



# The Seed Keepers

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## Editorial

Change is constant. Here on the East Coast the leaves remind us that autumn is upon us as we say farewell to one of the warmest summers on record. The chaotic array of colour is a sign that beauty can be found in the midst of confusion and decay.

As we continue to work for structural change that reflects the mutuality of women and men, the church, which includes the whole people of G\*d, is changing. Big changes are often the result of many, many small acts of resistance that have prepared the way. In this issue we continue to highlight women and men befriending change: protesters of the G20 meetings in Toronto, women in parish ministries, writers and readers of books, and all who took part in our first ever national video conference last June. This work, along with that of progressive Catholics around the globe, prepares for the inevitable dawn of justice. Be a part of it!

by Cathy Holtmann

## Befriending Change

### Gender Justice and the G20

By Cathy Holtmann, Harvey Station, NB

Canada was in the spotlight this past June hosting the G20 heads of state. Ironically, maternal health was a prime focus of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's agenda for collective talks on the developing world. Within a year of forming the federal government, Harper's Conservatives cut the Status of Women Canada's budget. In April this year they cut funding to fourteen women's rights groups in Canada as well as to CIDA-funded projects like KAIROS.

During her visit to Canada in March, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton had a harsh critique for Harper's proposed international agenda. She said, "You cannot have maternal health without reproductive health and reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortions. I do not think governments should be involved in making these decisions. It is perfectly legitimate for people to hold their own personal views based on conscience, religion or any other basis. But I've always believed that the government should not intervene in decisions of such intimacy" ([www.thestar.com](http://www.thestar.com)).



Ms. Clinton's critique was ably matched by the thousands of Canadians who gathered in the streets of Toronto to protest the G20 meetings. Anna Willats, a professor in the Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program at George Brown College was an organizer of the Gender Justice contingent which was part of the Justice for Our Communities March that took place on Friday 25 June 2010. Anna has a long history in the women's anti-violence community and in 2006 she was named Toronto's Best Activist by *Now Magazine*. Anna spoke about her experiences as an organizer and participant in the G20 protests.

"Diverse groups in Toronto came together to form the Toronto Community Mobilization network (<http://g20.torontomobilize.org>) which created the framework for people to organize different events leading up to the G20," said Anna. "I noticed that there wasn't too much focus on gender-justice and thought it would be a great idea to organize something specifically. I was invited to create a contingent that would lead the Justice for Our Communities March so I pulled that together with women and trans-folks."



CNWE

CNWE Mission Statement: To enable women to name their giftedness and from that awareness to effect structural change in the church that reflects the mutuality and co-responsibility of women and men within that church.

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The Justice for Our Communities March was designed to highlight local concerns such as cuts to women's programs, disability access, poverty issues, the lack of public housing, cuts to special diet funding, climate justice, and aboriginal issues. "All of the cuts that have been made have really impacted women particularly," said Anna. "When women face other barriers, because they're immigrants, disabled, young mothers, or seniors, this just compounds the impact of these cuts. The most vulnerable people face the greatest impact from government restraint (which was a focus of the G20 meetings). We also wanted to highlight the desperate situation for aboriginal women. Access is an issue for women who have to travel out of province for an abortion. Women in remote places face barriers to access as well. We pointed out that violence against women continues to take an incredible toll."



Between four and five thousand people took part in the march. The Gender Justice contingent carried three coffins: one filled with coat-hangers symbolizing lack of access to safe abortions; one covered with messages about violence against women, including the murders of aboriginal women; and the third coffin was covered with queer and trans- symbols to highlight illegality of homosexuality in some countries and to highlight restrictions of rights and higher suicides rates here.

Part way into the planned route, police arbitrarily stopped the march. Anna said that the large crowd stayed calm despite aggressive police attempts to corral them onto small side streets.

Thousands of people were detained by police, many without cause - some were held for long periods of time and about three hundred face charges of conspiracy. While the Ontario provincial and the federal governments have refused calls for public inquiries into the actions of the police, an announcement was made of an independent review by the civilian body that oversees Toronto's police ([www.thestar.com](http://www.thestar.com)).

Anna maintains that the G20 protests created an opportunity for diverse groups in Canada to work together. "Some great coalition-building happened and discussions are continuing," she said. "Links were made among groups who hadn't worked together before. The G20 provided a spring-board for a re-energized activist movement. People were able to identify how all these different actions by governments here and abroad are interconnected." According to the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty: "Across the globe we see G20 austerity measures snatching away health, educational and social services, while the governments of G20 countries continue to bail out banks and corporations. Locally, we witness racist criminalization of migrants and refugees becoming more vicious, while colonization and destruction of Indigenous nations and their lands continues. Many of us daily experience the entrenchment of a racist, ableist, patriarchal, queer-phobic, profit-driven culture, while countless bodies bear the violence of an oppressive police state that enforces these norms" ([www.ocap.ca](http://www.ocap.ca)).

As Catholic women engaged in the struggle against patriarchy, CNWE members know that there are costs for speaking and acting out for women's equality. In spending over one billion dollars for security for the G8/G20 meetings, Harper's government is sending a clear message to Canadian women and other oppressed groups that dissent will not be tolerated. Given the courage of all those who took the streets in Toronto, we must carry on in solidarity. We cannot remain complacent in the face of attacks to civil rights and cuts to programs women have worked hard to create. Rhetoric about equality without access to housing, food, health care and social services rings hollow. Is it time that we openly consider a gendered approach to Catholic social teachings including the issues of reproductive choice and domestic violence within our movement?