

# MICAH CENTRE

## NEWSLETTER ADVENT 2024

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## Witnessing to Love in an Off-Kilter World

**Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning**

Micah Centre Program Director

Ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza and Sudan, election results nearby and around the world, the deaths of land defenders and human rights activists in Honduras and Mexico and elsewhere . . . a lot has happened this fall that has made me wonder how communities inspired by Jesus' upside-down kingdom can witness to a more loving, more life-giving, more just path in this cultural moment.

Considering Gustavo Gutierrez's long obedience in the direction of God's justice and liberation has been helpful in my wonderings (see 'In Memorium: Gustavo Gutierrez' on page three). Gutierrez's work among and for the poor spanned almost 6 decades. He witnessed moments of hope in his Latin America, when it looked as if a more equitable world was being birthed. He also witnessed moments of deep despair, when it looked as if the powers of darkness and injustice would forever come out on top – the murder of Oscar Romero in 1980, the murder of his Jesuit friends working for justice in 1989, or the persistence of violence and poverty in his home city of Lima, Peru.

Yet to the end, Gutierrez insisted that the fullness of human life was a life lived for others:

**"The freedom to which we are called presupposes going out of oneself, the breaking down of our selfishness and of all the structures that support our selfishness; the foundation of this freedom is openness to others. The fullness of liberation – a free gift from Christ – is communion with God and other human beings."**

In this moment when the future feels so uncertain, and the forces of injustice and oppression seem to be as powerful as ever, we might be tempted to turn in on ourselves in indifference or despair. I hope instead we can return to Gutierrez's call to true freedom, a call empowered by the very gospel we remember at Christmas and exemplified in lives like that of Gutierrez himself.



*Dancing Saints*  
Mark Dukes, 1996

mural in rotunda  
St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco

# Advent Reflection and Prayer

*"The first advent was about the arrival of God into  
a world of woe, and every advent since  
invites us to grapple with what Jesus's coming means  
to our fraught landscapes now"*

*Kelly Nikondeha, The First Advent in Palestine*

**G**od of branch and blaze, in this Advent season we pray for your justice and your peace. In this time of longing, shelter us from the harsh rays of sun and screen. Keep us under the shadow of your wing, and give us an assurance of your love when it is most hard to feel your presence.

May your holy Spirit encourage every generation that languishes under violence wrought by human hands. We pray for an end to occupation in all lands, and especially for the people of Palestine. Bring an end to the terror, invasion, and incarceration that continues to haunt us.

Help us, too, to keep vigilant against the works of evil, in our own selves and in the world around us. Nurture the seeds of resistance and solidarity in our own hearts. Fill us with a love of land and neighbor.

We pray and wait in hope for your coming amongst us – for that peace and justice that we dare to call upon in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Prayer from Kenji Kuramitsu from Friends of Sabeel North America*

## What We're Pondering - Jonathan

**Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning**  
Micah Centre Program Director

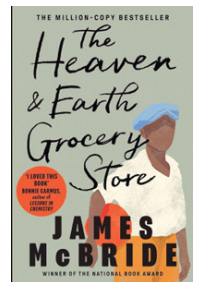


*The Kingdom of Jesus (song)*  
The Porter's Gate with Jon Guerra & Sandra McCracken, 2024

With words drawn mainly from Jesus' own teaching, this song is a thoughtful reflection on the upside-down reign of Jesus that prizes the meek, the poor, the peaceful, and the humble, subverting our allegiance to competing kingdoms and rulers.

*The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store (book)*, James McBride

McBride's beautifully written novel tells the story of Black and Jewish residents of the Chicken Hill neighborhood of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, in the 1920s and '30s. Part murder mystery, part character study, part snapshot of Black, Jewish, and immigrant history in America, the story is an insightful and funny reflection on what it means to live on the underside of history.



## Pakitinâsowin Fund Update

**Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning**  
Micah Centre Program Director

**I**n the summer of 2024, the Pakitinâsowin Fund's Indigenous-led Advisory Circle approved our third \$10,000 grant to support a grassroots Indigenous-led project working to build hope and community. This summer's grant went to the Ribbon Skirt Project, led by Tamika and Shawna, two participants in Verna Fischer's Oskya Metchewawin ('New Beginnings') Project, which received a grant at winter solstice 2023. Inspired by their participation in Verna's circles, Tamika and Shawna hosted elder-led ribbon skirt making workshops throughout summer and fall 2024 to reconnect community members to their culture and to each other.

# 'In Memorium' for Gustavo Gutierrez

Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning

Micah Centre Program Director

On October 22, 2024, the Micah Centre lost one of its heroes. Gustavo Gutierrez passed away in his home of Lima, Peru at the age of 96 after a long life dedicated to reimagining Christian theology and practice in light of God's call to solidarity with the poor. His theological work was inspired by his own experiences as a priest working among the poor in Lima. He famously defined theology as 'critical reflection on social practice in light of scripture', a definition we return to often at the Micah Centre.

