

# Quaker Concern

## Reparations and the hard work of reconciliation

By Matthew Legge



CFSC's Jennifer Preston facilitates a session at the closing ceremony of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

In 2026 Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) and Winnipeg Friends will bring forward a proposal for Friends nationally to make an annual payment of reparations to Indigenous Peoples, in response to living on and benefiting from Indigenous Peoples' lands. This would be a natural progression of Friends' reconciliation work.

### Friends' early history with Indigenous Peoples

I don't remember learning anything about early Quaker history either in school or during my orientation at CFSC. I'm told that romantic stories of William Penn landing in Lenne Lappe territory and founding Pennsylvania circulate in some places. More realistic views about this history will continue to evolve as further historical research is done.

From the first days, some Friends were egalitarian in their approaches and were welcomed by, and had respectful relationships with, Indigenous Peoples. Also, Friends were among those involved in dispossessing Indigenous Peoples' lands. Some promoted assimilation and sought to compel Indigenous Peoples to adopt European ways and Christian beliefs.

In the US, Friends ran what were called "Indian Boarding Schools." Like Residential Schools in Canada, the US schools facilitated the seizing of Indigenous children from their families and communities with the

express purpose of destroying Indigenous cultures, languages, and spiritualities. Widespread physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse also took place at the schools. Some Friends in the US are currently working with school survivors and their descendants to address this traumatic legacy.

In Canada, residential school survivors won the largest class action suit in the country's history, a settlement to which some Churches were legal parties. The Religious Society of Friends wasn't one of them, having not been involved in Residential Schools here. As part of the settlement, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to document the truth about the schools in Canada. It also issued 94 *Calls to Action* for reconciliation.

Although not directly involved, like other settlers, Friends were part of the colonial culture of Canada and paid taxes, so in those ways they were as responsible as other citizens of Canada for the Residential School system. Additionally, there is some question about whether Genesee Yearly Meeting was involved with the US schools in the 1860s. Some Friends say that it was, while others who've done historical research remain unsure. (Genesee was one of three Yearly Meetings that merged into Canadian Yearly Meeting in 1955.)

In short, Friends both participated directly in, and opposed, the project of colonization. Friends continue

*Continued on pg 5*

# Keeping up with Friends



## Joining hundreds to protect rights

We joined almost 200 organizations in calling for the withdrawal of Bill C-2. We called for Canada to reject the US-style anti-migrant and anti-refugee agenda, ensure equal rights, fair treatment, and non-discriminatory access to permanent resident status for all, stop scapegoating migrants and refugees for the housing and affordability crisis, uphold the Right to Asylum and due process in refugee determination by better resourcing the Immigration and Refugee Board. <https://QuakerService.ca/WithdrawC2>

## The enemy isn't who you think it is

When we're in conflicts, we might not only be up against a real person or situation. We might be up against our own imaginations. We might be doing much of the work to feel bad by ourselves explains CFSC's Communications Coordinator Matt Legge is his latest post for *Psychology Today*.

<https://QuakerService.ca/EnemyIsnt>

## Joint statements made at the UN

We joined with partners in the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples to deliver statements at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York and the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva. You can read the statements and find out more about this work at

<https://DeclarationCoalition.com>

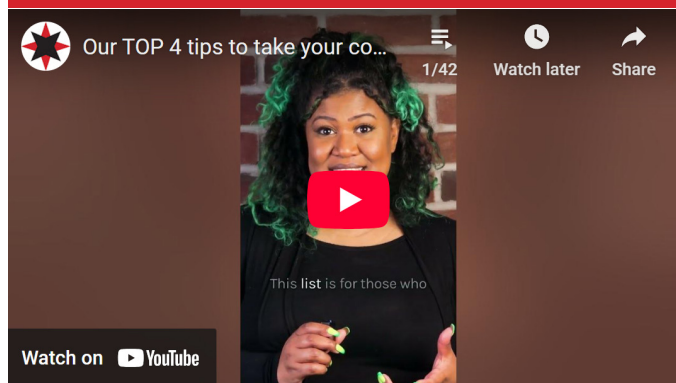
## Grants support transformative justice

CFSC has been busy giving out transformative justice grants this year. Recipients have included:

- **Canadian Coalition for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCCIP)**—we continue to financially support the CCCIP, covering the costs of its website, email server, and providing honoraria for youth members of the Advisory committee.
- **Candace House**—an organization in Winnipeg that gives support to family members who have lost someone to homicide; our funding supports the hospitality that they can give to families.
- **Write On!**—an organization that provides pen pals to people who are incarcerated; our support will fund the Write On! post office box for two years.

