# Mission and Service Stories: January‒April 2025

Mission and Service—helping transform lives, inspire meaning and purpose, and
build a better world.



The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada

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## Welcome to *Mission and Service Stories*!

*Mission and Service Stories* are for sharing with our faithful supporters to show them the amazing work their gifts make possible.

These stories can be used in services, in newsletters, and in face-to-face conversations. The more they’re shared, the more people will understand just how life-changing Mission and Service is!

For videos of some of the work you make possible, visit the [Mission and Service playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQDu-SgFb3RgRuLXGcT2-DvK8VeECsVdv) on our YouTube channel.

We hope this resource is helpful and inspiring.

As always, we would **love to hear your feedback**. Drop us a line at ms@united-church.ca and let us know what you like, what we can improve on, and what we can focus on developing.

Blessings,

The Philanthropy Team

## January 5: Reflecting on the Past, Building the Future

As we welcome 2025, we are given an opportunity to reflect on the past year—the challenges faced, the resilience shown, and the moments of joy and connection that carry us forward. The new year is a time to embrace hope, dream of new possibilities, and recommit ourselves to building a world rooted in Christ’s love.

In a time when uncertainty continues to shape our world, acts of kindness and solidarity make all the difference. Together through Mission and Service, we can create change that ripples through families, communities, and beyond. Let this new year be a reminder that hope grows when we work together.

This year, let us continue to strive to care for one another and the world around us. As we begin this next chapter, may we walk with Mission and Service partners, finding strength in our shared commitment to a better tomorrow. With gratitude for the journey so far, and anticipation for all that lies ahead, let us move into 2025 with courage, generosity, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Thank you for the impact you made in 2024. Your ongoing generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) is needed to spark hope, bring peace, and transform lives.

## January 12: Faith in Action: Empowering Global Peace

Project Ploughshares is a Canadian peace research institute with a focus on disarmament efforts and international security. It is also one of our dedicated Mission and Service partners. Project Ploughshares’ important efforts come with many barriers, including discouragement, pushback, and regular exposure to mentally draining work.

Duncan Etches started his journey with Project Ploughshares as a supporter. When he saw an opportunity to be The United Church of Canada representative on the management committee, he felt it was time to step into the key role. He comments on how wise and inspirational the whole team is, sharing that “they keep hope in impossible situations.”

Project Ploughshares includes people from diverse backgrounds who are all deeply committed to making the world a better place. Rooted in the ethics of Christianity—peace, reconciliation, and justice—their work connects with people inside and outside faith communities. Members are respected and invited to be part of important conversations.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) provides encouragement and hope to leaders of Project Ploughshares, a vital connection point for those passionate about global peace and security. Thank you.

## January 19: Empowering Bold Leadership

“I want the United Church of Canada to continue the policies, as well as the vision and the actions that make our slogan ‘Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice, and Deep Spirituality’ truly mean something.”

These are words from Matthew Tyhurst, one of The United Church of Canada’s Youth Forum Leadership Animators. [More of Matthew’s thoughts on the Centennial can be found on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHCIEkJMt48).

In July 2024, Matthew was one of eight passionate youth from across Canada who gathered in Calgary. Together, they worked to lay the foundation for 100 young people under the age of 30 to attend The United Church of Canada's General Council 45 in 2025, coinciding with the church's Centennial celebrations.

The group of talented and diverse youth are committed to developing leadership among their peers. After their time in Calgary, they returned to their local communities and regions to work on learning goals and projects for four weeks, but remain engaged throughout the year.

The group focused on building leadership and guiding their peers as they explore their roles in the church. Their placements in local and regional communities are designed to help them grow and prepare for the future.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) support youth as they inspire communities and engage in leadership. Thank you.

## January 26: A Network of Hope

Becoming a parent or guardian is a life-changing, complex experience that doesn’t have a one-size-fits-all answer. As kids, we looked to adults for guidance as we navigated the world with fresh eyes. Now, as adults, we recognize that we’re still figuring things out as we go, and there’s always an opportunity to grow our skills and minds.

