# Mission and Service Stories: 2024

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](mailto: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 7: Learning the Gospel at Camp

Lindsay Vautour, the United Church’s Engagement and Stewardship Associate, started attending a United Church camp at the tender age of five. There, she not only met lifelong friends and gained job skills as a counsellor, but it also helped chart her course to eventually work for The United Church of Canada.

“Coming from a financially tight background, I’m extremely grateful for the assistance available that let my brother and me attend camp every summer. I met so many different people from different cultures and regions, and got to learn their journeys in faith. I still keep in contact with some camp friends over 20 years later,” she says.

“One of my most prominent memories was with a fellow 13-year-old camper who told me that she loved camp because she could be herself without any expectations. She said, ‘I’m not the weird kid or the foster kid here, I’m just me,’” she recounts. “That’s something I resonate with because I wasn’t particularly popular in school, but popularity never mattered at camp, and it’s beautiful to know that that’s a widely shared perception.”

Children come together at United Church camps across Canada to learn the gospel in a safe and supportive environment. Through campfire stories, hiking, music, canoeing, and so much more, campers gain confidence while enjoying unique activities and exploring their curiosity. At camp kids learn soft skills like self-confidence, patience, and organization as well as hard skills in sports, crafting, and music.

Without the generosity of supporters, children who attend camp wouldn’t be able to continue having such affirming and defining experiences. Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) are deeply appreciated.

## January 14: Making a Home for Refugees

Imagine being forced to leave your home.

Set adrift, hoping to find a place to land, somewhere safe so you can rebuild your life.

“There’s this huge misconception that refugees choose to be refugees,” says ChrisAnn Alvarez, Refugee Support at The United Church of Canada. “It’s not a choice. It’s something they’re forced into.”

It’s a reality that is faced by millions of refugees, and it’s a reality that is becoming more and more prominent. More people are displaced today than ever before: 117.2 million, says the UN Refugee Agency.\*

That’s the equivalent of three Canadas.

There are many causes: human conflict, climate change, human rights violations, and more.

We can help.

Your gifts provide food, water, sanitation, and social support to people forced to flee their homes. [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) creates educational and confidence-building programs in refugee camps.

Mission and Service also helps refugees find new homes. “Congregations form sponsorship groups together to sponsor the refugee,” Alvarez explains. “What Mission and Service allows is for them to sponsor through their own congregation.”

She tells one story of a sponsor who renovated their basement after it flooded and immediately planned to sponsor a refugee in the new space.

“Who thinks like that?!” Alvarez exclaims with wonder and awe. “It’s just so beautiful!”

The refugee stayed with his sponsors for years, and they became an adopted family to one another. “The sponsor told me, ‘We have no kids, so this was an unexpected blessing,’” Alvarez recalls, tearing up. “That’s one example of someone opening their home in their home, in their heart, and allowing themselves to be transformed.”

When we help protect one refugee from persecution, death, or years in a refugee camp, we save the world for that one person—and just maybe for ourselves, too.

\*[Global Appeal 2023 | Global Focus (unhcr.org)](https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalappeal#:~:text=2023%20Global%20planning%20figures&text=117.2%20million%20people%20will%20be,2023%2C%20according%20to%20UNHCR's%20estimations)

## January 21: Providing Tuition Assistance

Hamdan wants to become a doctor someday. As the oldest son, this young teenager dreams big amidst the daily struggles that he and his family face.

Hamdan’s family came to Lebanon several years ago to escape the war in Syria. They can barely afford their monthly rent, food, household expenses, clothing, and medical needs. While his father works in a produce shop, his mother stays at home to care for the family’s four children and two other family members. This family of eight lives on the father’s pay and a small income supplement they receive from the UN.

Like Hamdan, many children in Lebanon are at risk of losing their education because an economic crisis—intensified by the COVID pandemic and the devastating 2020 explosion in Beirut—has plunged their families into poverty. When parents can’t pay school tuition, children face an unstable future. The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) assists Lebanese students and Syrian refugees ages 8‒13 with tuition and fees to secure their education and prevent them from becoming a lost generation.

One thing Hamdan’s parents don’t have to worry about anymore is his education. With tuition assistance provided by MECC to Hamdan and his siblings, they can continue to study until graduation and gain entrance into a university—giving Hamdan a chance to achieve his dream.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps remove barriers for teenagers like Hamdan so they can work toward their dreams. Thank you.

## January 28: Your Generosity Revitalizes Languages

Take a moment to think about your favourite story.

Now imagine that story being at risk of disappearing because the language it’s written in is endangered. This is something that nine Elders from Haida Gwaii are passionately trying to change.

Once there were over 15,000 fluent speakers of Haida, but today, because of assimilation tactics like residential schools, almost all Haida people speak English at home. The nine Elders—with an average age of more than 80—represent about half of the fluent Haida speakers who remain.

With partner support, the work of these Elders in a research-based revitalization project keeps the Haida language alive and growing.

The Elders are teaching students the words, phrases, songs and stories of their ancestors. The response has been empowering, with language learners near and far dedicating themselves to study. Lessons are given through the Longhouse of Skidegate village, but the program reaches much further, with more than 120 online lessons available. The opportunity to connect across the globe has allowed Haida language, stories, and culture to be shared broadly.

The program also gives young people from the Haida Nation the opportunity to connect with the Elders to nurture their cultural pride and understanding. “I appreciate the work the Elders are doing with our language and culture,” said one young student. “They work very hard every day so that my generation can remember.”

The Haida language is not the only Indigenous language that has been endangered. Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) support programs and partnerships for Indigenous cultural revitalization around the world.

## February 4: Lessons of Racism Learned When Young

*The following is an excerpt from a* [*blog*](https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/hard-lessons-racism-begin-young-age) *written by Adele Halliday. Your* [*Mission and Service*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) *gifts support anti-racism programs and initiatives like the ones Halliday develops as the United Church’s Anti-Racism and Equity Lead to help all of us be in deeper, more equitable relationships with one another.*

The name calling started when she was about three years old. They were racial slurs, and names, and taunts. My child, my own flesh and blood, was being ostracized for having Black skin. The people slinging the insults? Other children on the playground….

She may not have necessarily always understood the particular terms that they used, but she knew that they were related to her Blackness and her racial identity. And this deeply wounded her tender heart….

Despite all of our intentional modelling, teaching, and proactive actions, our child is still already developing internalized racism and inferior notions of herself.

The children who were taunting her were offering explicit and overt notions of racism, but they were children! They had not even started primary school! And yet, the children had already learned behaviour (at home, or elsewhere in society) that Whiteness is superior. And, they had the audacity to vocalize that to an innocent little child….

This is in part why I am so deeply committed to dismantling racism in all its forms—racism is damaging and destructive for all people in society. It reinforces negative notions for people of colour. I live it in a particular way because of my own racial identity, as a Black person who has lived with racial injustice my entire life.

The systemic nature of racism is something that cannot be ignored…. This effort to overcome racism is a continuous effort. And I am committed to this work for the long haul.