- **The National Restorative Justice Symposium**—a yearly conference for people and organizations wishing to advance the cause of restorative justice in Canada. CFSC helped the Symposium pay honoraria for excellent keynote speakers, such as Marlee Liss.
- **Rittenhouse: A New Vision**—named after Friend Ruth Rittenhouse Morris, this is an organization committed to bringing to fruition Ruth's vision of transformative justice. Grant money from CFSC allowed the Executive Director of Rittenhouse to attend the Transforming Justice conference in Victoria, British Columbia.

People are loving our free weekly tips for difficult conversations. Find out why:  
<https://QuakerService.ca/Tips>



## Quaker Concern

**Quaker Concern** is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. Since 1931, CFSC has worked for a world where peace and justice prevail.

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## *Are we backsliding on civil liberties in Canada?* by Sandra Wiens

**C**anadian Friends are likely familiar with news from the US, UK, and elsewhere in the world about eroding civil liberties and the criminalisation of dissent. We've seen stories on deportations, mass surveillance, and trampling the right to protest all becoming more common—and frighteningly—more accepted.

Of concern to Friends in the US, for example, has been the dissolution of the sanctuary laws that provided protections to people (mostly migrants or undocumented people) seeking sanctuary in places of worship. In fact, Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting vs. DHS, launched legal actions against these new powers being enforced by the Department of Homeland Security, arguing that the US Administration's policy violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act by allowing immigration law enforcement in or around so-called "protected areas," including religious services (this was barred by previous US administrations.)

In the UK, there have also been glaring examples of recent laws impacting civil liberties, especially the right to protest. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 have criminalised protest actions and given powers to police to stop actions that could be deemed disruptive before they occur. An example of this was the police raid on a group of young activists at the Westminster Meeting House in London back in March.

At the time Paul Parker, the recording clerk of Quakers in Britain stated in response to the raid: "No-one has been arrested in a Quaker meeting house in living memory. This aggressive violation of our place of worship and the forceful removal of young people holding a protest group meeting clearly shows what happens when a society criminalises protest. Freedom of speech, assembly, and fair trials are an essential part of free public debate, which underpins democracy."

In light of these events, I wondered if something similar could happen in Canada? I posed the question to the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG), of which CFSC is a founding member. According to them, there are no laws in Canada quite like the UK Public Order Act and others that fully criminalize certain civil disobedience tactics such as "attaching oneself to a building" or blocking any public roads.

ICLMG went on to say that it's not likely, at this

moment, that police in Canada would arrest people at a nonviolent protest planning meeting and Dominique Peschard from the Ligue des droits et libertés of Quebec (who was consulted on the question) agreed. However, Canada is not immune to these forceful actions. There are many reasons police can restrict or stop a protest and detain or arrest people. And there are many ways police and national security agencies try to discourage dissent in the name of national security, preventing/stopping crime, violating bylaws or fighting hate.

For example, in Ottawa, police have intimidated, pushed, heavily ticketed and arrested some organizers and protesters during pro-Palestine marches. This has been allegedly for not following orders to stay on the sidewalk, for violating a bylaw on noise (for simply using megaphones or microphones), or because organizers were protesting the arrests of others in front of the Ottawa police station. Another obvious example is the use of court injunctions and arrests against Wet'suwet'en land defenders. Another pervasive issue is police surveillance and data collection and sharing. RCMP or local police have shown up at book launches and protest sign-making gatherings to talk to people with the supposed intent of crime prevention or protecting protesters. And now, cities across Canada are looking to change (or have changed) bylaws to prevent protest in "bubble zones"—making it illegal to protest near places of worship, schools, and community centres.

