



FIRST UNITED CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Our Council and Governance

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL

(Robert VanderBerg)

The year of 2025 was marked by significant transitions for our community. The work of the Rev. Anne Montgomery and the Rev. Alyson Huntly completed in June and I am grateful for their leadership as they guided our community and introduced us to new ways of being. Following a summer of inspiring leadership by lay members, First was thrilled to welcome the Rev. Dr. Kanana Muketha as our new minister in September. This momentous occasion was marked by a Covenanting Service in November, during which we were called to embark on a bold, new path of radical inclusion. Despite the fact that it has been six months since we met her, we continue to offer a joyous welcome to Kanana - we are so, so happy that you are here, with us in community.

This period of transition was also characterized by deep introspection as we took an honest look at our community, considering our past, present and future. We celebrated where we have succeeded and we acknowledged where we have fallen short; we dreamed of a new tomorrow and we worked to prepare for it. In May, the congregation gathered for the Heaven Knows Where We Are Going workshop, during which we examined our strengths and weaknesses, needs and opportunities. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to Mary Donaghy, Alyson Huntly, Carol McMurdo-Paton, Martin Settle and Jessica Ward-King for their coordination. The Engaging Difference workshop, held in November, allowed us to explore what it would take to become a truly intercultural church. We were confronted with the reality that it is us who must change if we are to become a community that welcomes people just as they are, in their whole selves. Deep thanks to Renée Kokonya Sullivan and Catherine Gutjahr for their leadership.

There are many to thank for their ongoing work over the course of this year. To the Search Committee – Scott Radloff, Andrew Sacret, Norman Ball, Ben Lindsay-Clark, Mary Donaghy, Dorothy Naylor, Polly Vargath, and Nira Dookeran – thank you for your dedication and commitment throughout the process of identifying and selecting a new minister for our community. To the temporary Transition Committee, thank you for your work to prepare for the arrival of Kanana. In particular, thank you to Elena Powell, Norman Ball and Scott Radloff for finding housing and sorting immigration details: your attention to detail is unparalleled. Thank you to our outgoing Council members: Marilynn Brodie, Carol Shipley, and Renée Kokonya Sullivan. Finally, a special thank you to outgoing Past Chair Martin Settle, whose spirit-led leadership was essential to this period of transition, and to our Treasurer of eight years, Andrew Clark, whose commitment to our community's health is unwavering.

As we move into 2026, we face uncertain and challenging times throughout the world and within our congregation. Though stable and privileged, our financial position presents some challenges that are less familiar to us. Our needs as a congregation are high and we must balance what we can do with the resources that are available to us. This year we will focus on

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the priorities of stewardship and radical inclusion, with the intention to continue building a community that cares for and loves each and all others. It is through creating and nurturing our sense of belonging that we will thrive, creating here the kin-dom of God.

MINISTERS

For the period of January to June *(Rev. Anne Montgomery, Minister of Pastoral Care)*

Greetings, everyone!

It has been a pleasure to be at First United Church for the first half of 2025, in the ministry of Pastoral Care, and leading the occasional worship service, while you searched for a new minister.

First, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to our Staff Marg Stubington, Nikki Nel, Cindy Cherry, Paul Dumais, and a special note of thanks for the ministry of the Rev. Alyson Huntly; Council Chairs Marti Settle and Robert VanderBerg; all who serve on committees, and all who lead groups; all who dedicate their time and work with our children and youth; all who assist in making our worship services so meaningful; all who welcomed me and trusted me with your joys and concerns; all who take care of the small but important things so necessary for our community of faith to work so well.

Some highlights of the first six months of 2025 have been the annual shared worship with All Saints Anglican, our evening at the National Arts Centre, notes from Yemen written by Gail Weber, the 100th anniversary service of The United Church of Canada, and learning from all of you at First – thank you for sharing your thoughts, memories, and ideas.

I wish you all many blessings as you enter a new chapter of the First United Church story with your new minister!

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Anne Montgomery, Minister of Pastoral Care

For the period of January to June *(Rev. Alyson Huntly, Minister of Worship)*

It was a privilege to spend the first six months of 2025 in interim leadership with First United Church. I loved working alongside Anne and feeling a sense of teamwork and trust as our different gifts came together. I am grateful for the commitment and gifts of the staff team: Cindy, Marg, Nikki, and Paul. Working with Council and with Council chairs Robert and Marti was a wonderful experience, as was observing all the other ways First United members collaborate in leadership.

A few highlights of this season for me were:

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- The vibrant time together on Sundays, including worship and community and in particular our celebration of Easter and Pentecost
- The attentive and loving preparation for Kanana's arrival
- The insight and ideas that emerged from the "Heaven Knows Where We Are Going" workshop, and being part of the planning process with a great leadership team
- Watching people step up to new responsibilities and roles, knowing how important it is, as one person said, to "not expect one minister to do it all"
- Leaving one role at First and having the opportunity to join the J2A leadership team

First United is in very good hands thanks to its engaged lay leadership, its strong vision, and its gifted and Spirit-filled new minister.

Wishing you all many blessings for the year ahead, with gratitude for who you are and all you do,

Rev. Alyson Huntly, Minister of Worship

For the Period of September – December *(Rev. Dr. Kanana Muketha, Minister)*

At the start of each year, our church pauses to reflect on the past, thank God for our resilience, and celebrate our successes. In this spirit, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the Council Leadership and myself.

I begin by thanking the Search Committee for their thorough and dedicated work. I am also grateful to the Rev. Brian Cornelius for laying such a strong foundation within this congregation. The Rev. Anne Montgomery and the Rev. Alyson Huntly deserve special mention for stepping in to support our thriving community after the retirement of Brian.

Next, my thanks go to the Transition Committee, who took over seamlessly after the Search Committee, and helped us settle so well in Ottawa. I appreciate Elena Powell, Norman Ball, and all other Committee members whose efforts made a real difference. I am especially grateful to Mary Donaghy and Margaret Maxted, Jane Ellis and Dale Walker for their hospitality in opening their homes to us when Dorothy Naylor fell ill and had to change her travel plans, where we were initially scheduled to stay.