I hope that you will be too.

*Please take the time to read Halliday’s* [*full blog post*](https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/hard-lessons-racism-begin-young-age) *about her experience.*

## February 11: Small Gifts with BIG Impact

In February 2023, just one year ago, earthquakes left people in parts of Türkiye and Syria facing the devastating loss of their loved ones, homes, and communities.

Today, those same people are still facing the ongoing impact of the disaster. On top of difficulties with accessing basic needs and medical care, there remains an economic crisis. The costs of fuel and basic commodities have doubled, and in some cases tripled.

[Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partner the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) has been providing ongoing help to people living in the aftermath of the earthquakes. A Cash Assistance program has been life-changing for families, especially those who do not have a steady or fixed income.

Even the smallest amount can provide a family with a significant boost. Whether it is making house or rent payments, covering the cost of a medication, or being able to afford groceries, Mission and Service partners are there to provide support.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) extend a loving hand of peace and warmth to those in need as they live through the worst crisis of their lives. Thank you for your generosity.

## February 18: Leading Generations

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. We looked to teachers for help with schoolwork, and parental figures for managing emotions and fears. 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](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partners with the London Community Chaplaincy as they respond to parents and guardians who wish 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 for learning how to guide a child through critical stages of development, but also for navigating the complex mental aspects of 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 25: Taking Kids to School

How do you make the world a better place?

You can start by taking kids to school.

Around the world, 57 million children cannot attend school.\* They may never learn to read, to add or subtract, or to write. These are the skills they need to succeed.

Even more importantly, they never learn about their basic human rights.

It’s a complicated problem, says Patti Talbot, the United Church’s Global Partnership Team Leader. “The work we do isn’t going to lead to immediate societal change,” she says, “but it will make a big difference down the road.”

When children can’t go to school, society suffers. And that is why Mission and Service is in partnership with 74 organizations that work to increase access to education across the globe.

Each partner has their own approach to education and skills training, each supported by your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service).

Colombia’s Center for Communication uses arts and media to teach children about their rights. Women for Change in Zambia creates educational groups where participants share agricultural knowledge and awareness of their rights. At Japan’s Asian Rural Institute, local leaders gather to learn sustainable agriculture techniques they can take home and transform their communities.

“How can we make the world a better place?” asks Talbot before responding, “We can’t do that by ourselves; our partners know best what the challenges are.”

Talbot, a child of missionaries who was raised in Japan and Korea, knows that educational partnerships are critical. “In our partnerships, we learn from and teach each other,” she says. “The United Church’s focus is more than just sharing resources, but really sharing life together.”

It’s an approach that Talbot knows works, even if results take time. “Our partners are very grateful that the United Church of Canada has demonstrated over and over again that we are there for the long term,” Talbot says.

“Partners say to us ‘It makes such a difference to us to know that the United Church is with us, walking with us in prayer, supporting us, remembering us in their lives.’”

\*United Nations, “[Education for All](https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/education-all).”

## March 3: Accompanying Grandmothers

In the Rift Valley of Kenya, 7 percent of the people who live there are HIV positive—nearly 900,000—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, 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 had lost both her daughter and her son and was left to raise three grandchildren on her own. 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 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 ended 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.

## March 10: Public, Intentional, Explicit Inclusion

March 14 is PIE Day. In church circles it has nothing to do with math. PIE is short for “public, intentional, and explicit.” These are the standards we hold ourselves to when we seek to be affirming, welcoming, and inclusive.

PIE Day was co-founded by Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble and Affirming Connections. Every year, [Affirm United](https://pieday.ca/) invites us to celebrate the full inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in faith communities and beyond. The day challenges us to widen our welcome, to embody love, and to celebrate gender and sexual diversity.

It’s critical that we do. Gender identity and sexual orientation are used to justify human rights violations around the world. Same-sex sexual activity is a crime in 71 countries; in 11 of these the death penalty can be imposed.

Here in Canada, 1 million people identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. In 2019, police reported 263 hate crimes targeting people for their sexual orientation. This was a 41 percent increase over the previous year and the highest number since 2009.\*

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) sustain life-transforming advocacy and education. They support refugees fleeing for their lives because they identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. They support safe shelters, community awareness education, human rights programs, and safe spaces.

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.

\*Statistics Canada, [“Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2019”](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm) (March 29, 2021).

## March 17: Social Support through Education

Signing up for a course is both exciting and nerve-wracking. We think about what skills we’ll learn, how quickly we’ll see improvement, and 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](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/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.

While online learning expands opportunities and access to learning, distance learners miss crucial social engagement and human interaction. Ilona shares, “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.

## March 24: Preserving Culture through Language Revitalization

Take a moment to think about your favourite story.

Now imagine that story being at risk of disappearing because the language it’s written in is endangered. This is something that nine Elders from Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, are passionately trying to change.

Once there were over 15,000 fluent speakers of Haida, but today, because of assimilation tactics like residential schools, almost all Haida people speak English at home. The nine Elders—with an average age of more than 80—represent about half of the fluent Haida speakers who remain.

With partner support, the work of these Elders in a research-based revitalization project keeps the Haida language alive and growing.

The Elders teach students the words, phrases, songs and stories of their ancestors. The response has been empowering, with language learners near and far dedicating themselves to study. Lessons are given through the Longhouse of Skidegate village, but the program reaches much further, with more than 120 online lessons available. The opportunity to connect across the globe has allowed Haida language, stories, and culture to be shared broadly.

The program also gives young people from the Haida Nation the opportunity to connect with the Elders to nurture their cultural pride and understanding. “I appreciate the work the Elders are doing with our language and culture,” said one young student. “They work very hard every day so that my generation can remember.”

The Haida language is not the only Indigenous language that has been endangered. Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) support programs and partnerships for Indigenous cultural revitalization around the world.

## March 31: An Easter Message on Education

Over the past few months, we have shared stories centred on traditional and non-traditional education. [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) recognizes the profound connection between the Resurrection story and the transformative potential of education.

This Easter, we pause to think of great sacrifices and miracles. Just as Jesus emerged from the tomb, defeating death and showing us that we can be raised to new life, education opens the mind, dispels ignorance, and fosters a deeper understanding of Christ’s teachings and compassion.

Mission and Service, in its commitment to education, seeks to empower each partner to be a beacon of knowledge and compassion in the world. With your support, we engage in mutual learning, seeking opportunities to grow our understanding of the world through the eyes of our partners.

Thank you for empowering Mission and Service partners in all forms of education.

Blessings for Easter.

## April 7: United Church Camps—but Make Them Year-Round!

On a windy weekday morning in February, you might expect a camp to be quiet, anxiously awaiting the hustle and bustle that summertime will bring. But on the escarpment in Lincoln, ON, Cave Springs Camp is anything but quiet.

A Nature School for youth operates daily on the lower floor of the new Conference Centre. Staff take bookings for weddings, corporate events, and birthdays, and in the afternoon a youth group will arrive to enjoy the year-round facilities.