At present, more forceful police or government actions, like those taking place in the US and UK, are not happening in Canada. But when Canada introduced Bill C-2 recently, it showed us that nothing can be taken for granted. By addressing border security in a way that placates the Trump administration, this omnibus Bill is seeking unrelated powers that they have unsuccessfully attempted to obtain in the past. ICLMG advises that a good security culture and having solid plans when engaging in protest activities remain important. It's also vital to denounce all attempts to undermine civil liberties so that police do not feel emboldened to go further. Vigilance and the exercise of our civil liberties is key to ensuring a healthy and functioning democracy.

**Sandra Wiens** is CFSC's Government Relations Representative in Ottawa. For the notes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.quakerconcern.ca)

# Transformative justice is happening in Indigenous courts

By Karen Ridd



Eagle feathers can be used to swear oaths in Alberta's courts. Photo: Jason Franson/The Globe and Mail

**I**t was 1991 when the groundbreaking Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) report was released in Manitoba. Following two years of interviews with a huge range of people—remote communities in the North, legal officials of courtrooms in Winnipeg, family members of people who had died due to violence, incarcerated people—Justices Murray Sinclair and Alvin Hamilton rendered a scathing and thorough indictment of the ways that the legal system fails Indigenous Peoples, and, combined with racism, structural injustices, and the legacy of colonization, leads to their mass incarceration. Among the recommendations of the AJI was a call for the creation of an “Aboriginal Justice System” that would respond to harm and wrongdoing through culturally appropriate, transformative methods.

I remember exactly where I was standing when the news of the AJI report broke nationally. I was in the kitchen of a home I shared with 10 other people in Toronto. I didn’t know anything about transformative justice at the time. But as I listened to the news reports and, more specifically, the reactions that the report was getting across the country, I was struck by something profound.

As people learned about transformative responses, there was a general mood of “that sounds really good” and also, sadly, from many non-Indigenous Canadians, a concurrent attitude of “that sounds so good... they shouldn’t be allowed to have it, because I want it too.” That showed a lack of understanding of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples (including what would later be affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 5 as the “right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions”). But

what was clearly underlying the comments was a sense that this way of doing justice represented something profoundly important, something with potential for healing, something that represented an opportunity for transformational change.

In our transformative justice work at Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), we are always trying to imagine what can “move the needle” nationally towards a new vision for justice-making. One path that seems particularly fruitful is to support the expansion of Indigenous-led justice-making ventures, and to help non-Indigenous people understand the importance of these initiatives.

As CFSC’s Transformative Justice Program Coordinator, then, it’s important that I understand what Indigenous-led justice-making looks like in practice. And although I can read about these initiatives and listen to Indigenous people talk about them, it’s even more helpful for me to see them in action. So, on my recent trip to give presentations in Western Canada, I took advantage of being in Alberta to stop in at the Calgary Indigenous Court, and the Siksika Restorative Justice Court. The experiences were profound, enlightening, and moving. I’m so grateful to have had these opportunities.

In Canada, virtually all courtrooms are open to the public (exceptions are made for certain cases, such as ones involving the welfare of children), so I’ve often visited courtrooms—sometimes to support people involved, sometimes to learn more about the legal system.

Despite being embedded in the mainstream legal system, the two Indigenous courtrooms that I

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visited were significantly different from anything I had ever witnessed before, and certainly far more transformative, that is, more focused on healing.

In both courtrooms, the day started with a smudge, and with teachings from the elders. In Siksika, one of the elders talked about the Blackfoot terms for the various roles in the courtroom. The court itself is “The Place Where We Talk.” The community court workers are the “Helpers.” The sheriffs are the “Guardians.” The lawyers “The Ones Who Talk” (there was definitely laughter in the courtroom when the elder gave this name!). Crucially, the person who is called “the offender” in a typical courtroom, is “The One Who Made a Mistake.” Phew... what a non-judgmental term. Because of course, we have all made mistakes. This was one way that power dynamics were mitigated in the courtroom.

