



THE SIMEON INITIATIVE'S YEAR OF ENCOUNTER

A joint project of Cardus and
Clal - The National Jewish Center
for Learning and Leadership

Session 3 **Vulnerability**

Facilitators' Guide



SESSION 3: VULNERABILITY FACILITORS' GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on vulnerability as a lived reality, rather than an abstract idea. Many Jews today experience vulnerability physically and publicly: through security at communal buildings, through decisions about when to identify oneself as Jewish, and through the ongoing awareness that Jewish spaces and bodies have become targets. This session invites Christian participants to encounter that reality not through statistics, but through experiencing what it is like to move through the world while visibly Jewish.

The shared activity helps Christian participants understand how words, attitudes, and public discourse translate into real consequences for Jewish safety and Jewish life. By encountering the security infrastructure around Jewish spaces, hearing from those responsible for protecting them, and listening to personal experiences, participants are invited to grapple with the cost—emotional, financial, and communal—of living under threat. At the same time, Jewish participants are asked to share, to the extent they are comfortable, what it means to live with this vulnerability. This session is not meant to provoke fear, but to cultivate responsibility: Understanding how vulnerability operates in Jewish community right now, what might shared responsibility look like in responding to antisemitism?

PROGRAM GOALS

1. Participants will more concretely understand Jewish vulnerability by encountering the physical, emotional, and communal impacts of antisemitism on Jewish life and public presence.
2. Participants will recognize the connection between rhetoric, social climate, and physical safety, particularly how online discourse can translate into real-world harm.
3. Participants will reflect on their own relationship to vulnerability, including when they feel protected, when they feel exposed, and how those experiences differ across communities.
4. Participants will practice hosting across differences with intention and care, gaining concrete experience in welcoming the other faith community into their own sacred space.
5. Participants will explore what shared responsibility looks like in responding to vulnerability, identifying ways Christian and Jewish participants can act with greater solidarity in confronting antisemitism



AGENDA

Time	Activity	Description
15 minutes	Opening: Shared Commitments	Setting context and shared commitments for our time together.
20-25 minutes	Spiritual Inspiration	Learn teachings from our two faith traditions about today's program topic, noticing how they are similar and how they are different.
45-60 minutes	Shared Activity: Experiencing Jewish Security	Participants explore the security needs and lived vulnerability of Jewish communities.
20 minutes	Closing Reflection: Listening Pairs	Reflect together on our experience today. Learn how today's experience has impacted members of the other faith and consider how it has impacted us. Set goals for how to take this learning into the future.

FACILITATORS GUIDE

This session is intended to take place in a mutually comfortable space within the church. This session's shared activity will center around the Christian congregation serving as host and the Jewish congregation as guest. The goal is to practice hospitality with a focus on the guest's needs, and to learn more about ways in which Jews can feel comfortable and uncomfortable in Christian spaces and society at large. Much of the learning will occur before the gathering itself, as the church members determine how to best welcome the Jewish guests and to think in advance about what elements of the space might feel comfortable, unfamiliar, or challenging for Jewish participants. See "Shared Activity" facilitator notes below for more information.

OPENING: SHARED COMMITMENTS (15 MINUTES)

1. Gather in a suitable room for the group discussion. Set the chairs in a circle if possible, so that participants can see each other.
2. Welcome everyone to the program. (5 min)
 - Facilitator(s) introduce yourselves to the group with your name, which congregation you are from, and briefly why you wanted to be here today.
 - Introduce the Simeon Initiative and the Year of Encounter. You can read the below text aloud or summarize it. (It is also in the participant handout.)

In the last decade, and especially since the horrific attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, Canada has seen a significant rise in antisemitism. In 2024, Father Deacon Andrew Bennett of Cardus launched the [Canadian Christian Declaration on Antisemitism](#), a statement by Christian leaders across denominations committing Christians to stand publicly with the Jewish community against rising anti-Jewish hatred. Within two months, more than 700 clergy and faith leaders had added their names and The Simeon Initiative was born.

In June 2025, more than one hundred Jewish and Christian leaders from across Canada gathered in Toronto for the Simeon Initiative Jewish-Christian Leaders Summit. Rabbis, pastors, and lay leaders had thoughtful and candid conversations about antisemitism and the responsibilities their communities share, as well as both common ground and theological difference. Out of that gathering came a commitment to bring the same spirit of encounter into local communities.

What is The Year of Encounter?

The Year of Encounter invites Christian and Jewish congregations to form partnerships grounded in friendship, learning, and trust. Participating congregations commit to a year of shared experiences designed to deepen understanding and build enduring relationships across differences.