Cave Springs Camp hasn’t always been this way. Not so long ago, programming would only run in the summertime, with some bookings into the fall if weather permitted.

Program Director Lance Wright enthusiastically expresses his deep gratitude for the people who have made year-round facilities and programs possible. Looking outside on a February weekday, Lance can see children at the Nature School experimenting with the wind instead of hiding from it indoors on a phone or computer. Lance’s passion for creating lifelong memories and inspiring faith and self-confidence shines through his work to build a caring and dynamic community atmosphere.

From the vibrant colours of spring to the warm sunshine of summer, the crisp air of fall, and the magical snow-covered landscapes of winter, Cave Springs Camp provides an ever-changing backdrop for people of all ages to appreciate outdoor activities and adventures.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) is helping children, teens, and adults to reconnect with nature at any time of the year. Thank you.

*Stay tuned for a video from Cave Springs Camp coming later in 2024!*

## April 14: 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/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help support ADES’ agroecology project. Thank you for your generosity!

## April 21: Building and Strengthening Community through Art

*We would like to share a wonderful thank-you letter we received from Bissell Centre, a Mission and Service partner located in Edmonton. We're sharing it with you with deep gratitude and thanks for your generosity.*

Thank you to the wonderful people of The United Church of Canada. It’s with gifts like yours that we’re able to meet people facing poverty and houselessness where they’re at. We look forward to collecting and sharing more stories with you, like this one about Jon:

Jon is one of the community members at Bissell Centre, and has a passion (and talent) for art. In fact, he’s been named Bissell’s artist in residence. His work has been commissioned by Bissell to provide an authentic, community-made element to our event advertising, our annual impact reports, and several donor thank-you gifts.

His pieces often feature powerful imagery drawn from his Indigenous heritage and always in a spirit of celebration. His art was the focal point of the event poster for Bissell’s celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day [in 2022]. Inspired by the love and support he has received, Jon wanted a way to give back.

He designed, organized, and now facilitates a weekly art program called “Good Art.” In the workshops he guides people to express themselves in a healthy way through art that means something to them. Folks are encouraged to share about the art they make at the end of each workshop as way to build and strengthen community.

Your support provided a space for this to happen, and your gifts are having a palpable impact in the lives of Edmontonians facing poverty and houselessness.

Thank you very much United Church of Canada.

Shared with gratitude for your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). Thank you for your generosity.

## April 28: Healing through Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful way to preserve and share history. The theatre performance, Bunk #7, does just that.

Bunk #7 shares the true story of six boys rioting against the mistreatment and many forms of abuse they received at Edmonton Indian Residential School in St. Albert, Alberta, in the early 1960s. Written by the late Nisga’a MLA Larry Guno, the play is based on his own experience at the residential school and named for his bunk number.

The cast features Indigenous youth and young adults, offering a powerful way for the cast and audiences to learn and share the story of cultural resilience. In November 2021, the play premiered at Raven Theatre in British Columbia to a full audience. With overwhelming support, the performers went on a tour of northwestern BC to share the transformative journey. Performances in fall 2023 were once again met with great support.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) open opportunities for storytelling to move forward in an impactful and powerful way. Thank you for your generosity.

## May 5: A Beacon of Hope

When we hear of a global emergency, our minds often jump to “How can we help?” Your gifts to 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 lessens, 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 essential. By giving us the motivation to keep moving forward, hope is a powerful force that inspires us to keep going.

Mission and Service partner the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) continues to be hard at work providing hope. People in Syria are still experiencing the devastating aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes.

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 launched 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.

## May 12: Educating Future Leaders

Mission and Service does a surprising amount of development in your local church, recruiting new ministers and funding theological schools. It even shapes the hymn books you sing from every service.

Another important way Mission nd Service supports local ministry: by providing academic bursaries for students studying to become ministers and theological leaders.

“The church has a lot to offer in terms of witness to the community and supporting people who are struggling,” explains the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball, the United Church’s Executive Minister for Theological Leadership.

“The money is really helpful,” she says, “but the other thing that is so important to students is realizing that people throughout the church cared enough to donate to Mission and Service.”

The Rev. Alexa Gilmour received one of these bursaries when she was still a ministry candidate. “I was a single parent, and I knew I couldn’t get through without support,” Gilmour says. “I felt blessed by God through people who donated and who, by giving, encouraged me on my journey. I have tremendous gratitude for that important role the church played in my life at that time.”

Janzen-Ball wants you to know that your gifts do matter.

“They matter both tangibly in peoples’ lives in a real way but also in intangible ways because they signal the support of the wider community,” she says. “The care of people who are strangers to one another―the importance and impact of that can’t be overstated.

“Giving to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) is an opportunity to support future and current leaders. Those gifts make a significant difference.”

A more detailed video, [A Deeper Look: Educating the Ministers of Tomorrow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Egi4hFqZQ), is available on YouTube.

## May 19: Connecting for Global Peace and Security

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.

## May 26: Your Generosity Is Refreshing

Being able to take a shower can have a positive impact on a person’s mental and emotional health. It provides a sense of dignity, self-worth, and normalcy that contributes to overall well-being, especially to people living on the streets.

In downtown St. Catharines, ON, Silver Spire United Church’s shower and laundry program is changing lives. Three mornings a week, people are offered an opportunity to refresh and recharge. The two shower rooms can be locked and each have a changing area, so patrons have space to secure their personal belongings. The laundry room next door means that after they shower people can dress in their own clean clothing. Cellphone chargers are another small but helpful detail.

This program goes beyond being a practical service. It embodies compassion, addresses fundamental needs, and provides comfort in a welcoming space. In the sweltering heat of summer, a cool shower can make a huge difference.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps programs like Silver Spire’s to support people’s well-being. Thank you.

## June 2: Learning about God’s Love

Queer Kid Bible Camp is a unique and affirming space that has emerged to provide a supportive environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth within the framework of spirituality. Started by Mission and Service partner Silver Spire United Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, Queer Kid Bible Camp blends teachings of God’s love with messages of inclusivity.

Queer individuals have often been marginalized or excluded in spiritual experiences, which can make them feel isolated and alienated. Queer Kid Bible Camp aims to challenge these negative experiences by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance in a spiritual context. The camp offers a place for young 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to explore and reconcile their faith with their identity. Through theological and spiritual discussions, youth can openly ask questions without feeling uncertain about their safety.

The benefits of Queer Kid Bible Camp extend beyond its immediate impact on individual campers. The camp experience sparks conversation with parents and guardians who want to connect and understand their children better. As young participants gain confidence and self-acceptance, they become advocates for change within their own communities. The Rev. Karen Orlandi of Silver Spire United Church has seen a wonderful ripple effect, noting that she’s seen “healing for queer adults as they see queer kids openly embracing their identity.”

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) provides the queer community with opportunities to thrive in safe environments as they learn about God’s love. Thank you.