I'm also grateful to the congregation and the Council of First United Church led by Robert VandeBerg for warm welcome. Our church thrives because of your unwavering support, and through you, we have truly witnessed the spirit at work and divine presence. The growth and maturity of the congregation is a testament of the African Ubuntu philosophy "I am because you are, and since you are, therefore I am."

I am thankful for the Ministry and Personnel Committee – their grace, support, and encouragement have ensured everything runs smoothly, in all aspects of our life.

My gratitude extends to all our groups. Thank you to the Worship Committee for your collaborative spirit and steadfast support in planning. Your participation means so much. I also appreciate Nikki Nel, our Intergenerational Coordinator, along with the youth and First children's program leaders for your excellent work in Rite13, J2A, Youth at Church (YAC), and to everyone working behind the scenes. I am grateful for the growing spirit of interculturalism among our congregants as we strive to become an ever more inclusive and diverse church.

I am also thankful to our Music Director, Marg Stubington, whose inspiring music nourishes us spiritually. It's been a joy collaborating since I arrived at First.

Gratitude goes to the social justice committees – environmental and refugees – the Healing Pathways, Pastoral Care Committee, TGIF, hospitality and greeters and all whose names are not mentioned here. I will not forget to appreciate youth and children who have been participating in our worship services. Your gifts have been a blessing to each of us.

I would also like to recognize our treasurer Andrew Clark, for the wonderful work he has done in the past years, Cindy Cherry for her passion in her area of expertise, and Paul Dumais for his dedication. We are grateful as well for our partners at All Saints' Anglican, the Rev. Kathryn Otley, the Rev. Chung Yan and all their staff.

May the love of the divine and the gift of grace guide all that we do and aspire to accomplish now and, in the years, to come.

Grace and Peace!

Respectfully Submitted by
Rev. Dr. Dorcas Kanana Muketha
Minister, First United Church

MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL

(Joan Rogers)

The M&P Committee is comprised of Sandra Ballantyne, Amelia Buchanan, Paul Durber, Sarah Orsini, Scott Radloff and Joan Rogers (chair). Each staff member is paired with a member of M&P; they meet regularly.

M&P consults with, supports, supervises and evaluates the performance of First United staff members. Our 'job' is greatly facilitated by the positive attitudes and dedication of our skilled staff. We thank Kanana, Marg, Cindy and Nikki for all that they bring to their work and to the life of our church.

EASTERN ONTARIO OUTAOUAIS REGIONAL COUNCIL

(Wendy Snelgrove)

The Regional Council (EOORC for short) is the body (or court in fancy language) of the church administration which sits between individual congregations and the National Office of the United Church of Canada. The Regional Council has an oversight function, and this includes assisting congregations in the process of searching for and employing ministry personnel. EOORC also provides learning opportunities and facilitates congregations to come together for ministry and mission work. Members of the Regional Council include all ministers, and lay representatives from each congregation. For 2025 and into 2026, the national church has been focusing on Towards 2035, a look at the future of the United Church of Canada. Church Council will be leading some events for First United congregants on this topic after Easter. Wendy Snelgrove is the lay representative for First to the Regional Council. Due to our size, First is entitled to two voting lay representatives, so anyone who would be interested in serving First and the wider United Church in this capacity would be most welcome. Feel free to speak to Wendy or to the Church Council.

CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY

(Rev. Dr. Kanana Muketha)

Nikki Nel is the member of the First United Church. Nikki was interviewed in January 2025 and found suitable to be a candidate for diaconal ministry; accordingly, her candidacy officially began in June 2025.

Nikki's placement in First United began in October and ends in May 2026. Covenanting and recognition with the First United Church for her placement happened on Sunday, October 20, 2025, as part of Sunday worship service. Her facilitator, mentor, and placement local committee participated in her field placement orientation on Wednesday October 8th on Zoom with Janet Loss program staff, Center for Christian Studies.

Nikki's Facilitator:

Rev. Dr. Dorcas Kanana Muketha

Nikki's Mentor:

Catherine Gutjahr

Nikki's Local Committee:

Norman Ball

Maggie Melanson

Leah Auclair

Shirley Paton

MEMBERSHIP

2025 Membership of First United Church

Members	177
Adherents	182
VAMs and Retired Clergy	12
Non-resident members	23
Total persons under pastoral care	394
Total households under pastoral care	220
Average attendance at worship	154

Deaths/Funerals/Memorial Services: 3

May 18: Larry Burton

June 14: Wayne Dawson

August 29: Lyndell Hughes

Members Removed by Death: 2

Wayne Dawson

Lyndell Hughes

Retired Clergy Removed by Death: 1

Larry Burton

Removed by Transfer of Membership: 0

New Members received by Affirmation of Faith: 2

Shirin Ghotrati

Marcel Daigle

New Members received by Transfer of Membership: 4

Sheila Smith

Joan Stafford

Doug Stafford

Leona Alexander Lucas

Baptisms: 5

Jan 12: Hugh Stersky

Jan 12: Erzsi Stersky

Jan 12: Shirin Ghodrati (adult)

June 1: Leona Alexander Lucas (adult)

June 8: Aubree Walters

Weddings: 2

April 11: Lynda Taylor & Patricia Lacroix

July 26 : Trevor McBain & Kassandra Crawford

Voluntary Associate Ministers (VAMs): 7

Ellie Barrington, Howard Clark, Catherine Gutjahr, Alyson Huntly, Grant McNeil,
Maggie Melanson, Sharon Moon

Retired Clergy affiliated with First United, Ottawa: 5

Linda Appleby, Dorothy Naylor, Harry Ousoren, James Scott, Tom Sherwood

TREASURER REPORT

(Andrew Clark)

Please read this report as a complement to the detailed financial statements and budget provided in the Annual Report.