### **“The two Indigenous courtrooms were far more transformative, more focused on healing.”**

Additionally, there was no raised platform for the judge to sit on, and the people involved in a case sat in a circle. Some of the trappings of the European court were still evident (like rising when the judge entered, and the robes that some court officials wore), but they were disrupted. Court workers wore beaded medallions. The judge presiding in Siksika was Karen Crowshoe, a Blackfoot woman. She spoke kindly to each of the “Ones Who Had Made Mistakes,” asking them about what they were learning, commending them, and encouraging them. What I saw was what one of the Blackfoot elders described as “putting the Indian back into justice,” and it was beautiful.

People brought before these courts do not have to plead guilty (as participants in Restorative Justice Diversion programs often have to do); rather they are supported to make a “Healing Plan” for themselves, a plan that looks at the roots of where they have been struggling in their life, and that focuses on healing.

The plans that were reported about, on the days I visited, included: working with an elder, giving back to the community, a “restorative circle” with the victim, completing school, taking courses, attending ceremony, making restitution, holding

down employment, and more. The plans were comprehensive—crafted to meet individual needs and covering a long period of time. There was no pressure for a quick fix. Lawyers gave updates and reports on how their clients were progressing on their Healing Plans. And the docket paused in Calgary while one young man, who had completed his Healing Plan, was given a Blanket Ceremony.

It was powerful to sit in these courtrooms, to witness these radical changes, and to watch what we can only hope is the slow dismantling of current dysfunctional mainstream systems.

For follow up, I would encourage readers to sit in on Indigenous-led justice making. If you haven’t been to a typical court, you might want to do that first, so that you have something to compare it to. There are Indigenous courts (sometimes called Gladue Courts) in many communities across Canada. Here’s a list, to help you find one near you!

<https://QuakerService.ca/IndigenousCourts>



**Karen Ridd** is CFSC’s Transformative Justice Program Coordinator.

## ***Reparations*** continued from pg 1

to benefit from and be harmed by colonialism. In response, many Friends seek to reconcile for the future, and have been involved in the work of reconciliation for decades. Acknowledging this mixed and at times deeply troubling history is important. The subtitle of the TRC’s final report is *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future*.

### **Canadian Friends Service Committee**

CFSC was founded in 1931 and has supported Indigenous Peoples’ human rights since at least the 1960s. Indigenous and non-Indigenous Friends have been involved in this work, and that of reconciliation, for generations. Actions in these early days included engaging in nonviolent activism at the request of the Innu Nation, Grassy Narrows First Nation, and the Lubicon Lake Nation.

Later, Quakers repudiated the racist Doctrine of Discovery and were among the first to collectively commit to decolonization and reporting on the specific

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## Reparations continued

actions taken toward reconciliation. Friends then helped found and facilitate a coalition of churches working to advance Indigenous Peoples' human rights.

How did Quakers—despite being few in number—become a leading non-Indigenous faith-body in Canada working for Indigenous Peoples' human rights? In a word: relationships. For almost 30 years, CFSC's General Secretary, Jennifer Preston, has cultivated relationships of respect and trust with Indigenous partners and organizations. With the support of numerous Friends and colleagues, these relationships have formed the bedrock of our work on Indigenous Peoples' human rights for decades.

Jennifer is a highly sought after expert in this area. You might have seen her on national television if you watched the closing ceremony of the TRC in 2015. The commissioners asked her to facilitate a session, during which Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild thanked her and Quakers for their work on reconciliation.

This didn't happen overnight. This level of trust was built slowly through taking vital actions that, at the time, few noticed.

In 2006-2007 Jennifer and colleagues repeatedly travelled to New York. She put everything on hold for a long series of off-the-record meetings with ambassadors. Why? Because Indigenous Peoples were struggling to get those meetings, but for some reason, governments were willing to meet with human rights nonprofits like CFSC.