## June 9: Advocating for Sexual and Gender Minorities in Other

We are blessed to live in Canada, a country that recognizes the right to love whoever you want, regardless of their gender or sex. And while we haven’t always done what is right, The United Church of Canada now recognizes that all love―including Two Spirit or LGBTQIA+ relationships―is holy and blessed by God. But those rights do not exist in many parts of the world today.

“One of our partners in Kenya has advocated strongly for the human rights of sexual minorities, and that has caused him to be in jail, caused him to risk his life to be able to do that,” says the Rev. Michael Blair. The church’s first openly gay General Secretary is now helping to advocate for sexual and gender minorities in foreign countries.

“When we hear these stories, we can see that this is a life and death matter.”

Your gifts for [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help shelter refugees as they escape repressive governments. Same-sex attraction is a crime in 71 countries, and 11 of them have the death penalty.

Mission and Service also holds consultations in other countries to discover how we can best work with our partners to protect sexual and gender minorities. “A few years ago, we hosted a consultation here in Canada with several partners and asked how we can be supportive of their work,” Blair says. “They told us we needed to come and help in their context.”

To date, Mission and Service has supported consultations in Latin America and the Philippines.

“We are bringing together leaders to explore how the church can be a place of liberation and life for sexual and gender minorities in those communities. That is happening because of the folks who contribute to Mission and Service,” says Blair.

Thank you for helping to protect sexual and gender minorities. You are saving lives and changing views around the world!

## June 16: Rainbow Camp Is Welcoming

Rainbow Camp® in northern Ontario has welcomed young people of all sexual identities since 2012. From the beginning, Mission and Service has supported Welcome Friend Association, which runs the camp.

“Initially, we wanted to bridge the local LGBTQ community with area churches. We started the association, and then we launched the camp. We had no idea what we were doing at the time. Only one person on the board had camp experience, but we knew that young people would benefit,” says Chris Southin, one of the camp’s co-founders.

Rainbow Camp® now serves up to 50 youth each week for four weeks, with expansion plans in the works.

Above all, Rainbow Camp® provides campers with a safe space to be who they are without judgment. “I’ll never forget our first year of camp,” says Harry Stewart, also a co-founder. “It was the second full day. A camper told us his mom had found a dress in his closet. He lied to her and said that it belonged to his girlfriend. He had brought the dress to camp and said he would like to wear it. High heels and sand don’t mix!” he explains, laughing, “But the warmth, love, and compassion that the camper received from everyone at camp was amazing.”

Southin and Stewart want the camp experience to be memorable, fun, soul-searching, and supportive. “We don’t want any camper to feel afraid to be who they are. I think that’s why so many now call it their home.” This important work was recognized with a Governor General’s award in 2021.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) supports safe, welcoming spaces like Rainbow Camp®. Thank you!

## June 23: An Act of Generosity

Those who work in the United Church’s Philanthropy Unit have the privilege of hearing the stories of generous supporters. Each story shared is inspiring, but this note included in a cheque sent by Rock Lake Pastoral Charge in Manitoba is especially delightful:

“Please find enclosed our cheque for $125.00. One of our member’s great-grandchildren rolled loose coins they found around the house. There was 1 roll of loonies, 6 rolls of quarters, 6 rolls of dimes, and 5 rolls of nickels. The three children ages 12, 9, and 7 were told if they rolled the coins, they could use the money however they wanted. They decided very quickly that they wanted to give it to children/people of Ukraine. They brought the money to Rock Lake Pastoral Charge and asked to have the money sent through The United Church of Canada for Emergency Response―Ukraine. They wanted it to go through the church because their great-grandmother loved the church.

“The children could have gone and bought a toy or chocolate bar but they thought about it and decided to give it to help the people of Ukraine. They were so proud when they came into the office. It was a big heavy bag of coins they carried for seven or eight blocks to get here. They were really pleased to present it,” says office administrator Linda Sharpe.

This story represents thoughtful, intentional giving at its finest. Every gift given is a treasure. Every gift given tells a story about generosity.

Thank you for [supporting the work we do together](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) as a United Church. May the story we tell in our giving and receiving bring us ever more near the heart of God.

## June 30: Life-Changing Arts Programs for Children

For hundreds of children living in Córdoba, Colombia, arts programs supported through your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts teach children about their rights, give them an opportunity to express themselves, and promote peace-making as well as gender justice.

“Providing workshops for children that teach them about their rights empowers them to think critically about themselves and their country. Through media, art, music, and theatre, they learn about important social issues, human rights, and gender equality,” says the Latin American Center for Popular Communication (CEPALC).

Children are the most vulnerable group in Colombia. Eighty-four percent of violent acts in Colombia are committed against children. Two and a half million children living there work to sustain their families. Many are forced into dangerous labour. That’s why CEPALC designs programs in sectors hardest hit by poverty and violence.

“I told my mom that we had seen some works of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Flora Tristan. I remember that they taught us that we must defend the rights of us women. What I like, in general, is that they taught us that we must make peace,” says Amelie, an eight-year-old girl who lives in Bogotá and workshop participant. “Thanks to CEPALC workshops, I’ll be a writer, and I will write things so that children will promote and defend peace, following Jesus’ examples. I will defend and promote our rights in my stories so that nobody can disrespect us or the rights that we have. When I am an adult, I won’t be doing violence against anybody.”

## July 7: Ministers’ Retreat: Respite and Reflection

Northern United Church ministers are facing a crisis. The number of deaths in northern communities has been immense, and the grief of burying community members, especially young people, has been overwhelming. The emotional toll of ministering to a grieving community is enormous, and ministers are in dire need of rest and renewal.

A [ministers’ retreat](https://united-church.ca/stories/pastors-retreat) is being planned for October 2024. The retreat will provide rest, training in crisis management, and spiritual renewal, and will allow leaders to return with renewed strength to help those in need. Ministers will participate in a blend of training and respite opportunities, including learning about vicarious trauma and administering Naloxone, and relaxation opportunities through art therapy, beading workshops, and sharing circles.

Through your generous support of Mission and Service, this retreat is on its way to being a reality.

If you would like to support the retreat, please [give here](https://united-church.ca/donate/2024npr). Every dollar donated will be matched by a contribution from the Healing Fund. Thank you.

*Hear what northern ministers are experiencing and what they need to keep going:*

[Listen to Lawrence](https://youtu.be/5Swli03VzKk).

[Listen to Grant](https://youtu.be/KXzCNjDj8sk).

[Listen to Olive](https://youtu.be/aVfwuBA1uKI).

## July 14: Climate Justice through Cultural Movement

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 on communities and livelihoods, 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/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps make workshops like this possible. Thank you.

## July 21: Restoring Lost Languages

These days, most of us have access to technology that allows us to learn the world’s common languages. But countless languages—including many Indigenous languages—can only be learned from their few remaining speakers.

Revitalizing a lost language, as one of our partners in Nunavut is doing, is an important way to preserve not just the language but also the culture that surrounds it.