General Fund Results in 2025 and 2026 Budget

The General Fund is used for the day-to-day operations of the church. All unrestricted donations to First are recognized as revenues to this Fund. As predicted, because 2025 was the second year of our Ministerial transition, it was not a typical year from a financial perspective. Recall that when we began the year we did not know when we might call a new Minister or how much the transition costs would be for our new Minister, so we were not in a position to budget for them. Considering this context, we did quite well overall with **a deficit of only \$12,251** even with \$23,950 of transition costs (mostly the costs of Kanana's move from Alberta to Ottawa and installation costs). However, we were able to achieve these results largely as a result of **operational expenses** that were \$19,100 below budget (in turn, mostly the result of having no ministerial expenses for July and August). We were short of our overall budget revenues by \$4,500.

The concerning news for the year was that we had a shortfall (actual less than budgeted) of Congregational givings of \$16,600; instead of rising by 2% from last year as proposed and budgeted, overall givings actually declined by 7% from the previous year. We were able to partially offset this decline with higher-than-expected other revenues (i.e. rental income, memorial givings and interest income). The other good news is that our **First things First** (pre-authorized remittance) program grew and exceeded its budget target and we exceeded our Advent appeal target of \$40,000 by \$4,600.

The proposed **Budget for 2026** projects **a deficit of \$13,270** and this will be a challenge for the community as explained below. The Finance Committee has done its best to contain expenses with operational expenses budgeted to rise by 4.1% over last year's actual expenses. The largest increase is our staff budget as we return to a full staff complement. On the revenue side, in addition to the increased value of the **Building and Legacy Fund**, Trustees agreed to increase the annual 4.5 percentage share transfer to the General Fund to a 5 percentage share this year. We are also proposing to keep the Intergenerational Transfer

at the same level as last year – recognizing that this will use up the remaining balance in this Restricted Council Fund.

The challenge to our First community this year is to increase our year-over-year givings by 5%, with 4% coming from existing members and the other 1% hopefully coming from new members. As always, some will be able to increase their givings by more than this, some may need to stay the same and some may have to decrease their givings.

Council is looking at conducting a stewardship campaign as well as other opportunities for increased giving while also looking at reviewing our medium-term financial plan to get us back on a sustainable financial path.

A note of caution: the budget was made prior to the recent burst pipes and flooding event and makes no provision for extra costs for this event simply because we cannot yet accurately predict what these will be. We are optimistic our insurance will cover most of these costs (except for the deductible) and we will be tracking these costs separately and reporting back to the congregation on where things stand as the situation develops.

Mission and Service, Directed Outreach, Refugee Ministries and Soul Space

The First community continued to give generously to our various outreach missions and ministries. We exceeded our increased \$36,000 goal for 2025 for the **Mission and Service Fund (M&S)** of the UCC by over \$1,000. M&S contributes to the UCC ministries and outreach in Canada and the world. The 2026 budget proposes the target remain at \$36,000.

First United also gave a record amount to the **Westboro Region Food Bank**, raising just over \$27,000, of which \$ 14,457 was raised through a campaign by Joan Rogers with the residents at the Metropole Condominium. This amount is in addition to the \$2,500 First United gave to the Food Bank as part of its regular budget. Other Directed Outreach gifts went to Centre 507 and the Multi-Faith Housing Initiative. First United continues to manage a portfolio of **refugee funds** acting as the Constituent Group and co-sponsor with other refugee support groups in Ottawa. We received income of \$59,458 for refugee accounts and disbursed \$63,716 resulting in the value of our Council's Restricted Refugee Accounts standing at \$154,016 at year end. (See note 8 and the separate narrative report on our refugee ministry).

Soul Space attends to the spiritual needs of street health workers and since its creation has been directed by a Steering Committee accountable to Church Council. In 2025, by mutual agreement of Church Council and the Steering Committee, it was agreed to transfer the remaining balance of this Restricted Ministry account as at December 19th to a new not-for-profit entity with its own Board of Directors entitled the Soul Space Collective. The amount transferred was \$88,625. First United Church signed an Agency Agreement with Soul Space to ensure that these Funds would be used for the original charitable purposes intended in line with First United's mission and values and in accordance with CRA guidelines. (See separate narrative report on the Soul Space program and note 7 in the Financial Statements).

Memorial Givings

In 2025, we received gifts to the Westboro Food Bank and the memorial fund in memory of Wayne Dawson. We also received gifts to the memorial fund to honour the lives of Larry Burton and Lyndell Hughes.

Words of thanks

Many people contribute to the Finance Ministry at First:

A special thanks to Cindy Cherry, our Church Administrator, who keeps the books, tracks donations, and puts in extra work at year end and the beginning of the year.

Jane Ellis, our champion of doing Bank Deposits.

Jane Ellis, Shirin Ghodrati, Wendy Snelgrove, Caroline Crowe and Dale Walker who work with me on the Finance Committee.

Susan Little, Shirin Ghodrati and Jane Ellis, who conducted the annual internal review of our 2025 Financial Statements.

Catini St. Pierre for advising on this year's Advent Campaign.

Neil Knudsen who oversaw the Soul Space books with Cindy.

Dale Walker, our Donations Coordinator.

Our cheque co-signers: Norman Ball, Joan Rogers, Jane Ellis, Margaret Maxted Carol McMurdo, and myself.

And a huge thank you to Susan Little for her expert accounting advice, her assistance helping the Treasurer complete our annual charitable return to the CRA and her leadership of the annual internal review of our financial statements.

Parting words: It has been a privilege and honour (as well as a lot of work) to serve as Treasurer and on Church Council for the past eight years. I never ceased to be amazed at the generosity and dedication both in time and money of this community to its mission. I expect I will continue to support the stewardship ministry in some capacity at First United including assisting the incoming Treasurer.

DONATIONS REPORT

Leaders: Dale Walker is the Donations coordinator who reviews and ensures that the work by the Church Administrator Cindy Cherry is accurate.

We are grateful for the generous support of so many who support First United. In the charts below, there is a report on average monthly givings by congregants to First United.