So, at the request of Indigenous Peoples, Jennifer and colleagues from Amnesty International spent countless hours correcting misinformation about Indigenous Peoples' human rights. It paid off. Amazingly, the United Nations (UN) adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* despite efforts from colonial States like Canada to squash it!

As part of this huge success, Jennifer joined with Indigenous partners to help found and coordinate the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Coalition, which includes many prominent Indigenous organizations and Nations, has been active at the UN and in Canada ever since.

The Coalition has toured and helped to answer

questions about international law for Indigenous Nations. It has educated and held states to account at the UN. It has briefed Ministers, Parliamentary Committees, and federal government departments in Canada. It has taught university classes, published a book, and distributed hundreds of thousands of pocket-sized copies of the *UN Declaration*—dramatically raising the profile of Indigenous Peoples' human rights.

Along with all this public work, the Coalition has continually worked behind-the-scenes, meeting with key decision-makers in Ottawa to eventually secure another massive win. The Coalition was instrumental in getting Canada to adopt legislation to implement the *UN Declaration* into all of Canada's laws. Much work remains to be done, but this promises to be a huge step for Indigenous Peoples' human rights.

Over the years, CFSC has continued to do this important work alongside Indigenous partners—hosting events, conducting international visits to learn from Indigenous Peoples, intervening at the Supreme Court of Canada in the landmark *Tsilhqot'in Nation* Aboriginal title case, and much more.

With the support of Indigenous partners who review applications, CFSC runs a Reconciliation Fund that gives money to grassroots Indigenous cultural and language revitalization efforts—an important act of reparations.

CFSC's work has also always sought to educate Quakers and settlers in the broader public. The CFSC website includes many resources such as the popular *Indigenous Voices on Reconciliation* video series, where some of CFSC's Indigenous partners answer questions that many settlers have about reconciliation.

The plan for Friends to introduce annual reparations payments in 2026 builds on this long history. An annual reparations contribution would acknowledge for some our being Treaty people, and for others living on unceded or non-Treaty territories in Canada. Reconciliation demands reparations for dispossession and historic and ongoing injustices. These payments would be part of Friends' living up to the call to reconcile for the future.



**Matthew Legge** is CFSC's Communications Coordinator.

## *Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki: an invitation to peace* by Mel Burns

**W**hen you walk into a quiet church and see posters depicting the aftermath of an atomic bombing, what do you feel? For Debbie Grisdale, and for the 300 visitors who came to St John the Evangelist Anglican Church in Ottawa this past May, it was a powerful mix of sorrow, curiosity, and hope.

They gathered to mark the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The exhibition's goal was clear: to remember, and to remind. It succeeded in both.

### **Why remember?**

On August 6th and 9th, 1945, nuclear bombs devastated two cities. But these bombings weren't only historical events—they remain a warning today. Nuclear weapons continue to threaten life everywhere, both through their existence and long-lasting ecological harm.

### **A community gathered**

Over eight days, the church's chapel transformed into a gallery of truth-telling. Thirty posters, gifted by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum thanks to survivor Setsuko Thurlow, told stories of suffering, survival, and resilience. Five more posters, created by Carleton University public history students, highlighted Canada's connections to nuclear weapons—from mining uranium to current global policies.

On opening night, more than 60 people gathered. Speakers included law professor and human rights activist Alex Neve, Rev. Gary van der Meer, students Amber Collins and Gracie Henneberry, Shane Roberts from the United Nations Association in Canada, and Debbie Grisdale, as part of Ban the Bomb Ottawa. The speakers shared reflections, hopes, and a commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons.

The exhibition wasn't just about reading posters. People prayed together at a mid-week service led by Rev. Gary, danced amongst the images one morning to the haunting pop song Hiroshima/Nagasaki by Gabrielle Roth and the Mirrors, listened to the symphony Step forward and toll this bell for peace by Robert Frederick Jones, and rang a small bell installed to invite visitors to sound out their prayers for peace.

These guestbook words resonated deeply: "Everyone should see this."