The Inuinnaqtun language is the cultural foundation of the Inuinnait people, who live in the central Canadian Arctic. The literal meaning of the word Inuinnaqtun is “to be like an Inuinnaq (a person).” Today, fewer than 600 people can still speak Inuinnaqtun fluently. Many lost the language when they were removed from their communities and sent to residential schools.

Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, is working hard to keep Inuinnaqtun alive. One-on-one language immersion sessions with mentors inspire reconnection. Through everyday conversations at home and on the land, mentorship is helping to heal the wounds of systemic oppression.

In partnership with Mission and Service, Inuinnaqtun language mentors get resources to allow them to spend 300 hours a year working with their apprentices to begin to restore the language.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help partners continue to restore language and culture. Thank you.

## July 28: Facing an Uncertain Future in Lebanon

Hamdan wants to become a doctor someday. As the oldest son, this young teenager dreams big amidst the daily struggles that he and his family face.

Hamdan’s family came to Lebanon several years ago to escape the war in Syria. They can barely afford their monthly rent, food, household expenses, clothing, and medical needs. While his father works in a produce shop, his mother stays at home to care for the family’s four children and two other family members. This family of eight lives on the father’s pay and a small income supplement they receive from the UN.

Like Hamdan, many children in Lebanon are at risk of losing their education because an economic crisis—intensified by the COVID pandemic and the devastating 2020 explosion in Beirut—has plunged their families into poverty. When parents can’t pay school tuition, children face an unstable future. The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) assists Lebanese students and Syrian refugees ages 8‒13 with tuition and fees to secure their education and prevent them from becoming a lost generation.

One thing Hamdan’s parents don’t have to worry about anymore is his education. With tuition assistance provided by MECC to Hamdan and his siblings, they can continue to study until graduation and gain entrance into a university—giving Hamdan a chance to achieve his dream.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps remove barriers for teenagers like Hamdan so they can work toward their dreams. Thank you.

## August 4: Building Community through an Afterschool Program

“I’m going to sleep here!” Amarah, age 6, threatens from under the table. Along with her sisters, she hides from her family at the Tomken Grove Afterschool Program’s pickup time. This is a common occurrence because every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., the children feel that two hours together is not enough.

Through the passion of Westminster United Church in Mississauga, ON, the Tomken Grove Afterschool Program aims to encourage community among local children. The program creates a recreational space outside of school where neighbourhood kids can spend time together in an electronics-free environment.

Some form of physical activity is always scheduled: dance battles, obstacle courses, hula-hooping, spending time outdoors and more. Snacks such as fresh fruits and yogurt keep the kids healthy and energized, and everyone is involved in cleanup responsibilities for snack and outdoor time, which encourages independence and innovation.

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help programs like this as they encourage community and connection. Thank you.

## August 11: Minority Youth Forum: The Power of Bringing Youth Together

*Ashley Keeping was one of two United Church young adults selected to attend the Minority Youth Forum in Japan, hosted by the Center for Minority Issues and Mission.*

*Ashley writes:*

“Just like Miyako residents, I live on an island and can relate to their everyday lives on their island, as it was small and humble just like here in Newfoundland. There was one prominent difference. The majority of the residents are seeking peace from their own government, something we don’t have to worry about here in Canada. God called upon me to see how the people of Miyako Island are living, and to share with everyone their struggle for peace.

“The Minority Youth Forum program brought together young adults from Canada, Japan, and Taiwan. The Youth Forum experience showed me how powerful it is to bring youth together to share our culture, to share our faith, and to share our stories. To be able to have discussions with youth from other cultures about how we can change the world gives me so much hope for our future.

“This trip filled my heart with joy, hope, and love for the wonderful people that I can now forever call friends. It also taught me that you need to find, keep, and treasure peace, as well as pursue it for the rest of your time, and that I will do. Thank you, Miyako, for everything you taught me.”

The Youth Forum is an ecumenical initiative of churches in Japan, supported by The United Church of Canada and Mission and Service. Your generosity through Mission and Service helps programs like this one that inspire peace and learning. Thank you.

Read Ashley’s [full blog here](https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/pursuing-peace-atlantic-pacific).

## August 18: Nothing Can Hold Us Back

Audacious Hope, the national youth and young adult event, brought together over 450 energetic young people and passionate youth leaders July 3-6, 2024, for an unforgettable experience at Brock University in St. Catharines, ON. Through the combined efforts of The United Church of Canada Rendez-vous team and The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s Uplift team, this landmark event was the first-ever collaborative youth event by the two denominations.

Each day included inspiring and vibrant worship led by the incredible Adele Halliday and Mitchell Anderson. Attendees were captivated by a lineup of phenomenal speakers and workshop leaders, including Moderator the Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps continue programs and workshops that encourage youth in their faith. Thank you.

More [videos from Audacious Hope](https://www.youtube.com/@UnitedChurchCda/videos) are available on The United Church of Canada YouTube channel.

## August 25: Church Offers Unique Ministry in National Park

Canadian churches grace unique places: restaurants, storefronts—even movie theatres. Perhaps the most serene of all settings, though, is a national park.

Waterton United Church is situated in the heart of Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta. Although the United Church has had a presence in the park since 1955, the current building was dedicated in 1961. The cathedral window in the sanctuary, designed to frame the mountains, offers a breathtaking view.

“Architect George Watson framed Mount Vimy,” explains Carol Watt, Secretary. “People who aren’t involved in the church but just stop to visit look out captivated by the view of the mountain over the lake. It’s a special thing that happens. It touches something deep within.”

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help the church remain open year-round. In the summer, Sunday services take place from late June through September with support from guest ministers. Other services are offered during high holy times throughout the year. Youth groups use the building as retreat space, and the chapel is a popular space for weddings. With a small room and kitchenette behind the sanctuary, the church also draws leaders who want to retreat.

“Providing space for spiritual reflection and retreat is an important aspect of the ministry we provide,” says Watt.

A newsletter reads, “Waterton United offers a unique ministry to the wealth of summer visitors who flock happily into the national park and then find this gem of a United Church of Canada.”

Thank you for supporting churches in remote places that witness in a unique way to the majesty and grace of God.

## September 1: Moments of Connection

Have you ever stepped into a forest surrounded by birds chirping, insects calling, and leaves rustling in the wind? The leaders at Mission and Service partner Cave Springs Camp in Beamsville, ON, are encouraging children to leave the hustle and bustle behind to enjoy moments of connection with nature and each other.

Nestled right on the Niagara Escarpment, the joyful sounds of children discovering and playing echo throughout the campgrounds. “I found a salamander!” someone exclaims as other campers rush over to see. Something as simple as “Look at this cool rock!” draws laughter and excitement. These moments of connection are powerful, allowing everyone to be present and supportive.

In such a peaceful setting, the beauty of nature reminds children of the simple joys of friendship and gratitude. This experience can inspire a deep appreciation for the earth and a desire to take care of it. Children make music, worship, explore creativity through art, challenge themselves, and connect with others, all together in nature.