STEP CHART

Monthly Offerings to First United in 2025 - 190 Donors

Donations are averaged to include Advent givings, and those who give periodically or through the donation of stocks/mutual funds

							7 Donors	over \$400 33% of monthly total
							34 Donors	\$300-\$399 9.5% of monthly total
							\$200 +	
					13 Donors			
				23 Donors	\$150-\$199			
			39 Donors	\$100-149				
			\$50-\$99					
		32 Donors						
		\$25-\$49						
	12 Donors							
	\$10-\$24							
37 Donors								
up to \$9								

Total Average Monthly Giving to First United – \$17,900

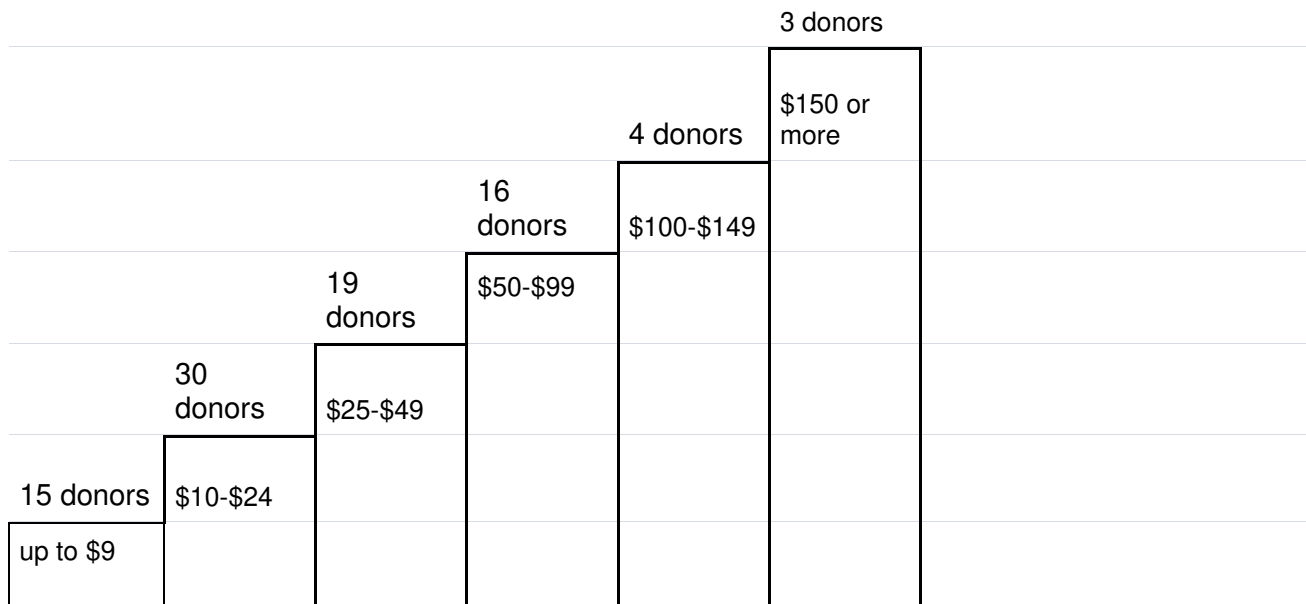
Total Annual Giving to First United - \$214,792

STEP CHART

Monthly Offerings to Mission and Service in 2025 - 87

Donors

Donations are averaged to include those who give periodically or through the donation of stocks/mutual funds



Total Average Monthly Giving to Mission & Service – \$3,091

Total Annual Mission and Service - \$37,093 (which includes loose cash)

In 2025, through First United Church, donations of \$27,159 were directed to following organizations:

Westboro Region Food Bank, Multi-Faith Housing, Centre 507.

We also received \$59,458 for Refugee ministries, most donated through community sponsorships.

TRUSTEES' REPORT

(Monique Van Schie)

Membership: Peter Engelmann, Kanana Muketha (ex-officio), Lisa Nafziger, Marti Settle, Jason Swan and Monique van Schie.

Every congregation in the United Church of Canada must have a Board of Trustees. The Trustees hold the real property (building and land) as well as cash investments (Building/Legacy Fund) in trust for the congregation and the wider United Church. Since we no

longer own any real property, the ongoing responsibility of our Board of Trustees is to ensure the investments in our Building/Legacy Fund are well managed.

Background to the Building/Legacy Fund: The primary purpose of the Building/Legacy Fund is to provide annual income to the General Fund of the congregation to offset our building costs. The bulk of this investment comes from the proceeds of the 2007 sale of our Kent Street building.

The original investment in 2007 was \$930,000. Over the years, the Church Council designated bequests to be invested in this fund, \$139,132 from Sharon Hawkins in 2018 and 2020 and \$14,716 from Kathy Southee in 2023. The total amounts invested are \$1,083,848.

Presently, the Building/Legacy Fund is valued at \$1,624,556. Because the Church Council did not need money for cashflow, the Trustees retain \$137,842 from the General Fund to keep invested and realize investment growth. The total invested is \$1,762,398. A detailed accounting of the present value of the Building/Legacy fund is included in Schedule 7 of the Reviewed Financial Statement.

Policy for the Use of these Funds: Since the establishment of the Fund, an annual contribution has been transferred to the General Fund to support the operations of the congregation. As a congregation, we originally adopted a policy of transferring 4% of the December 31 market value of the Building/Legacy Fund for operations in the following calendar year. This policy allowed the congregation to realize growth in the fund, and thus increase the amount of the transfer to offset inflation and increasing budget demands. In 2022, the congregation approved an adjustment to 4.5% transfer. In 2026, the Trustees recommend a 0.5% increase to a 5% annual transfer to the General Fund.

Recommendations for the 2026 Budget:

The trustees recommend:

- 1. The transfer of 5% of the market value of the Building/Legacy Fund to the General Fund and, therefore, a transfer to the General Fund in the amount of \$81,200 based on a total equity of \$1,624,556.**
- 2. That transfers to the General Fund be enacted at the discretion of the Trustees and the Finance Committee, based on congregational cash flow and fluctuations in the value of investments.**

Historical Information:

The previous transfers to the General Fund for the last nine years have been:

2025 -	\$71,800 at 4.5%
2024 -	\$66,000 at 4.5%
2023 -	\$62,750 at 4.5%
2022 -	\$69,200 at 4.5%
2021 -	\$54,980 at 4.0%
2020 -	\$49,660 at 4.0%
2019 -	\$45,800 at 4.0%
2018 -	\$45,500 at 4.0%
2017 -	\$44,000 at 4.0%

The investment return over the last nine years has been:

2025	5.8%
2024	10.1%
2023	8.1%
2022	(4.6%)
2021	15.9%
2020	9.4%
2019	12.6% - began investing with Fiera Capital Wealth
2018	(2.2%) - invested in a Balanced Fund with Fiera Investments
2017	9.0%

As a reminder, at the 2007 Annual Meeting, the congregation approved an investment policy which authorized the Trustees to select a professional manager/firm/foundation to manage the investments with a long-term investment horizon, including investments in equities. Such an investment policy recognizes years in which there could be investment losses but, for investments to grow at a rate greater than the rate of inflation, such a policy is necessary for greater returns over the long run.