In London, Ontario, Mission and Service partners with the London Community Chaplaincy as they respond to parents and guardians who want to build a network of support, share the parenting journey, and develop new skills as they navigate raising children in a low-income setting. Together, these parents are working hard to build a positive future for their children and families.

Each week, London Community Chaplaincy provides a welcoming and safe social setting for adults to connect and grow as parents. Not only do they learn how to guide a child through critical stages of development, but also how to navigate being a parent or guardian while also managing financial stress, food insecurity, housing complications, and more. Gathering with other adults in a similar situation allows participants to share their struggles and triumphs, further building a sense of community.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) support partnerships like the London Community Chaplaincy as they help empower parents along the parenting journey. Thank you.

## February 2: A Classroom of Care

Signing up for a course is both exciting and nerve-wracking. We wonder what skills we’ll learn and how quickly we’ll see improvement, and worry about how naturally “talented” we may be.

In Sambir, Ukraine, English teacher Ilona is encouraging her learners to challenge that way of thinking and enjoy the aspect of social time with one another while learning English. This class, supported by Mission and Service partner ACT Alliance, is part of a psychosocial support program for Ukrainians displaced by war. Ilona and her family were also displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, and she is now actively contributing to the well-being of others in similar situations.

In-person learning expands opportunities and access while also providing crucial social engagement and human interaction. As Ilona says “When we come together and get to know each other, we have a community. We can open up and share our thoughts, feelings, and experiences.” In a low-pressure learning environment, students can feel comfortable as they learn skills and learn about each other.

Thank you for the support you show to through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) as our neighbours endure the ongoing impacts of war and conflict.

## February 9: Farming Against the Odds

In the rugged hills of India’s Badabasko village, Jaiprakash Paharia, a determined 60-year-old farmer, and his wife, Rami Paharin, have battled against nature's odds. Their land, stony and dependent on increasingly unpredictable rains, yielded meagre crops of maize, cowpea, pigeon pea, and sorghum each year. Their family had literally hit rock bottom.

Faced with declining harvests, they turned to goat rearing in search of a more sustainable livelihood. Left with no other choice, Jaiprakash invested all he had in what seemed to be a promising venture. However, these efforts were marred by heartbreaking losses. Year after year, diseases claimed up to 20 of their precious goats, threatening their hope for a steady future once again. It was as if they were back at the foot of the hill; they were desperate.

As they were counting their losses, through Mission and Service partner Canadian Foodgrains Bank, member Tearfund Canada brought life-changing support to their village through The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief (EFICOR).  The project team provided thorough training on livestock management practices and taught about essential deworming and vaccinations to best sustain livestock.

Jaiprakash was skeptical at first about giving these treatments to his goats. However, as he learned how they could safeguard his livestock's health, he took on these practices graciously and achieved transformative results. For the first time since they had started keeping livestock, their goats remained healthy throughout the season, with zero losses! This newfound stability secured their livelihood and revitalized their hope for the future.

Jaiprakash and his family are endlessly thankful to Tearfund Canada and EFICOR for their radical support. Their training not only improved the health and well-being of their livestock but also equipped them with the tools and understanding to sustain themselves through future adversity.

Thank you for supporting our [Mission and Service partners](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) and people around the world, as they walk toward a more sustainable future.

## February 16: When Faith Meets Understanding

In the Rift Valley of Kenya, over 200,000 people are HIV positive, and many will not survive. Grandmothers whose children have died of AIDS are often left alone to care for their grandchildren, and to add insult to injury, their church community condemns them, leaving them without support as they raise their grandchildren.

Some pastors in the Rift Valley, as in many other places, believe and teach that faithful Christians cannot contract the disease and that it is a judgment from God—a disease for sexual sinners.

“The pastors had little information about HIV and AIDS; to them, and others in the community, it was a strange disease…. [They believed] HIV was a result of sexual sin and was a judgement from God for the sexually immoral,” writes Esther Mombo of the World Council of Churches.

In partnership with the United Church of Canada, Mombo and Pauline Wanjuru of St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya, led a series of workshops in one Rift Valley community that has been hit especially hard by HIV/AIDS. They invited grandmothers and pastors to connect and learn from each other.