Your support of [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) allows children to continue connecting in nature at United Church camps. Thank you.

## September 8: It Starts with Education

Through your generous support of Mission and Service, our partners are nurturing seeds of wisdom and faith in communities across the globe. By supporting educational initiatives, individuals are empowered to explore their spirituality, deepen their knowledge, and build a better future for themselves and their communities.

Imagine a classroom of [kindergarteners in a refugee camp](https://united-church.ca/stories/kindergarten-refugee-camp) where children eagerly gather to learn about the world and their place in it. Picture a young adult discovering the [profound teachings of their faith](https://united-church.ca/stories/nothing-can-hold-us-back) for the first time, safely supported by their peers. Consider a group of [parents and guardians gathered in a workshop](https://united-church.ca/stories/leading-generations), sharing their hopes and dreams for their communities, guided by mentors who inspire them to lead with compassion and justice. Imagine people learning and [restoring lost languages](https://united-church.ca/stories/restoring-lost-languages) to preserve precious history and culture.

These moments of growth are at our heart, and they are made possible by your compassion and generosity. As we look to the future, the impact of educational initiatives through Mission and Service partners becomes even clearer. Every lesson learned, every skill acquired, and every relationship built contributes to a larger tapestry of hope and resilience.

Whether it's a child in a rural classroom or an adult in a leadership program, the education provided through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partners is a beacon, guiding individuals toward a path of faith, understanding, and service. Together, we are sowing the seeds of a more compassionate world. Thank you.

## September 15: A Journey of Faith and Peace

*Sophie Fitzgerald was one of two United Church young adults selected to attend the Minority Youth Forum in Japan, hosted by the Center for Minority Issues and Mission.*

*Sophie writes about her experience:*

“As a young woman in my 20s who has lived and grown up in the United Church, I have always felt God’s call to spread God’s love and peace in any way that I can. Being involved with many organizations and missions with the church, I’ve had the privilege to do this many times in many provinces across Canada but never internationally, until this past March where God called me to travel to Miyakojima island.

“On a tour of the island, we saw exactly what the Japanese military is doing to Miyakojima. We saw how they are taking the beautiful beaches and using them as training camps, putting up missile bunkers in the middle of town next to peoples’ homes and so much more. We sat and talked about how our generation can help the people of Miyakojima have peace once again, and how peace cannot be created with military and military weapons. Throughout these conversations and visits to these sites you could feel an overwhelming presence of our Creator, and was saddened when coming to the terms that everything beautiful that God created was being destroyed and will be destroyed if war does occur.

“We all need to come together to be a community, a community of God’s children striving to seek peace in the world. All people of compassion, wisdom, and belief need to come together in order to take care of one another, and to take care of our beautiful world that the Creator made. Systems of injustice can only be resolved with community and partnership with one another. I am blessed that I get to bring the partnership and stories of the people of Miyakojima island back to my island of Newfoundland.”

The Youth Forum is an ecumenical initiative of churches in Japan, supported by The United Church of Canada and Mission and Service. Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps programs like this one that inspire peace and learning. Thank you.

Read Sophie’s full blog: [Seek Peace and Pursue It](https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/seek-peace-and-pursue-it).

## September 22: Inuinnaqtun Language Revival Group

The Inuinnaqtun language is the cultural foundation of the Inuinnait people, who live in the central Canadian Arctic. The word *Inuinnaqtun* literally means “to be like an *Inuinnaq* (a person).” Today, fewer than 600 people can speak Inuinnaqtun fluently, with many having lost the language when they were taken from their communities and sent to residential schools.

Mission and Service partner Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, is dedicated to keeping Inuinnaqtun alive. They offer one-on-one language immersion sessions with mentors to inspire reconnection.

Since the initial gathering of the Inikhaliuqatigiit team in 2021, many significant successes have occurred. Over the past year, the team has worked hard together, both in person and online, to create helpful resources for revitalizing the Inuinnaqtun language. They have spent many hours making sure these resources will make a positive impact.

One big success is the development of the Inuinnaqtun Dictionary app, which is newly available for free on Android and Apple. The team has also created a beginner Inuinnaqtun curriculum called Inuinnaujunga and is working on lessons for more advanced levels. They are also teaming up with linguist Richard Compton from the Université de Quebec à Montreal to create a Community Grammar of Inuinnaqtun.

Your compassionate gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) are supporting programs that help preserve language and culture.

## September 29: Update: Pastors Retreat—Respite and Reflection

A short while ago, we shared that a Pastors Retreat is being planned for October of 2024. This retreat will provide badly needed respite for northern United Church ministers who are facing a crisis.

The number of deaths in their northern communities has been immense. The grief of burying community members, especially young people, has been overwhelming. The emotional toll of ministering to a grieving community is enormous.

Your response has been profound and powerful. When we shared that leaders are in dire need of rest and renewal, you went into action. Thanks to your generous and outstanding support of Mission and Service, this retreat is going to be a reality.

The retreat will provide rest, training in crisis management, and spiritual renewal, and will allow leaders to return with renewed strength to help those in need. Pastors will participate in a blend of activities, including learning about vicarious trauma and experiencing relaxation opportunities through art therapy, beading workshops, and sharing circles.

Thank you for your expression of compassion through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) that has ensured that this retreat will move forward.

To learn more, visit [Pastors Retreat](https://united-church.ca/stories/pastors-retreat). Thank you.

## October 6: Our Journey towards Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

From October 15 to November 26, 2024, the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism program offers daily and weekly opportunities for learning, reflection, and action.

This year, dynamic speakers will be offering live events each Tuesday of the 40 Days at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Small study groups will accompany each event, giving learners and leaders the opportunity to explore the content more deeply.

The program, designed to move people through a journey towards becoming anti-racist, offers an opportunity for participants within the United Church and beyond to engage in learning and develop their faith.

Written reflections explore internalized racism, systemic racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and more. The readings encourage deep, thought-provoking discussion for both individuals and communities of faith.

The United Church of Canada has committed to becoming an anti-racist denomination, and this work is an ongoing journey for everyone. Your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts support expanding this crucial initiative each year.

## October 13: What’s for Thanksgiving Dinner?

Thanksgiving is a time when many of us come together with loved ones, enjoying the abundance of food that graces our tables. It’s a time that reminds us of the blessings we have received. Yet, as we give thanks for our own blessings, it’s important to remember that many others, both here in Canada and around the world, are struggling with food insecurity. Your generous support through Mission and Service is making a difference by helping feed thousands of people in need.

One of the programs your Mission and Service gifts support is Food for the North, which serves Canada’s most remote northern communities. Food is not just scarce there but also incredibly costly. According to the federal government, back in 2019, the average Canadian family of four spent an average of $1,000/month on groceries. But in Nunavut, that same family would have to spend $1,600/month to get the same amount of food. And that was five years ago—imagine how much worse things are now! Your contributions ensure that these families have access to affordable and nutritious food, changing lives and offering hope in a time of growing need.