This work is both personal and collective. On the local level, it begins with conversations, meals, and study. On the national level, it reflects a growing recognition among Christian leaders that antisemitism should not be a Jewish problem, but one that Christians have a particular responsibility to confront. By entering into a genuine relationship with Jewish neighbours, Christian congregations can begin to repair what has been broken in our society and model a faith that stands against hatred, with humility and resolve.

3. Depending on the size of the group, go around for introductions. (5-10 minutes)
 - Less than 10 people: Go around one by one and have people introduce themselves, say which congregation they are from, and share (briefly!) why they wanted to be here today.
 - 10 or more people: Put people into pairs or trios to introduce themselves with name, which congregation they are from, and why they wanted to be here today.
4. Shared Commitments (5 min)
 - Give everyone a copy of the Session Handout, which includes Shared Commitments.
 - Facilitator introduces the idea that we are here because of shared commitments. "We want to encourage ourselves and each other to have meaningful, real encounters in this group today. These are not always easy things to do, but we believe they will lay the groundwork for authentic and impactful cross-communal learning. We are going to go around and each person please read one of the commitments in the Year of Encounter Shared Commitments handout we've given you."
 - Go around and have a different member of the group read each item on the sheet.
 - Ask: "Is there anything anyone would like to add to this list?"
 - Then: "Do we all feel that we can commit to these principles? Please raise your hands to show your agreement."

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION (20-25 MINUTES)

1. Facilitators introduce the Spiritual Reflection section of the program. You can read the below or use your own words.

"We will now draw upon some sacred texts from each of our faiths about the topic of Vulnerability. The goal is to see both commonalities and differences, to learn about each other, and to inspire ourselves in the work of Jewish-Christian encounter.

We hope you will share from your heart and your own personal experience, and know that you don't need to feel like you are representing your whole faith."
2. Facilitators share a little bit about how your faith reads texts – Christian and Jewish traditions read and experience sacred texts quite differently, and it is helpful to the participants to understand a little about this.
 - Judaism: Here are some examples of things the Jewish facilitator might want to share about how Judaism traditionally approaches sacred text:
 - The fullest understanding comes from reading in the original Hebrew or Aramaic.
 - We learn in pairs because better understanding is seen to come from conversation and argumentation.
 - Each word can be considered intentional and sacred and therefore used in interpreting the verse.
 - Reading with commentaries from other generations adds to our understanding.
 - Each person has the potential to come up with a new and important understanding or interpretation, and interpretation and elaboration is praiseworthy.

- We can learn from the text what God is trying to teach us about how to live our lives.
- The Jewish legal tradition springs from the Hebrew Bible, but is further developed over the centuries through legal compendiums such as the Mishna (circa 200 C.E.), the Talmud (circa 600 C.E.), and other medieval and modern collections of law.
- Christianity: Here are some examples of things the Christian facilitator might want to share about how Christianity traditionally approaches sacred text:
 - Catholics and Orthodox principally engage Biblical texts in a liturgical context where they are organized into a lectionary based around the church year. Additionally, some will read the Holy Scriptures contemplatively as part of their personal prayer through *lectio divina*. Holy Tradition, how the Church has interpreted these texts, is a parallel source of authority.
 - This is less common among the majority of Protestants for whom reading scripture is frequently individual or small-group based, emphasizing personal discernment and spiritual guidance and with the belief that the Holy Spirit guides interpretation. They place little to no emphasis on tradition as authoritative.
 - Scripture is usually engaged in the language of the reader, with the understanding that translation can convey the meaning without knowledge of Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek.
 - The focus is more often on what the text means about how to live one's life, rather than debate about historical, linguistic, or communal contexts.
 - Christians read Scripture, including the Hebrew Bible ("Tanach"), through the lens of Jesus, understanding earlier texts as part of a larger story that culminates in Christ. The text is read as a unified story in which God's relationship with humanity unfolds over time.

3. Jewish Facilitator teach the Jewish text. Christian Facilitator teach the Christian text.
Open for discussion.

- Suggested teaching points and discussion questions are below and on the handout.
- Feel free to modify to match your own teaching or community.

JEWISH TEACHING: CHOOSING TO REVEAL OURSELVES

This text is from the Book of Esther, which Jews read aloud on the holiday of Purim, celebrating the Jewish community of Shushan, Persia surviving an attempted annihilation by Haman in the fourth century B.C.E. When Haman convinces King Ahashverosh to decree the murder of all of Shushan's Jews, Mordechai sends word to Queen Esther that she must plead with the King (her husband) to save the Jews. Esther sends a reply back explaining that she can't do that because if anyone appears before King Ahashverosh without being summoned, they are put to death. What follows is the exchange that motivates Esther to try to save her people anyway.