The congregation also required that the manager be guided by the ethical investment policy of the United Church of Canada. Trustees are obligated to follow the criteria set out in the Ontario Trustees Act and must exercise the care, skill, diligence, and judgment that a prudent investor would exercise in making investments and are obligated to follow the terms of the United Church's Trusts of Model Deed. In addition, Trustees are not personally liable for losses on investments if they follow the prudent investor approach as set out by the Ontario Trustees Act.

Our investment strategy with Fiera continues with 50% of funds invested in a Balanced Fund (which is a combination of alternative income and equities), 25% in Global Equities, and 25% is invested in alternative income sources, such as loans for infrastructure developments, agriculture, real estate, and green projects. This strategy has a goal of providing growth as well as stability since the alternative income sources are not impacted by stock market fluctuations.

Our Commitment to Spiritual Nurture in Community

COMMITTEE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL, CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

(Allegra Newman)

Membership: Allegra Newman (Chair), Nikki Nel (Coordinator for Intergenerational Ministry), Marti Settle, Sarah Grimwood

Formed in April 2022, the committee provides leadership and guidance to support the Coordinator of Intergenerational, Children's and Youth Programming and seeks to further enhance the intergenerational priority at First United.

First United commits to meeting the spiritual needs of several generations to learn and grow together, enhancing worship engagement/leadership across generations and deepening relationships across all ages.

2025 Highlights:

- Intergenerational services: June service focused on congregational priorities for Fun, Faith and Friendship events.
- Intergenerational choir
- Fun, Faith and Friendship gatherings:
 - February 1: Theme: Presence & Connection-Nurturing Interconnection & Getting to know each Other
 - April 6: Theme: We Worship Together as a Community
 - November 22: Theme: Becoming an Intercultural Church
- Church picnic - June 22
- Young adult gatherings -YAC gatherings
- Welcome lunches in the spring and the fall
- Guess who's coming to dinner
- Pageant

Intergenerational events are well attended and appreciated by congregants of all ages. The intergenerational committee is looking for additional members, including a co-chair, to further support Nikki in the planning of events in the coming year.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

(Nikki Nel)

Children's Program Leaders:

Catini St. Pierre, Claire Savage, Emily Cerantola, Joanna Smith, Kate Hoye, Lisa Gue, Melanie Laneville, Peter Moore, Rachel Dietrich

Helping Hands:

Andrew Sacret, Aster Dusome, Bart Sullivan, Brad Timmins, Carol Dawson, Jessica Ward King, Jessie Thomson, Katrina Pilkington, Mary Ann Rogers, Mary Blakley, Maureen Hewitt, Shannon Headland, Tyler Nagle, Wendy Snelgrove, Zachary Chrumka

First United Church is committed to providing a safe space for all our children and youth. This year our programs have been filled with energy, growth, and learning. We have established a welcoming community that is open and accepting of children and youth as they are. We are delighted with the number of new families that have joined our existing families to create a vibrant community. We ran two children's program groups (ages 3-7 and 7-10). We had 42 children attending on a regular basis in the two groups. However, the number we have on any given Sunday varies a fair amount from week to week. With families moving our numbers dropped significantly in the fall.

A big thank you to our Children's Program leaders who bring many gifts and make our children feel safe and welcome in our congregation. Thank you also to our helping hands who help provide supervision and support in the programs. Both our Rite13 (ages 11-13) and J2A (age 13-16) (Journey to Adulthood) are in the first year of their two-year cycle. Both groups have been developing the relationships between the youth, exploring Faith and being human in today's world. They have also had some fun adventures doing social activities. Our nursery space is open but we don't always have volunteer supervisors. Consequently, parents and guardians cannot assume that they can leave the children. We are hoping to re-establish a nursery team and would welcome volunteer enquiries so we can connect new families with others in our congregation. Thank you to the congregation for your continued support of the Children and Youth Ministries and all our families whose children and youth make our congregation such a rich and lively space.

What were the highlights in 2024?

- Easter Egg Hunt in the chapel
- Christmas Pageant with 20+ Children & Youth & three baby Jesi, Leo Ancelin, Mia Blanchard-Varga, Wesley Bizjak. Thank you to Pat Lindsey for your direction.

We are still in need of people to commit to leading and supporting our children and youth. Our programs are very successful because we provide consistent leadership, but our leaders are at risk of burning out.

YOUTH MINISTRY

RITE13 PROGRAM

History and Vision

Our modern youth program, titled Journey to Adulthood (J2A) began with a vision to create a safe place, where each youth feels loved, noticed, known and cherished. We recognize the need for friendship and support for youth as they explore their authentic selves. We prioritize curiosity and the fun aspects of exploring one's faith and place in the world. The program runs for 4 years: 2 years in Rite 13 and 2 years for J2A. The original program has been significantly modified over the years to respond to the complexities of our youth in a rapidly changing world. The first J2A program began in the fall of 2007; it ran for 2 years, led by Joyce Hardman, Wendy Snelgrove and Murray Angus with 11 youth. The first Rite 13 group, led by Andrew Jones, Pat Lindsey and Wendy Ann Deslauriers also began in 2007 with 6 youth. We are so grateful for all the leaders and youth that have made this a nurturing program possible for the past 18 years.