This Thanksgiving, as you gather with your family, please know how deeply grateful we are for your support. Your [gifts through Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/donate) extend far beyond your own table, reaching into the homes of those who would otherwise go without. Together, we are not just providing meals—we are sharing the love and compassion of our faith with those who need it most. Thank you for making such a profound impact. Have a blessed Thanksgiving.

## October 20: An Abundance of Blessings in a Time of Need

With your generous support, many Canadian seniors who might otherwise face empty plates this season are able to enjoy nutritious meals and maintain their dignity throughout the year.

The Food Security for Elders program relies on your support to provide grocery cards to Indigenous Elders in the Morley First Nation and Lethbridge, AB area, where access to healthy food is limited. Without your support, these seniors face the harsh reality of choosing between essential needs and nourishing meals. They need your help to ensure their tables are filled with the food they deserve.

In a time of rising grocery prices and economic challenges, your kindness ensures that our most vulnerable neighbours are not left to struggle with food insecurity. Your gifts help transform their experience from one of worry and scarcity to one of comfort and nourishment. With your support, Elders can enjoy healthier meals and maintain their well-being.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gives more than just food; it offers hope and a sense of community. As we continue through our seasons of gratitude, we extend our heartfelt thanks to you for making such a significant impact. Thank you.

## October 27: Hope and Transformation

In a part of El Salvador where the climate is harsh and mining projects have impacted the environment, the Association of Economic and Social Development Santa Marta (ADES) is making a remarkable difference. Partnered with Mission and Service, ADES has launched a transformative agroecology project, bringing hope to rural farmers.

This initiative is centred at the Dora Alicia Sorto School Farm. Here, rural families—primarily led by women—learn sustainable farming practices that recycle nutrients into the soil, protect biodiversity, and reduce production costs.

Thanks to your generous gifts, this project can equip farmers with training, technical expertise, and native seeds, all while promoting environmental stewardship and gender equality. In a region affected by increasing droughts and disrupted agricultural patterns, these new methods help farmers adapt and thrive.

Your support has the power to extend to communities facing severe challenges. By contributing to this project, you are not just providing food; you are also empowering families to grow more, sustain their land, and secure their futures.

Thank you for supporting projects like this through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). Your gift ensures that others can look forward to a future where their tables are full.

## November 3: Accompanying Young Adults Through Transformative Years

*We would like to share a wonderful thank-you letter we received from the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (ECM) at the University of Guelph, a Mission and Service partner located in Guelph, ON. We're sharing it with you with deep gratitude for your generosity.*

“Thanks to support from United Church Mission and Service, the Ecumenical Campus Ministry at the University of Guelph has been able to support the UofG community and accompany young adults during some of the most transformative years of their lives.

The Ecumenical Campus Ministry has been a partnership of the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Church at UofG since 1968. The chaplaincy is fully supported by alumni, parents, and grants from partner churches—the university does not fund faith programming.

Over the 2023/24 academic year, ECM was able to serve 25 free meals to university students, provide weekly worship services right on campus, conduct field trips to 10 local churches, hold 3 public presentations on issues of faith and inclusivity, mentor 5 student leaders, host 2 different weekend retreats, and coordinate the Queer Christian Community for 2SLGBTQIA+ students at UofG. This just scratches the surface!

This kind of ministry presence is made possible because of ECM’s vision of having a full-time chaplain, something that would be unthinkable without support from United Church Mission and Service.

So from all the students at UofG, thank you for your gifts to United Church [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service)! Your support is making a difference in the lives of young adults at the University of Guelph.”

To see our Mission and Service in action, watch the [2023/24 Ecumenical Campus Ministry highlight video](https://youtu.be/wkpEcJ3Mqmo?si=rZWWVwn_WRo9UW41).

## November 10: Overcoming Obstacles

Sue, 61, has faced a lifetime of challenges, starting in her youth when her mother was involved with organized crime and jailed for fraud. Later, as a young mom, a car accident left Sue with chronic back pain. And last fall, a fire destroyed her Hamilton apartment, forcing her onto the streets. Despite these struggles, Sue has found stability at Mission and Service partner Wesley. In Wesley’s special care unit, Sue is working to overcome the drug addiction that she has lived with since she was 11. While the process has been difficult, she is slowly reducing her drug use with the help of prescribed medications and support from Wesley’s staff.

The care unit operates under a harm reduction model, allowing clients like Sue to manage their addictions in a supported environment. Wesley’s program is part of a broader effort in Hamilton to address homelessness and substance use. Recently, the program expanded its capacity, and now provides about 30 beds for individuals struggling with multiple substances. Clients are not expected to quit drugs immediately but are supported in stabilizing their lives, receiving medical care, and reconnecting with family. Wesley’s team includes doctors, nurses, and addiction specialists who help clients find their own path to recovery.

For Sue, this support has been transformative. Her room at Wesley provides a much-needed sanctuary, offering a reprieve from the constant stress of homelessness and addiction. She continues to focus on her recovery, working in the garden and taking steps toward quitting fentanyl altogether. Sue dreams of eventually finding her own home and reuniting with her beloved cat, Kitty Cat, who was rescued from the fire and is being cared for by a friend.

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help support people like Sue on her ongoing journey to build a better future for herself and her children. Thank you for your continued support.

Sue’s story was recently featured in The Hamilton Spectator. [Read more about Sue’s story](https://wesley.ca/sues-story-healing-trauma/).

## November 17: Supporting Community Resilience in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, severe drought and food shortages continue to take a toll on communities, but the Zimbabwe Council of Churches is leading efforts to provide support. In partnership with Mission and Service and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the Scaling Up Resilience Project focuses on practical, long-term solutions. By emphasizing climate-smart farming, gender equality, and community-driven initiatives, the project is helping families strengthen their resilience and work towards a more secure future.

The challenges facing Zimbabwe are immense, with frequent droughts, unpredictable rains, tropical cyclones, economic instability, and outbreaks of diseases like cholera all contributing to severe food insecurity. In the Bikita and Gutu districts, up to 60% of people are affected, with many families struggling to put food on the table, send their children to school, and are at risk of gender-based violence. Crop failures, especially due to El Niño, have worsened conditions, leaving communities in urgent need of solutions.

The Scaling Up Resilience Program addresses these issues by building on the success of previous humanitarian efforts. It will provide training in gender-sensitive, climate-smart agriculture, strengthen disaster risk management systems, and revive essential community assets, such as water conservation works and irrigation schemes. By promoting gender equality, supporting financial resilience through savings and loans programs, and ensuring that all community members, including the elderly and those with disabilities, are included, the project is creating a brighter future for thousands of people.

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) have provided crucial support to partners like the Zimbabwe Council of Churches as they work toward a secure and sustainable future. Your continued support is deeply appreciated.

## November 24: Gifts with Vision: A Gift to All

“I have everything I need.”

“I can’t think of anything I want.”

“No gifts for me this year.”