One grandmother who attended the workshops was 70 years old. She was raising three grandchildren on her own after losing both her daughter and her son. Instead of stepping up to help, her neighbours refused to visit her because they said her daughter and son had been sexually immoral. Her pastor wouldn’t even attend her children’s funerals because he didn’t want to be seen associating with her family. When she went to church, the pastor preached about the punishment for sexual immorality.

At the workshops, this woman bravely told her story to the pastors who attended. She also shared with them how it felt to be shamed for loving her children and caring for her grandchildren. Another grandmother explained that her grandchildren were born with the virus and couldn’t have been involved in any sexual immorality. Yet another spoke of God’s love for everyone. Pastors listened and learned, and moved forward by making a commitment to extend compassion and offer pastoral care to the grandmothers.

All of us know from our own life experience that when we know better, we do better. Your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts gave these grandmothers the opportunity to help their pastors learn to do better by connecting their love for their grandchildren to God’s love for all. Thank you.

## February 23: Hope in Action

When we hear of a global emergency, our minds often jump to “How can we help?” Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) enable partners to immediately get to work providing crucial basic needs: food, water, shelter, and medication. But after the initial response, and after headlines fade away, the emergency and urgency remain.

After the immediate shock fades, people living in the wake of a disaster can have difficulty imagining what life will look like down the road. In these times, hope is an essential, powerful force that gives us the motivation to move forward and inspires us to keep going.

Two years after the February 2023 earthquakes, people in Syria are still experiencing the devastating aftermath, exacerbated by civil war and other natural disasters. And Mission and Service partner the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) continues to be hard at work providing hope. From retrofitting buildings and providing medical equipment to education and trauma healing, MECC is dedicated to sustainable relief. In Aleppo, MECC rehabilitated four schools before the academic year began in September 2023, providing children with a safe place to learn.

Thank you for supporting the work of our [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partners. Your generosity is a beacon of hope during challenging times.

## March 2: Hope for Mothers, Strength for Families

In the Eastern Carpathian Mountains, far from the chaos of war, a retreat in Tukhlya, Ukraine offers rest and renewal to mothers who have given everything for their families. Supported by Mission and Service partner ACT Alliance, ACT member Hungarian Interchurch Aid has welcomed 135 mothers and their children in the “Happy Family” initiative, providing space for healing and resilience.

In early January 2025, 18 mothers and their little ones arrived. All had either been displaced by war or lived near the frontlines. Many are exhausted, burdened by grief and overwhelming responsibilities. “I always thought only about my children—their clothes, food, education,” shares Yulia, a mother of five who lost her husband a year ago. “Here, I was able to stop and think about myself.”

With psychological support, hiking, art therapy, and group sessions, the retreat helps women regain their inner strength. While the women focus on healing, their children participate in creative activities, allowing everyone time for self-care. Many women hesitated before they left home, worried about stepping away from their duties and earnings. “How could I leave everything?” Yulia recalled. “But now I see how much I needed this time to regain my strength and return home with love and energy.”

For many, this is their first experience receiving psychological support. “These exercises helped me understand myself better,” says Nataliya, who fled to Lviv after losing her home. “I learned techniques I can use every day to cope.”

This retreat is made possible with help from your gifts to [Mission and Servic](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service)e. While it cannot erase hardship, it offers strength for the journey ahead. Your support provides a space for healing, restoring hope, and empowering those in need. Thank you for making a difference.

## March 9: PIE—Public, Intentional, Explicit Inclusion

March 14 is PIE Day, and in church circles it has nothing to do with math. “PIE” is short for “public, intentional, and explicit”—the standards we hold ourselves to when we seek to live into being affirming, welcoming, and inclusive people and communities.

PIE Day was co-founded by Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble and Affirming Connections. Every year, Affirm United invites the church to celebrate the full inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in faith communities and beyond. The day also reminds and challenges us to continue widening our welcome to embody love and celebrate gender and sexual diversity in all its forms. It’s critical that we do.

Gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be used to justify serious human rights violations around the world. Same-sex sexual activity is a crime in 71 countries; in 11 of these the death penalty is at least a possibility. Canada is now home to 1 million people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. In 2019, police reported a 41 percent increase in hate crimes targeting people for their sexual orientation over the previous year, the highest total since 2009.

Your gifts through Mission and Service sustain life-transforming advocacy and education work, including supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees fleeing for their lives and providing community awareness education, human rights programs, and safe spaces.

This work is vitally important. For some, it means the difference between life and death.

Thank you for giving through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). God’s compassionate love knows no boundaries. Your generosity shows ours doesn’t either.

## March 16: Building Climate Resiliency

In areas where historically there has been little rain, now there are floods, and where there were floods, now there are droughts. That’s how Shadrick Chembe, the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager at Women for Change—an organization in Zambia that strives to improve conditions in rural communities by empowering women and girls—describes the changing climate in Zambia. Women bear the brunt.

“In Zambia, women are still responsible for collecting firewood and charcoal and making food. Now, because of climate change, they have to walk a longer distance to gather firewood. Charcoal is harder to get. That means it’s harder to make food. At the same time, women aren’t involved in the decision-making processes that impact this work,” explains Chembe.

Women for Change was established in 1992, and its long-standing partnership with the United Church stretches back to1995. From the beginning, mobilizing communities to share ideas and best practices has been key to the work. Since its inception, 1,500 community groups have been established, with 25‒40 people in each group and representatives from each forming associations. The groups discuss a variety of justice-related topics. Building climate resiliency by preparing for, recovering from, and adapting to drastically changing weather patterns is a priority.

Weather extremes due to climate change coupled with companies promoting seeds that only produce a single crop increasingly put people at risk.

“The majority of farmers are poor. They can’t buy seeds, but companies have created seeds that force farmers to have to purchase them each year,” says Chembe. “Groups discuss how they can save and share seeds, what they can plant with longer or shorter rains, and if there are traditional methods that can increase food production,” he says, adding, “We are grateful for the United Church’s support. The church has really been there for many years, helping us build awareness and resiliency. It’s been a real partnership.”

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate) support long-term, life-changing work through committed partners like Women for Change. Thank you.

## March 23: Springtime of the Spirit

First come the tiny snowdrops, bravely peeking out over the melting snow. Then, the crocuses with their delicate purple petals, followed by the buttery-yellow daffodils. By the time I’m bundling up for Easter service, tulips in every colour of Joseph’s splendid coat are blooming.

Spring reminds us of renewal, of hope, of life returning. And in this Easter season, I see that same renewal in the Mission and Service work that your generosity makes possible.

Because of you, Mission and Service partners are like the first flowers of spring—blooming where they are needed most. Your compassion takes root and becomes warmth and care for those in crisis, hope for those facing hardship, and new possibilities for communities near and far.

Like the crocuses and tulips, our shared ministry blossoms in many forms, responding to the needs of different communities in the ways that will help most. Your support makes this possible, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

This Easter, may you be like the first flowers of spring—vibrant, alive, and bringing joy to those around you. In this time of renewal, know that your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) will help even more seeds of hope take root and grow. Thank you.

## March 30: Breaking Barriers: Women in Theology and Leadership

In India, social and cultural factors limit access to theological education for women in comparison to men. The Rev. B. Silpa Rani is actively encouraging women to pursue theological education and engage in leadership roles.

When Silpa started her first degree in Theology, she spent two years as the only woman in a class of 16. Now, years later, as she works on her doctoral dissertation, she has seen a gradual increase in the enrolment of women in theological programs. While this is encouraging, Silpa recognizes that there is still a long journey forward. While she seeks to empower modern women, she is also working to shed light on the experiences of women and minorities of the past.

Silpa was the recipient of a theological education scholarship, which paved her way to join the faculty at Bishop's College, Kolkata. She has been exploring the unique identity of the Qumran community within the context of the Dead Sea Scrolls. She is actively researching to identify the women, children, and minority groups of the society, drawing parallels between the Qumran context and contemporary Indian context.

Your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts provide support to leaders like Silpa, who are actively working to empower women and change the world.

## April 6: The Next Century: Youth Leading the Way

“100 years from now, I definitely see the church being a diverse and open space for all because of the program boards that are being put in place.”

These are thoughts from Mariana Muhumuza, one of The United Church of Canada’s Youth Forum Leadership Animators, on her vision for the next 100 years of the United Church of Canada. More of Mariana's thoughts on the United Church’s Centennial can be found on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RupgsIszECU).

In July 2024, Mariana was among eight passionate youth from across Canada who gathered in Calgary. Together, they worked to lay the foundation for 100 young people under the age of 30 to attend The United Church of Canada's General Council 45 in 2025, coinciding with the church's Centennial commemorations.

This group of talented and diverse youth is committed to developing leadership among their peers. After their time in Calgary, they returned to their local communities and regions to work on learning goals and projects for four weeks, and to remain engaged throughout the year.

The group focused on building leadership and guiding their peers as they explore their roles in the church. Their placements in local and regional communities are designed to help them grow and prepare for the future.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate) support youth as they inspire communities and engage in leadership. Thank you.

## April 13: Supporting a Rights-Based Approach to Growing Food

The Association of Economic and Social Development Santa Marta (ADES), a Mission and Service partner, is located in an area of Central America that is very vulnerable to climate change. This hot, dry region regularly experiences drought. Mining projects have also negatively affected the environment and the people in the region. ADES and other community organizations decided to act to protect the community’s right to a healthy environment.

An example of how ADES has responded is a three-year agroecology project co-funded by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation and The United Church of Canada Foundation, along with Mission and Service. Agroecology benefits the land and water because it recycles nutrients back into the soil. It also reduces production costs, lessening the financial burden on rural farmers.

In this project, ADES works closely with the community to grow food in a rural region of El Salvador, promoting sustainable agriculture that protects biodiversity, maintains the integrity of the land, and upholds rural culture.

At the centre of the project is the Dora Alicia Sorto School Farm, where rural families, mainly led by women, learn about agroecology. The school provides training, technical expertise, and seeds indigenous to the region. It focuses on preserving the surrounding environment and on upholding gender and human rights as part of its approach to food security.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate) help support ADES’ agroecology project. Thank you for your generosity!

## April 20: Renewing Hope and Growing Love

Easter is a time of renewal and reflection—a reminder of the boundless grace and love that flow through the world. It is also a time to celebrate the ways that you put love into action through Mission and Service.

For 100 years, the faithful generosity of compassionate people like you has helped The United Church of Canada answer Jesus’ call to love and serve. Across Canada and around the world, this support has empowered, and continues to empower, life-changing work. In El Salvador, rural farmers are getting the resources to grow enough food for their families. In Zimbabwe, women are learning skills to build sustainable livelihoods. And these are just two of the countless stories of transformation made possible by Mission and Service partners.

As the church looks toward the next century, this legacy of compassion and justice continues. The impact of every gift, every prayer, and every act of service will echo far into the future, ensuring the church remains a source of love and hope for generations to come.

Thank you for the love you show through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate). With your help, we will move together with compassion into the next 100 years.

## April 27: Changing the Narrative: Young Voices for Climate Justice

In 2024, Mission and Service partner the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific collaborated with the Bangladesh Student Christian Movement on a workshop called “Youth Leading Change: Climate Justice through Cultural Movement.” Through discussions and activities, it aimed to raise awareness among young people about climate challenges and empower them to take local actions.

Over four days, 50 passionate students from various regions of Bangladesh came together to address the critical issue of climate change. They explored the severe impacts that climate change has on communities and livelihoods in Bangladesh, particularly the displacement caused by floods. Floods force families to migrate to Dhaka, now one of the world’s most densely populated cities.

The heart-wrenching stories of displaced families deeply resonated with the participants, igniting their determination to drive change. Equipped with knowledge and tools, these young leaders are now poised to advocate for climate justice and inspire their communities.

Your generous support of [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate) helps make empowering work like this possible. Thank you.