Esther 4:10-16

When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis."

Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"

Questions about the Jewish teaching

1. Why do you think Esther at first refused to take on the responsibility for going to the king? What do you think changed her mind?
2. Have you ever had to conceal who you are? What were the factors you considered when making that decision?
3. Have you ever had to show who you are, even when it was dangerous? How did you decide to do that?

CHRISTIAN TEACHING: CHOOSING RISK

Facilitator notes: In the Christian tradition, vulnerability is not understood primarily as weakness, but as a chosen posture of self-giving. The story of Jesus' crucifixion is central to this understanding. Christians believe that Jesus does not arrive at this moment by accident, nor is he overpowered against his will; rather, he accepts the suffering that he is to endure for the sake of humanity. For Christians, this is a claim about who God is and how God acts in the world: not through domination, but through self-emptying love..

The following text invites us to consider vulnerability not only as something imposed on us, but as something we may at times choose in service of others. As you listen, notice how this account understands the cost of remaining present when self-protection would be easier.

Mark 15:22-34

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Questions about the Christian teaching

1. Why do you think in this passage Jesus doesn't try to save himself?
2. Have you ever stayed in a place of risk or vulnerability, even though it would be easier to leave? Why did you make that choice?

Questions about both teachings

1. How might we become more vulnerable in order to build trust across our religious differences?
2. For Christian participants: How might your church act on what you've learned about Jewish vulnerability right now?

SHARED GROUP ACTIVITY:

EXPERIENCING JEWISH VULNERABILITY (45-60 MINUTES)

For this session, facilitators are invited to design an experience to reveal the often-invisible vulnerabilities of Jewish life right now, including heightened security and the constant calculation of when to be publicly identifiable as Jewish. It is not meant to scare people, but rather to inform and inspire response.

This could be a good program especially for younger adults, who encounter more online discourse around Jews, Israel, and antisemitism. Facilitators should frame the experience by highlighting the causal relationship between public rhetoric and physical safety. Words spoken online, in protest spaces, or in political discourse do not remain abstract; they shape social permission structures that directly affect Jewish bodies and buildings. You might encourage participants to listen ahead of time to Canadaland's "What Is Happening Here?"—a podcast exploring antisemitism in Canada right now.

Facilitators should identify an event, location, or structured encounter that requires Christian participants to move through Jewish space in the same way Jews regularly do, with heightened security. This might be visiting

- A synagogue service.
- A Jewish day school.
- A Jewish Community Centre.
- The Israeli Embassy.
- Another high-profile Jewish communal or event.
- A Jewish site that has been recently been vandalized.

Participants should be asked to notice the experience of entering through security checkpoints, interacting with guards, presenting identification, or navigating restricted access, particularly in contrast to how they normally enter their own sacred spaces. What are they seeing? What are they feeling—discomfort, surprise, sadness, anger, protectiveness? These reactions are central to the learning, not a distraction from it.

You might consider an additional experience in which Christian participants wear Jewish identifiers or carry signs about Israel, as a way of experiencing this vulnerability.

Whenever possible, pair the site visit with personal testimony after the initial experience of security. This could take the form of a brief panel or conversation with members of the Jewish community who are directly involved in or affected by security concerns: volunteer security team members, professional guards, trainers, budget officers responsible for security spending, clergy, students, or congregants who can speak to how antisemitism has shaped their daily decisions over the past two years.

Close the activity by grounding the experience in responsibility, rather than helplessness. This session is meant to deepen understanding of Jewish vulnerability so that Christian participants can more clearly see their own role in shaping a society where Jewish life does not require constant defense, and where solidarity is expressed not only in words, but in sustained attention and action.

CLOSING REFLECTION: LISTENING PAIRS (20 MINUTES)

Facilitator note: For our closing activity in each program, we'll be going into constructivist listening pairs. This is a practice of listening in which each partner is given time to reflect aloud on the speaking prompts, uninterrupted. When given the chance to speak without interruption, we sometimes are able to go further with our thinking. It is important to stress to the group that when we are the listener, our sole job is to listen supportively. Inspired by the work of [Victor Cary](#).