January – August 2025 (*Wendy Snelgrove*)

Leaders: Wendy Snelgrove & Polly Varga Toth

Rite 13 is our program for younger youth, with a 'graduation' this past summer. In the early part of 2025, Rite 13 was for youth in Grades 7 and 8, who moved to J2A in September 2025. For the first part of the year, leadership was provided by Polly Varga Toth and Wendy Snelgrove, with assistance from Tyler Nagle and Catini St. Pierre. The group had approximately 10-12 youth, with an average of 7 to 8 on any given Sunday. Every Sunday the youth gather for a time of openness, learning and sharing, followed by games. (The youth are especially fond of *Mafia*). The focus of our discussions is on our giftedness.

September – December 2025 (*Pat Lindsey*)

Leaders: Robert Grimwood, Jessica Ward-King, Ben Clark, Pat Lindsey

Many of our youth and leaders form deep bonds and continue to support each other over the years. Recently, I ran into one of the youth at his new job. I was overjoyed by his friendly smile and the warm feelings that flowed between us. He appeared to be a kind supervisor to two new co-op students. It was the highlight of my day.

In the fall of 2025, a new group began, composed of youth in grades 6 and 7.

9 youth have attended. We are grateful for additional leadership provided by Aster Dusome and the steadfast support of Nikki Nel.

We meet in room 5/6 every Sunday. We remove our shoes to honour our sacred space, we light a candle and confidentially share our concerns, highs, lows, how we feel and what prayers are needed.

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Our themes over the fall included: the power of prayer from healing to awe; meditation; creating our own creation stories, recognizing our gifts and abilities, and exploring social justice issues.

Fall 2025 Highlights

Saunders' Farm Pumpkin Fest

Mini retreat – exploring the Moses Story, games and pita pizza

Performing in the Christmas Pageant, “What If”.

Emerging

Our current Rite 13 group looks forward to fund raising for the Multi-faith Housing Initiative Tulipathon in May.

JOURNEY TO ADULTHOOD (J2A)

January – July 2025 (*Jillian Buckie*)

Leaders: Jillian Buckie, Mirelle Ward-King, and Ben Lindsey-Clark

This cohort of the J2A program was a small-but-mighty group of youth and leaders that met every Sunday morning during the church service. We spent this time exploring themes like faith and our self-identity, social justice, and how we can be part of creating positive, meaningful change in our communities. Our group was guided by the covenant we created together; some of our key values were engaging each other with respect and curiosity, cultivating a safe space where we can be ourselves, and (equally as important) having fun together.

We spent the first half of 2025 preparing for our pilgrimage to Calgary in July, which marked the end of our 2-year program for this cohort. Four youth and three leaders took part in the trip. We packed a lot into our eight days: going to the Calgary Stampede, experiencing the wonder-inspiring scenery of Lake Louise, climbing up Nose Hill to take in the view of the city (and for some, rolling back down), visiting the dinosaurs and hoodoos in Drumheller, and many other adventures both big and small. We were hosted by the very generous congregation of Hillhurst United Church. During our stay, we were welcomed by Hillhurst's youth group, joined in for their annual Stampede Sunday service, and participated in a contemplative mid-week service.

Throughout our preparations and during the pilgrimage, we reflected on the differences and similarities between being a pilgrim and being a tourist. We focused on eight themes (sacred space, community, faith, ritual expression, letting go, offering, perseverance, and celebration) and contemplated how each one appeared in our experiences.

We are very grateful for all of the help we received from the congregation in order to make a safe and fun pilgrimage possible. In particular, a big thank you to: Nikki and our “leaders emeritus”, Mary Donaghy and Andrew Sacret for their support during the planning and preparation phases; Sandra Ballantyne for providing on-call support leading up to and during

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the pilgrimage; Dorothy Naylor for connecting us with key contacts in Calgary; and all those who joined us for our 3 a.m. sending-off service, especially the volunteer drivers who transported us to the airport. Many thanks also to the parents and guardians for leading the fundraising efforts throughout the two years leading up to the pilgrimage, including the BBQ and line dancing event they hosted for the congregation. Most of all, thank you to our wonderful youth for their open hearts and minds throughout the whole J2A program and for sharing in the journey with us as leaders.

September – December 2025 (*Alyson Huntly*)

Leaders: Spencer Frost, Alyson Huntly, Judi Varga Toth, and Marti Settle

J2A is a group for youth aged 12 to 14 that meets together for two years. We are privileged to have a diverse group of 14 active members for 2025-2027. Youth bring their gifts of wisdom, challenge, spiritual insight, different life experiences, and of course a ton of energy.

What J2A is all about:

- Supporting one another on that long (and sometimes challenging) journey from being a kid to being an adult
- Growing and changing and learning
- Exploring and questioning everything ... values and faith and life and belief and spirit
- Discovering God, who is love
- Feeling Spirit presence in all of life
- Finding our vision and helping create a better world
- Being in a community that cares and accepts us just as we are.

Our first gathering of the 2025-2027 group was Sept 14, 2025 and we met almost every Sunday until Christmas in the room at the top of the stairs off the main hall. That room has become our base and we have worked together to make it feel like home as we created a group covenant of respect and decorated the space.

Sunday morning sessions are mix of group activities, discussion, personal sharing, snacks, games, and art, all centred around themes of spirituality, self, and society.

Events in the fall 2025, outside of Sunday mornings, included:

- A Pumpkin carving event to raise funds for future J2A activities
- A day at the farm hosted by Spencer and Faisal with a BBQ, games, and other activities
- An overnight sleepover at the church with games and other activities
- J2A youth and their families helping with hospitality once every six weeks

Respectfully submitted by Alyson for the 2025-2027 J2A leaders.

CHOIR AND MUSIC MINISTRY

(Marg Stubington)

As our community continues to move and thrive through this period of transition, music at First United also continues to thrive. Through the spring, our interim ministers provided leadership with Alyson Huntly leading most services as we all kept on singing. Following the call of our new minister in the spring, I enjoyed working with our excellent lay leaders through the summer months.

