

Tessa Blaikie Whitecloud**Layperson****Nominated by Winnipeg Presbytery****(Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario)****Biographical statement**

Tessa Blaikie Whitecloud is currently the Executive Director at 1JustCity, an umbrella organization created to bring financial stability and greater visibility to the outreach ministries of the United Church of Canada in Winnipeg.

Under Tessa's leadership for the last 3 years, 1JustCity has been incredibly successful in diversifying funding for the ministries outside of the Church, becoming an incorporated not-for-profit, and meeting its mandate to actively love the underloved. With charitable status, 1JustCity ensures a future for our outreach sites. Tessa has grown their supporter, volunteer, and donor list exponentially. The work of 1JustCity has given Tessa the opportunity to live her faith through her daily interactions with people. Tessa is passionate about the work of 1JustCity and the United Church of Canada. She sees a future for our Church.

Tessa started full-time at 1JustCity the same year she married her husband Hanwakan Blaikie Whitecloud. Together, they are learning his ancestral Dakota language and facilitating workshops on reconciliation and restitution. They also spend a lot of time cycling, practicing yoga, and spending time with their goddaughter, godson, and nephews. Soon her nephews will be of age to join Tessa's wrestling class. As a 2005 Canada Games athlete, Tessa has been coaching wrestling for little ones ever since.

Growing up UC and active in all facets of the Church, Tessa looks back with special affection on her time in Canadian Girls in Training, delivering Christmas hampers with her dad, Bill Blaikie, and many games of hide-and-go seek in the church buildings.

Tessa first took to the pulpit at the age of 17 after a school mission trip to Bolivia. Working in Winnipeg's north end for many years as a summer camp leader, Tessa began to recognize and mobilize the privilege she carries as a white-settler to work on issues of Canada's colonial attitude and the resulting injustices Indigenous people experience.

Tessa joined the UC Youth 4 Peace Delegation to Palestine (2009) to be in solidarity with Christians, Jews, and Muslims there working for peace. Returning home, Tessa performed over 50 presentations about Israel-Palestine while finishing her Honours degree in Sociology. She served again as overseas mission staff after a severe car

accident left her on disability for several months and unable to continue her job as a personal trainer for people with developmental disabilities.

During her MA in Political Economy, Tessa continued to look at the ways that Canadians must not only be “allies” but also owners of the injustices Indigenous people are facing. Tessa now lectures on this regularly on top of teaching in the Sociology department at University of Winnipeg since 2015.

Her master’s work involved an internship with KAIROS ecumenical justice initiatives, a Christian Peacemaker Teams delegation to Grassy Narrows First Nation, and conference presentations on solidarity... eventually she graduated, too.

Her work as a mental health promotion worker with Canadian Mental Health Association, including acting as regional organizer for “Clara’s Big Ride for Bell Let’s Talk” and more, helped her build her media skills and she uses those skills to make sure 1JustCity’s stories of Good News are heard by as many as possible.

Statement about the Church

We are a Church with a future! I believe that the future of our church can be extraordinary, it may be different, but if we face the challenges before us with steadfast faith and openness to the guidance of the Spirit and God’s awesome transformations.

Your faith is like a super power, and sometimes-hostile secularism, or statistics of decline, can be like kryptonite. But we are called to remember the Easter Story, and the teaching of the kernel of wheat, that in death, in grief, arises new life, new beginnings, faith renewed.

This is a time of change for our church and in that change I see a huge opportunity. The challenge is: will we seize it?

Every day, I am filled with optimism as I witness communities of love and faith in our United Church outreach work. Where we humbly encourage one another and build each other up, just as we are told to do in scripture;

As we live out social action as sacrament,

As we be the manger,

As we clothe the cold,

As we feed the hungry,

And as we advocate for a society in which housing will be affordable, God’s children are not left vulnerable to the elements and hunger is no more.

This is what being Christian means to me.

Today I ask of you the opportunity to share this story of Christianity—our story.

I see opportunity when youth of all faiths who have left Sunday school never to return

to church again start coming back to volunteer. Called to action when the church opens their doors to offer shelter, called back to cook so that bread may be broken among the least and the last.

I see opportunity to be medicine for those who are struggling with their self-worth. We can fill a spiritual hunger. We can share the Good News that we all deserve love and are created in love. In so doing we can challenge the culture that says we need to buy this, buy that, eat less, eat more, or otherwise be something or someone other than God intended. We can resist a culture that is not only destroying our souls but the sustainability of our planet.

I see opportunity when we recognize the Jesus in one another and treat each other accordingly; treat each other as Jesus would have. This means ending poverty, ending boiling water advisories in racialized communities, calling out systems of oppression. It means having faith that the incremental changes we make towards the building of God's Kingdom matter. Maybe we don't win today, but we have faith that the win is not what matters.

I see opportunity in sharing the stories of our amazing accomplishments—like youth who feel safe to come out at Sunday School, like the thousands of families across Canada that rely on us this week to have enough to eat, in being a Church at the forefront of social change. A church that makes the hard calls and right choices to repent and apologize. A church committed to moving beyond reconciliation towards restitution. We set a precedent and government followed.

As a community of faith we have been self-aware and so we have been silent at times to make space for others to be heard. Today, Canada needs our voice. It needs to hear that there is an old way made new, that all are welcome to come in and change us, not just join us. Canadians need to hear that everyone, from everywhere, can fill their spiritual deficit by being a part of our community, through leading our community, for God is where we gather together, and the spirit moves among us when we are among each other.

We need to show those who refer to themselves as “Spiritual but not Religious” that we understand their discomfort with religion while at the same time helping them to understand the great possibilities of being spiritual in community.

The intention of our church to be inclusive and progressive is exactly what our world craves.

Let us share that the spirit moves us to be Inclusive, Caring, Prophetic, Faithful, Woke!
This is what our Christianity looks like—I see our opportunity!