Gutierrez's most influential book, *A Theology of Liberation*, was published in 1973 and drew on biblical study and the then-vibrant Christian social movements throughout Latin America to argue that Christian theology – and Christian communities – must be accountable to the experiences



*Gustavo Gutierrez*  
Kelly Latimore, 2024  
icon

of the poor in history. The book became central to what became the movement of 'liberation theology', and continues to be read by Christians around the world as they grapple with God's word in light of systemic poverty, hunger, and injustice.

Two quotes from Gutierrez continue to inspire me in my work as Micah Centre director. Gutierrez famously said that all of his theological and pastoral work for the poor was his attempt to answer one question, "How can we say 'God loves you' to the poor, when their everyday experiences in the world seem to say otherwise?" Yet the challenge of working with and for the poor did not turn Gutierrez bitter, which I detect in his beautiful summary of human life and calling: "We are made by love and for love. Only by loving can we fulfill ourselves as persons."

## Adrian Jacobs Coming to King's!

Indigenous Christians using smudging in Christian community settings has and continues to provoke visceral responses from some Christians. Fear of compromising Christian faith worries some to the point of raising objection to this practice. The church in Canada, the CRCNA in particular, has a history of addressing these concerns theologically and pastorally.

In January, the Micah Centre is hosting an evening with Adrian Jacobs as he reviews this historic and contemporary concern and address the various dimensions of concern. This is a free event, and you are welcome!

Adrian Jacobs, a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario, is the Senior Leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation at the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He is an educator on Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues.



## Syncretism: A faithful response to fear

Adrian Jacobs



January 16, 2025  
7-8:30pm

The King's University  
Lecture Theatre: N102  
refreshments provided



# Honduras Water Project

## Returning to El Cedrito in 2025



**N**ow in its 30th year, the Honduras Water Project will send a team of six students and one staff person to southern Honduras in May, 2025. The team will return to the Cedrito settlement, where they will participate in ongoing work to bring a reliable source of fresh water and improved sanitation to the area.

Local engineers are currently searching for a suitable site to drill a well. If they are successful, the King's team will assist with water storage and distribution. The alternate project involves continued work in the same geographic area as part of the aptly named WASH Project. This WorldRenew program follows steps to improve sanitation practices in homes through the installation of pilas (personal water stations), cement flooring, and latrines for each family. Phase one of the WASH Project in Cedrito, which the King's team participated in this past spring, saw seven families benefit from improved sanitation conditions. This coming spring, the team would work on installing four floors, eight pilas, and six latrines. Completion of these projects reduces sickness as a result of inadequate sanitation.

To provide some insight as to how development projects such as this work, the first step included a survey of needs completed by the local community, including a suitability study. 64 families were identified as beneficiaries for WASH Project improvements. Cedrito is poised well for the WASH Project as local construction material is available (stone and sand) and local leaders are already trained in WASH initiatives.



*May 2024 Honduras Water Project Team: Scott Mora, Kevin Zarate, Hailey Yorke, Emily Reitsma, Kayla Soetaert, Nicholas Apoll Gray, Casey Belway, Sadie Sullivan, Alyssa Yorke, Erin Greidanus, Joshua Dubetz, Celena Kingma, Ethan Nanninga (l to r)*

Cedrito is located in southern Honduras, near the border with the Republic of Nicaragua. The main sources of income for residents are related to agriculture, livestock, the shrimp industry, and day labour. One of the challenges faced by this community is a lack of job opportunities; higher-income jobs involve internal and external migration (to the United States of America or Spain).

Not only are we pleased to work with this multiple-partner project, we are encouraged by stories told by previous student teams. The Honduras Water Project provides an incredible opportunity for our teams to

develop friendships with our Honduran brothers and sisters in Christ, grow in global experience, and gain knowledge about sustainable development. Our teams often include returnees; in fact, this year one student is participating for her third successive year!

## Community Garden

**S**arah Greidanus, a fourth year Chemistry student at King's, served as the Community Garden Coordinator this past summer. She did a fantastic job! Her season began with the daunting task of spreading 4 yards of fresh garden mix soil over all the raised beds. Her role also included fielding the demand for plots and maintaining the common areas through the summer and fall seasons. The garden continues to draw a lot of interest in the neighbourhood, with 14 households renting 40 plots. Future plans include expansion of the composting system hardscape elements. If you're interested in a plot next year, please email us at [communiity.garden@kingsu.ca](mailto:communiity.garden@kingsu.ca).



# Student Refugee Program Update

## Two Students, Third Coming!

Ellen Algera

Micah Centre Administrative Assistant



WUSC EUMC  
LOCAL COMMITTEE  
COMITÉ LOCAL

In August, King's welcomed a second WUSC SRP student. This year the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (coordinator of immigration) secured an early arrival, allowing a full week for student adjustment before classes began. This was most helpful, as we got to know the new student and helped her settle in before the full student body arrived and orientation activities were in full swing.

The Micah Centre is grateful to coordinate this mutually beneficial program. Students from the Micah Student Society have stepped up as volunteers, orienting SRP students to all things Canadian from a peer perspective while they themselves learning about other cultures and the impact of displacement on families. SRP students work hard to pursue dreams of university degree completion. The road is not always

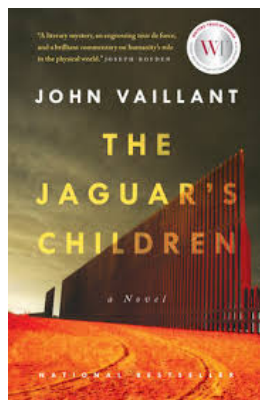
easy, but walking this road together has proved most beneficial. I had the pleasure of meeting WUSC staff at their headquarters in Ottawa in October and I am truly grateful for the integrity and expertise they bring in coordinating this sponsorship program.

We are actively seeking funding to continue this program at King's. The university sets aside scholarship funds for refugee students, and the Micah Centre raises money for daily living essentials, acting as the sponsoring agent. This is the area of greatest need. We encourage you to take a look at our new brochure, included, which is (hopefully) filled with answers to your questions! We would love to hear from you if you'd like to learn more!

## What We're Pondering - Ellen

Ellen Algera

Micah Centre Administrative Assistant



*The Jaguar's Children (book)*, John Vaillant, 2015

*The Jaguar's Children*, required reading for the Quest Mexico course, is a fast-paced read with a singular setting - the inside of a water tanker truck. I was immediately hooked by the frantic (unanswered) text messages sent into space from inside a mildewy tanker where a group of migrants were trapped - abandoned in the desert near Nogales, Arizona. Written by an investigative journalist, the fictitious novel intimately reveals the life story of the narrator, journeying back in time through his family line, marking the spread of North American agribusiness into rural Oaxaca which ultimately forces him into this precarious situation. The desperation of his kinfolk is palpable, the dangers he faced life-threatening - all in the attempt to preserve the family farm and heritage crop. While the events are fictitious, they clearly resemble our unfortunate daily news feed. I look forward to picking up *The Golden Spruce* (also by Vaillant) next!



*Peace by Chocolate (film)*, directed by Jonathan Keijser, 2021

*Peace by Chocolate* won 15 awards at international film festivals when it debuted in 2021, and I'm not surprised. I loved this film. I felt like I had stepped inside the Hadhad family's new home in Antigonish, meeting their local Canadian sponsors and experiencing a sliver of their struggle in leaving conflict-torn Syria for a new life in Canada. Through beautiful storytelling, the film doesn't shy away from struggles of losing everything, pausing dreams, leaving loved ones, and dealing with necessary (yet missing) paperwork. We witness unfortunate bickering with locals who are challenged by the newcomers' presence and rare skill set while at the same time see others illustrating the warmth, generosity, and lengthy support we hope is more typically Canadian. Based on the true story of the founders of the successful Canadian chocolate company of the same name, this is a heartwarming Christmas watch – just remember to turn on your subtitles so you don't miss a thing!

# Giving

Interested in supporting the work of the Micah Centre? We are happy to share more about our initiatives and programming. Please contact Jonathan or Ellen - we would love to meet with you or answer your questions (emails can be sent to Jonathan.Nicolai-deKoning@kingsu.ca or Ellen.Algera@kingsu.ca). Donations can be designated to specific funds, and can be received in either Canadian or United States dollars (for tax-receipting purposes).

Thank you for considering a partnership with us as we help students learn to build a more just and sustainable world.

Micah Centre Funding by Initiative:

- Pakitinâsowin Fund
- Student Refugee Program
- Honduras Water Project
- Micah Centre Fund



give CAD here



give USD here

If you are interested in supporting us financially in Canada, you can visit [kingsu.ca/give](https://kingsu.ca/give), and designate your gift to the Micah Centre.

If you would like to give your donation in USD and receive a United States charitable gift receipt, please donate through our US partner the Friends of ICS (<https://fics.icscanada.edu/>) and designate The King's University, Micah Centre, and the fund you are supporting in your donation note. If you need help or have any questions, please do not hesitate to send an email to [development@kingsu.ca](mailto:development@kingsu.ca).

Alternatively, US physical checks can be mailed here:

Friends of ICS  
3091 Old Kent Rd. SE  
Kentwood, MI 49512 USA

email: [info@friendsofics.org](mailto:info@friendsofics.org)

King's Charitable Registration #108085911 RR0001



## Micah Centre

at The King's University

The Micah Centre is located on land governed by Treaty 6. We acknowledge and celebrate all the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands.

The Micah Centre relies on the support of our partners to continue our work: building a global vision of justice and renewal with King's students and community.

Thank you for your continued gifts of prayer, time, and encouragement to us and our students.



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9125 50 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T6B 2H3  
P 780.465.3500 | [KINGSU.CA](https://KINGSU.CA)