1. Facilitators introduce the Listening Pairs (2 min)

- The purpose of this closing activity is to reflect on our own experience and to hear another participant's reflections – and to let that learning sink in. We will be pairing up – one Jewish and one Christian listening partner – and we'll be practicing generous listening.
- The way this will work is as follows:
 - Each partner will reflect on the prompts for 4 minutes, uninterrupted. Partner B will listen supportively, but not speak. Then Partner B will have a chance to reflect back to Partner A what you heard for 1 minute. The purpose of Partner B's response is not to correct but to echo back, for example: "I heard you say" "I'm wondering what that was like for you to..." Then we will switch and do it again with Partner B reflecting. We will keep the time and let you know when it's time to switch.
 - I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information, but for your learning.
- Guidelines to keep in mind
 - Share only what you are comfortable sharing. It's okay to prefer not to share much, and it's okay to be excited to share a lot.
 - Each person is given equal time to talk and be listened to.
 - The listener does not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story.
 - We maintain confidentiality so we can be authentic.
 - We don't use our speaking time to criticize others, but rather to reflect on our own experience.
- In a moment, please pair up with someone from the other faith background and take turns answering one or more of the following prompts:
 - What did you learn about yourself or your own faith or tradition today?
 - What did you learn about the other faith?
 - What is something new you are taking away with you from today's experience?
 - Is there a commitment you want to make, coming out of today?

2. 10 minutes for paired sharing. Facilitators tell people at the switch times:
 - 4 minutes - Partner A speaks
 - 1 minute - Partner B reflects on what they heard
 - 4 minutes - Partner B speaks
 - 1 minute - Partner A reflects on what they heard

3. 10 minutes for full group conversation about their paired reflection time.
 - Let's come back together to hear about your reflections. Please share only from your own reflection or your response to what you heard, but not your partner's words or experience in order to maintain their confidentiality.



SESSION 3: VULNERABILITY HANDOUT

What is the Simeon Initiative's Year of Encounter?

In the last decade, and especially since the horrific attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, Canada has seen a significant rise in antisemitism. In 2024, Father Deacon Andrew Bennett of Cardus launched the *Canadian Christian Declaration on Antisemitism*, a statement by Christian leaders across denominations committing Christians to stand publicly with the Jewish community against rising anti-Jewish hatred. Within two months, more than 700 clergy and faith leaders had added their names and The Simeon Initiative was born.

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This work is both personal and collective. On the local level, it begins with conversations, meals, and study. On the national level, it reflects a growing recognition among Christian leaders that antisemitism should not be a Jewish problem, but one that Christians have a particular responsibility to confront. By entering into a genuine relationship with Jewish neighbours, Christian congregations can begin to repair what has been broken in our society and model a faith that stands against hatred, with humility and resolve.

SHARED COMMITMENTS

We want to encourage ourselves and each other to have meaningful, real encounters in this group today. These are not always easy things to do, but we believe they will lay the groundwork for authentic and impactful cross-communal learning. We hope these shared commitments will give us encouragement in our encounter today.

TODAY, I GIVE MYSELF AND MY FELLOW PARTICIPANTS HERE PERMISSION TO:

1. **Not know:** We don't need to know everything about our own faith, our own opinions, or other topics that may come up. We can be honest about not knowing the answer.
2. **Feel upset:** We may be hurt or upset by something someone else says; that's okay. It's part of really hearing each other.
3. **Share how something impacts me:** We are not here to agree on everything. Sharing how we are impacted by what others say and do—even when it upsets us—is a gift we give to each other as we seek greater understanding.
4. **Feel paralyzed:** We don't always have to know exactly what to do next. Sometimes we may feel simply unable to act.
5. **Appreciate someone else's faith tradition:** We can grow through wisdom learned from or about someone else's tradition, without feeling like we're abandoning our own.
6. **Change my mind, potentially multiple times:** We don't need to be absolutely certain about everything, and we can even change our minds during a conversation here.

TODAY, I COMMIT TO:

1. Asking questions when I don't understand something, rather than guessing.
2. Allowing my heart to soften when I hear something I resonate with.
3. Being courageous and open to changing my heart and mind.
4. Being generous of spirit and assuming my fellow participants have the best intentions.
5. Allowing others to have their own beliefs without trying to change them.
6. Practicing holding ideas that are not my own, with curiosity.
7. Listening in order to understand, rather than to respond or correct.

VULNERABILITY IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

JEWISH TEACHING: CHOOSING TO REVEAL OURSELVES

This text is from the Book of Esther, which Jews read aloud on the holiday of Purim, celebrating the Jewish community of Shushan, Persia surviving an attempted annihilation by Haman in the fourth century B.C.E. When Haman convinces King Ahashverosh to decree the murder of all of Shushan's Jews, Mordechai sends word to Queen Esther that she must plead with the King (her husband) to save the Jews. Esther sends a reply back explaining that she can't do that because if anyone appears before King Ahashverosh without being summoned, they are put to death. What follows is the exchange that motivates Esther to try to save her people anyway.