Another visitor wrote, "Great work... it is very clear and effective. Your message comes across clear as day." Many wept. Others shared memories of Japan or wartime experiences. More than 160 signed a petition urging Canada to make nuclear disarmament a foreign policy and national defence priority. The petition also calls on Canada to urge all nuclear-armed states to accede to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) or negotiate a binding instrument for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This petition continues to grow. Its clear demand is that Canada must lead.

### **Next steps and unrealized hopes**

One dream remained unmet. Despite reaching out to teachers and the public school board, no classes could visit due to budget constraints. Teachers told them they would integrate the posters into lessons if they could be brought to the schools.

That's what they hope to do next. In August, the posters will display in Ottawa City Hall, followed by a Catholic parish in September for the UN International Day of Peace. Debbie and her organizing team are exploring ways to lend them to schools this fall.

### **Funded by Friends**

This initiative was organized by Debbie Grisdale for Ban the Bomb Ottawa and Ottawa Monthly Meeting and Mary Girard and Kris Wilson-Yang, members of Ottawa Monthly Meeting and co-organizers in the annual work of commemoration. They were supported by a Community Peacemaker Grant from Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), helping Ban the Bomb Ottawa and Ottawa Monthly Meeting to share these vital stories and advocate for a nuclear-free world. To learn more about how CFSC **funds grassroots peace work like this**, visit <https://QuakerService.ca/Grants>

### **Will you ring the bell for peace?**

The next time you hear a bell toll, let it be a reminder that peace isn't passive. It's created by people like us, choosing to remember, to act, and to hope.



This article is based on a report submitted by Debbie Grisdale. Mel Burns is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

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# Friends on the move



JENNIFER PRESTON, JEREMY VANDER HOEK and **Rachel Singleton-Polster** travelled to New York and Geneva again this year for UN meetings on Indigenous Peoples' human rights. Once again, these were amazing spaces to connect with partners from around the world! Indigenous peacebuilding was a major focus in New York. CFSC co-sponsored two side events, hosted a quiet diplomacy dinner at Quaker House, and supported an intervention. At one of the side events our partner **Kenneth Deer** shared how his nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, is governed by the Great Law of Peace. We joined our voices with Kenneth and other partners to emphasize to States that Indigenous peace traditions are essential to addressing global conflicts.

SANDRA WIENS AND JEREMY HELPED HOST a Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples event in Ottawa to screen our partner **Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel's** film *Deskaheh Levi General: the quest for justice*. The documentary tells the story of Chief Deskaheh's travel to the League of Nations in 1923 as a representative of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

He was denied entry, but that didn't stop the Haudenosaunee or Indigenous Peoples around the world from advocating for their right to represent themselves internationally as nations. After the screening, human rights experts and the current Chief Deskaheh title holder shared about the continued struggle for the enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples in the UN. We worked hard to ensure that several embassy representatives were in attendance to hear this!

CFSC CONTINUES ITS ENGAGEMENT IN THE Decolonizing Settler States project together with partners at the University of British Columbia. Jennifer and Jeremy hosted a meeting of the partners involved in the project in Guelph, Ontario.

Sandra attended a conference in Prince Edward Island (PEI) to connect with those working on Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income (GLBI) and to learn more about the PEI Demonstration Project, a model for a five-to-seven year long basic income demonstration program in PEI. It could serve as the basis for a GLBI in Canada. Why not ask your

MP if they know about this project, and if they support seeing it move ahead?

SANDRA AND CFSC BOARD MEMBER JOHN **Samson Fellows** also presented at Canadian Yearly Meeting in session (online this year) about GLBI.

KAREN RIDD WITH STUDENT LINDSAY HUNT presented a soon-to-be released CFSC report at a conference at the University of Victoria. The report explores the question of who is benefitting financially from the Canadian carceral system. The presentation was very well-received by a packed room!

Karen gave presentations about CFSC's transformative justice work to Friends in Cowichan Valley, Victoria, and Calgary. Karen and CFSC Associate **Sarah Chandler** presented at Western Half Yearly Meeting. Karen and CFSC member **Lillian Henegar** led a session on GLBI. In the middle of all this travelling and presenting, Karen found time to record a presentation on restorative and transformative justice for the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches.