the oppressive poverty cycle. We must return again and again to the fight, and abide with our neighbours, friends, family and community as we struggle onward.

What actions or advocacy pieces return to you in this time of resurrection? Often, simple efforts to remind people of the path we are on can make a big difference. GLI printables like lawn signs and buttons can be powerful ways to help us stay the course and call others to the path. You can find links to these on the PMR Justice webpage.