This is something many of us have heard, and maybe something we’ve found ourselves saying. And while it may be true, despite not wanting or needing anything, we know gifts are going to happen anyway. Instead of searching “gifts for someone who is hard to buy for,” why not give [Gifts with Vision](https://giftswithvision.ca/)?

[Gifts with Vision](https://giftswithvision.ca/) is a way to give gifts from the comfort of home, with no packaging or wrapping needed. Instead of gadgets and fleeting trends, Gifts with Vision is full of gifts that will help transform lives throughout Canada and around the world. When placing your order, you’ll be able to add an e-card, including a delivery date, for each gift.

Every Gift with Vision provides support for a specific Mission and Service partner offering a unique project. Without Mission and Service, [Gifts with Vision](https://giftswithvision.ca/) projects would not be possible. Thank you for supporting both.

When Christmas rolls around, remember that a meaningful gift is a simple click away. If madly dashing around the mall on Christmas Eve has been your gift-buying style, kick back and relax. Gifts with Vision has you covered!

## December 1: Nurturing New Beginnings

Becoming a new parent can be overwhelming, with the constant demands of caring for a newborn, sleepless nights, and the pressure to make the right choices for your child. The exhaustion and balancing daily responsibilities while navigating the unknowns of parenthood often leaves new parents feeling unsure and isolated. It’s a time filled with great joy, but also uncertainty, as parents adjust to their new roles and work to create a safe and nurturing environment for their little one.

At Fairview Resource Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the New Parents Support group aims to walk with parents as they navigate the complexities of raising a newborn. Once a week, parents gather to meet with a public health nurse who provides education and answers questions. From expectant parents to those with babies up to 18 months, the program provides resources for those who might not otherwise have access to in-person support or resources.

Parents connect not only with health professionals, but form deep bonds with each other, and some are still in contact many years later. Many of us have heard that “it takes a village to raise a child,” and Fairview Resource Centre is truly taking action to give a positive space for children in the community to flourish. Thank you for walking alongside our Mission and Service partners as they help children and communities grow.

Your support of [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/mission-and-service-old) is vital to the continuation of incredible programs like these.

## December 8: Helping Refugees

This past year, Wesley supported over 1,000 newcomers from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and other countries.

This is the story of one family of refugees.

Christine is a courageous and resilient mother who has been through unspeakable danger and sorrow to ensure the safety and success of her family. Christine, her children, and her grandchildren can teach us about self-sacrifice, endurance, and dedication to those we love. Initially from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christine and her family fled to a refugee camp in Zimbabwe after a violent attack in their village. They lived through deplorable conditions and danger for ten years before finally being granted asylum in Canada.

When Christine and her family arrived in Canada, they were exhausted and emotionally drained from their long journey and years of unrest. Their first stop was Wesley’s Newcomer Reception Centre, where they found support from Wesley staff and a comfortable place to rest. With the help of Wesley’s programs and services, the family is rebuilding their lives in the Hamilton region.

Christine’s dream for her children and grandchildren is to have a safe and bright future filled with opportunities. Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, Wesley can provide supportive programs to newcomers, those experiencing homelessness, addiction and mental health barriers, and local families experiencing poverty.

With your support of [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/mission-and-service-old), we can change lives.

## December 15: Giving Gifts with Vision

It’s almost Christmas, and time seems to really fly at this time of year. If you still have someone on your list, instead of searching “last-minute gift ideas,” why not try Gifts with Vision?

With Gifts with Vision, you can give meaningful gifts without the stress of packaging or last-minute mall dashes. Every gift helps transform lives across Canada and around the world. With gifts in categories such as addressing poverty and hunger, healing and reconciliation, and education, there is truly something for everyone.

Each Gift with Vision supports a unique Mission and Service project that wouldn’t be possible without your help.

So, this Christmas, skip the rush—[Gifts with Vision](https://giftswithvision.ca/) is just a click away!

## December 22: A Place to Thrive

For some, Beasley Community Center is just a building to pass while driving down Wilson Street in Hamilton, Ontario. For others, Beasley is a sanctuary, a safe place where they can truly be themselves and thrive. For Cyris, Beasley’s meaning and purpose have gone through many seasons of change, starting as a young child and continuing today as he works as a summer student with the After School Program.

In 2010, when Cyris was nine years old, Dr. J. E. Davey Elementary School and the connected Beasley Community Center opened. Here, he attended Wesley’s after-school program and recreational drop-ins almost daily. Programs run by Wesley gave Cyris a place to spend his afternoons with his friends, particularly on the basketball court. “I loved being at Wesley. It gave me a place to be where I felt safe and comfortable,” says Cyris. “I got in trouble in school a lot; it was somewhere I could just play and not think about the stuff going on at home or at school.”

It was at Beasley that Cyris’ natural drive to help others began to flourish into a fierce dedication to serving his community in meaningful ways. “I love being in my community,” he proudly states.

Now, Cyris is 22 years old, and is attending the University of Ottawa to study Criminology with a goal of becoming a police officer. With this career, he feels he can give back and make a positive difference in his community while working in his hometown of Hamilton. When his school break rolls around, you can find him right back at Beasley working as a summer student at the same after-school program he participated in. “I love working with the kids, interacting with them, inspiring them, helping them,” he says.

When asked about what motivates him to help others and work with kids, Cyris credits the influence of the mentors he had at Beasley and his mother, who has spent her life working with young children. He had older friends who started working at Wesley. In high school, while he was still attending the recreational drop-in programs, he decided that he would follow their lead.

“I love helping people; that’s my biggest motivation,” he says. With the kids at Beasley, “it’s a full-circle moment, I was them at one point. Now I can help provide the support I had, and it feels pretty cool.”

Through his work at Beasley, Cyris hopes to help the children he mentors see that they, too, can overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams. “Just follow your dreams, do what you want to do, do what makes you happy,” he reminds them often.

Cyris’ work helping others is far from over, and he hopes the kids he works with find their own versions of success and that some will return to help when they’re older. He’ll be there too—“I’ll always be around. I can’t see myself not being here. I’ll keep my hand in it somehow. I love it here.”

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/mission-and-service-old) support programs that help children and young adults grow and thrive. Thank you.

## December 29: A Time of Reflection

As we look forward to the New Year and all the hope and possibility 2025 will bring, it’s also a time to reflect on the growth we experienced in 2024. Through moments of peace and challenge, joy and sorrow, it has been a true blessing to witness God at work through people like you.

Amid earthquakes, conflict, economic struggles, hunger, and more, you have consistently asked, “How can we help?” Thank you for holding our neighbors in warm, compassionate care throughout a challenging year. Together, you have helped put food on tables, rebuild communities after disasters, provide life-saving medication, educate children, and so much more.

Your gifts continue to support our partners as they respond to urgent needs in Canada and around the world, bringing hope and breaking down barriers so that they can keep doing their vital work. As we reflect on this past year and welcome the new one, we are deeply grateful for your support of [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). Thank you for bringing hope to so many.