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Questions about the Jewish teaching

1. Why do you think Esther at first refused to take on the responsibility for going to the king? What do you think changed her mind??
2. Have you ever had to conceal who you are? What were the factors you considered when making that decision? those the person doesn't know very well or might consider to be strangers?
3. Have you ever had to show who you are, even when it was dangerous? How did you decide to do that?

Christian Teaching: Choosing Risk

In the Christian tradition, vulnerability is not understood primarily as weakness, but as a chosen posture of self-giving. Christians believe that Jesus' crucifixion is not by accident, nor is he overpowered; rather, he remains present in suffering that he could escape. For Christians, this is a claim about who God is and how God acts in the world: not through domination, but through love that is willing to be exposed or rejected.

The following text invites us to consider vulnerability not only as something imposed on us, but as something we may at times choose in service of others. As you listen, notice how this account understands the cost of remaining present when self-protection would be easier.

Mark 15:22-34

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Questions about the Christian teaching

1. Why do you think in this passage Jesus doesn't try to save himself? When are times when you have felt most welcomed—not just entertained, but truly received?
2. Have you ever stayed in a place of risk or vulnerability, even though it would be easier to leave? Why did you make that choice?

Questions about both teachings

1. How might we become more vulnerable in order to build trust across our religious differences?
2. For Christian participants: How might your church act on what you've learned about Jewish vulnerability right now?

LISTENING PAIRS

The purpose of this closing activity is to reflect on our own experience and to hear another participant's reflections – and to let that learning sink in. We will be pairing up – one Jewish and one Christian listening partner – and we'll be practicing generous listening.

Instructions

1. Each partner will reflect on the prompts for 4 minutes, uninterrupted.
 - Partner B will listen supportively, but not speak, for 4 minutes.
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 - Then we will switch and do it again with Partner B reflecting for 4 minutes and Partner A reflecting back for 1 minute.
 - We will keep the time and let you know when it's time to switch.
2. I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information, but for your learning.

Guidelines to keep in mind

1. Share only what you are comfortable sharing. It's okay to prefer not to share much, and it's okay to be excited to share a lot.
2. Each person is given equal time to talk and be listened to.
3. The listener does not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story.
4. We maintain confidentiality so we can be authentic.
5. We don't use our speaking time to criticize others, but rather to reflect on our own experience.

Reflections Prompts

In a moment, please pair up with someone from the other faith background and take turns answering one or more of the following prompts:

1. What did you learn about yourself or your own faith or tradition today?
2. What did you learn about the other faith?
3. What is something new you are taking away with you from today's experience?
4. Is there a commitment you want to make, coming out of today?

FOR FURTHER READING

ON JUDAISM

1. *The Jewish Way* by Rabbi Irving Greenberg
2. *Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant
3. *The Sabbath* by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
4. *Essential Judaism* by George Robinson
5. *A Living Covenant* by Rabbi David Hartman
6. *A Letter in the Scroll: Understanding Our Jewish Identity and Exploring the Legacy of the World's Oldest Religion* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
7. [Pirkei Avot: The Ethics of the Fathers](#)
8. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

ON CHRISTIANITY

1. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* by N. T. Wright
2. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
3. *The Story of Christianity (Vols. I and II)* by Justo Gonzalez
4. *The Early Church* by Henry Chadwick
5. *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* by Bishop Robert Barron
6. *The Orthodox Way* by Bishop Kallistos Ware
7. *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution* by Alister E. McGrath
8. The Gospels (in this order): Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (Revised Standard Version)
9. Epistle to the Hebrews (Revised Standard Version)
10. Epistle of James (Revised Standard Version)

ON ANTISEMITISM

1. *A Convenient Hatred: A History of Antisemitism* by Phyllis Goldstein
2. *Antisemitism Here and Now* by Debra Lipstadt
3. *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present* by Dara Horn
4. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* by David Nirenberg
5. *Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism* by Dennis Prager
6. "What Is Happening Here" podcast series by Canadaland on antisemitism in Canada <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/what-is-happening-here-canadaland-investigates/id1438924421>



THE SIMEON INITIATIVE'S
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[HTTPS://WWW.CHRISTIANDECLARATION.CA/](https://www.christiandeclaration.ca/)

CARDUS

IMAGINATION TOWARD A THRIVING SOCIETY

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