SuperChoir keeps growing; we are now up to 36 singers with approximately 26 to 28 singers present each Sunday. Our Thursday rehearsals are full of comradery and playfulness and we continue to support one another. We enjoy rehearsing and Sunday singing in different formations: in a circle in the Chancel, surrounding the congregation, in the centre of the sanctuary or in our usual choir area. As always, we sing music from a variety of styles and time periods and in several different languages as well (Latin, French, Spanish, Zulu, Swahili, German, English...). Some of our choir members travel quite a distance twice weekly – more than 30 minutes' drive each way. Thank you for your dedication!

In September, First United welcomed Rev. Kanana and I knew immediately that she adores music; it is clear that music brings Kanana lots of joy, especially music that makes us move! SuperChoir continues to provide inspiring anthems and lead congregational singing every week. On November 2 (All Souls Day), we had a Hymn Sing to honour the memory of 'saints' in our lives. Congregants sent us suggestions of hymns and names of those to whom we would sing. We created a beautiful service around 12 different hymns that held great meaning to many of us. SuperChoir was proud to take part in Rev. Kanana's Covenanting Service on November 23rd; we sang and danced our way through the joyful Hlonolofatsa for this celebration. For Fun, Faith and Friendship on November 22nd, a small group of singers worked on Put A Little Love in Your Heart and joined the rest of SuperChoir at the Sunday service the next morning.

The choir has been introducing new songs and hymns in recent services from *Then Let Us Sing!*, a new resource from the United Church of Canada. The church has purchased books for the choir and lyrics will be available on-screen during services. Our music ministry was enhanced by the gifts of Greg Renaud (trumpet for Easter and Remembrance), Stephen Rouble and Ellen Bobet (violin), Tyler Nagle (djembe) and Pat Mayberry.

The choir and congregation continue to benefit from the generosity of our volunteer sound technicians, Scott Radloff, Norman Ball, Marti Settle, and Robert Grimwood who make the music sound as good as can be, both in person and on Zoom.

Thank you to the members of the Worship Committee, led by Jane Sly, for steering us through the summer as we waited for news of our new minister's arrival, and for your continued leadership!

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Kanana, I look forward to learning and growing with you! Nikki and Cindy, my hard-working colleagues, thanks for being steady rocks. Thank you to Sarah Orsini, my Ministry and Personnel liaison, for her support and guidance.

I am grateful to be working in this supportive community that values music so highly.

COMMUNICATIONS

(Nikki Nel & Cindy Cherry)

Communications and Social Media is a key ministry in ensuring that information is readily available to the congregation through Friendly Reminder emails, First Glance, our website and social media.

2025 highlights:

Nikki Nel maintains a social media presence. First has 470 followers on Instagram and 440 on Facebook. Nikki shares invitations to upcoming special events. We have heard people appreciate reminders about these events on Facebook.

Cindy Cherry maintains the website and produces *First Glance*.

DRUMMING—THE MINISTRY OF RHYTHM

(Dave Henderson)

It has been another banner year for the Ministry of Rhythm at First United. Every 1st and 3rd Monday of the year (with the exception of statutory holidays) you will find some joyful racket emanating from either the courtyard or the sanctuary at First United. Our small band of 'rhythmnauts' continues to be grateful to First United for the use of this facility.

Late 2025, we decided to open up an additional beginners class on Wednesday evenings to deal with the interest from others interested in learning to drum. These keen folks have come to us through past advertisements in First Glance and social media posts, both of which have been suspended to manage interest with our ability to accommodate those wishing to learn. The intent is to integrate this new group with other circles in the community and/or the Monday Ministry as their confidence and prowess improves.

Highlights last year were the invitation to drum at Larry Burton's (a long-time member) memorial service at First United, a welcomed visit from Kanana in the Fall and our annual gig playing on the Santa Claus Day Parade float of the St Lawrence Stage in Morrisburg.

Last year our voluntary good will offering to the church amounted to eleven hundred dollars.

Again, our deepest gratitude to the staff (Cindy) for her excellent liaison skills and the leadership of First United for accommodating the Ministry. We can't wait to get back to the

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sanctuary after the repairs are done; in the interim we are drumming out of the earthen vessels Clay Studio in Hintonburg (as noted in the photos).



DUTY OF CARE

The Church Council of First United appoints a Duty of Care Steward to oversee the implementation of *Duty of Care* policies adopted by First United (the policies are available through the church office) and to implement the process of securing Police Vulnerable Sector Checks (PVSCs).

All those participating in providing leadership in our children, youth and healing pathways ministries updated their Police Vulnerable Sector Checks (PVSC).

We thank all those who volunteer at First United. Implementing these policies is an ongoing process. Thank you for your cooperation in securing PVSCs.

ENNEAGRAM GROUP

(Dorothy Naylor)

In September 2025, we began our seventh year. Leadership is shared by teams who design sessions based on a book we have chosen as a guide for the months ahead. Earlier in 2025, our book led us in identifying and understanding our personality dynamics in relationships. Our studies in the fall were guided by *More Than a Number*, a book that shows that just knowing

our number is not the goal. Rather it goes on from that discovery, revealing more understanding of ourselves and offering pathways for growth and development.

We have been meeting the second Thursday evening of the month. Our doors are open. New people are welcome. To make it a better experience for newcomers and existing members, this year we decided to ask that newcomers join the group in October or November.

TO GATHER IN FELLOWSHIP (TGIF)

(Maryanne MacDonald)

TGIF is a gathering of members of our church family to share stories and life experiences, to provide support and social interaction through a combination of online and in-person opportunities. In 2025, we met on the Fourth Friday of every month in Room 5/6 and were treated to good snacks and conversation. On one such Friday we were treated to a marvelous travelogue by Shirley Paton and Carol McMurdo-Paton about their trip across Canada. In September, many of our regular members joined the 100th birthday celebration for Audrey McCooeye in her original home on Florence Street, sharing many memories of Audrey's life and her attendance as a regular at TGIF. On December 12th, 21 members and friends gathered in the church hall for a potluck Christmas luncheon, where everyone felt part of the community and felt supported physically with great food, emotionally with great conversations and spiritually with the singing, games and laughter. In August it was with sadness we said goodbye to our dear friend and one of the original members of TGIF, Lyndell Hughes, whose kindness, wisdom, gentle spirit and boundless love will live on in our hearts forever. We also said goodbye to one of our newest members Wayne Dawson. Wayne and his wife Carol had been coming to TGIF for the past three years and we enjoyed Wayne's conversations and sense of humour. Both Lyndell and Wayne are greatly missed. This is a welcoming community of not just seniors but also those who are in need of fellowship and connection. Everyone is welcome.

WELCOMING AND HOSPITALITY MINISTRY

In 2025, one Welcome Lunch was held in October. Jenna Griffiths, Ellen Bobet, Dale Walker, Carol Dawson, Catherine Gutjar and Shirley Paton coordinated this gathering of approximately 10 newcomers. Kanana opened the meal with prayer.

Greetings were provided by chairs of Council, Finance Committee, Intergenerational Programming, and Worship Committee. Attendees were encouraged to sign up for name tags and the church email list.

A special thanks to Bruce Cameron, Carol McMurdo and Jon for their support in the kitchen and setup and cleanup before and after the meal.

Hospitality: Over the years, we have had hospitality teams to welcome those attending the Sunday services, take up the offering, serve refreshments after worship and clean up afterwards. Members of hospitality ensure that First United's tradition of inclusive welcome continues.

Hospitality Team Leaders: This year, Bruce Cameron volunteered to be the Hospitality Coordinator and co-lead with Allegra Newman (the Assistant Hospitality Coordinator) with J2A on Team 3. Bruce also fills in to lead Teams 1 and 2 as the leaders' role remain vacant. Jane Ellis and Dale Walker lead Team 4, and Jo-Anne Harvey and Mary Ann Rogers co-lead Team 5. A huge thank you to all!!

WORSHIP COMMITTEE/SUNDAY SERVICES

(Jane Sly)

The role of the Worship Committee is to creatively plan Sunday and special services throughout the year. This is the primary means to realize our commitment to offer spiritual nurturance to our community as we seek to provide inspiring and compassionate worship that tends to the needs of all ages. We seek to recognize in our progressive theology-inspired worship our commitment as a congregation to be intergenerational, anti-racist, environmentally conscious, justice seeking and affirming of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Current members of the group include Marg Stubington, Nikki Nel, Jane Sly, Pat Lindsey, Carol McMurdo-Paton, Emily Cerantola, Aster Dusome, Milo Popa and Tara Phillips.

Our Commitment to Healing

CONGREGATIONAL CARE NETWORK

2025 marked the first full year in the life of the First United Church Congregational Care Committee. The Committee met six times (there were three other meetings between the committee chair and ministry personnel). Meeting highlights include:

1. Discuss pressing congregational care needs;
2. Check-in with and support Rev. Anne in the provision of congregational care;
3. Put in place pastoral care resource people who could respond to emergency needs over the summer months (upon Rev. Anne's departure while awaiting Rev. Kanana's arrival);
4. Offer a congregational care orientation to Rev. Kanana upon her arrival;
5. Support Rev. Kanana in congregational care as she learned more about our community and our approach to care;
6. Review of the Committee's purpose and future direction upon the arrival of Rev. Kanana.

The Vision for the Committee as set out in its terms of reference is:

"A priority for First United is a commitment to spiritual nurture in community as well as to healing and wholeness. To embody these commitments, the Congregational Care Committee

- *recognizes that people who know each other care for each other;*
- *facilitates formal and informal mechanisms to provide care for the members and adherents of First United."*

In addition to supporting ministry personnel, members of the committee were pro-active in reaching out to and supporting members of our faith community who needed pastoral care.

Committee members included Grant McNeil (Chair), Catherine Gutjahr, Rev. Anne (until her departure in June), Rev. Kanana (upon her arrival in September) and Joëlle Morgan. Joëlle left the committee in the fall of 2025 to begin her supervised ministry education placement at Rothwell Heights United Church in preparation for ministry in the wider church. As you can see, the committee has gotten very small.

We thank all who serve our community on this committee as well as the entire congregation who offer care to one another. We also thank Maryanne MacDonald who unofficially supports our efforts and both Maryanne and Carol Shipley for their Card Ministry at First United who we turn to regularly.

HEALING PATHWAY MINISTRY

(Sharon Moon)

The Healing Pathway ministry had many active practitioners including Jan Armstrong, Laura Bonnett, Howard Clark, Rosemary Clarke, Brian Cornelius, Paul Durber, Rita Finnegin, Andrea

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Fisher, Susan Garvey, Julia Gordon, Pat Lindsey, Basia Mair, Pat Mayberry, Neil McFadyen, Sharon Moon, Andrea Prazmowski, Hugh Robillard, Doug Stafford, Joan Stafford, Elaine Taylor and Monique Schie. We are excited to welcome seven new practitioners this past year.

We are a ministry offering prayer with laying on of hands for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Since COVID, we also offer distance healing and some of our practitioners practice mostly distance work. Everyone is welcome to receive. You do not have to be sick to come. In the past, receivers have gained benefit from the Healing Pathway as they have dealt with recovery from surgery, chronic pain, life transitions, emotional challenges, family crises, health issues, concussions or just plain longing for balance and wholeness in their lives and support for wellness and healing on all levels.

This ministry has been ongoing since about 2002. We offer regular weekly Tuesday afternoon sessions in the chapel, with Tuesday evening sessions every second week. This year, our in-person and distance practice offered over 450 sessions. This does not include many sessions offered outside of the church building.

Healing Pathway practitioners participate in several additional activities:

1. Healing Prayer with Anointing during regular communion services.
2. Chair sessions on the third Sunday of the month after church in the chancel area.
3. Occasionally going to a person's home or to a hospital bedside offering Healing Pathway.
4. Responding to group healing requests for distance energy healing, e.g., when a
5. grandchild is extremely ill or someone is recovering from surgery.
6. Doing presentations on what Healing Pathway actually is to small groups, e.g., Rite 13.
7. Giving leadership to at least one church service a year focusing on healing and
8. wholeness.

We have a robust ministry with dedicated practitioners and would welcome any who would like to learn and practice with us or who would like to receive and see what it is like.

Howard, Sharon, Paul and Hugh and our former minister Brian are also involved in Healing Pathway at the national level.

LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

(Jessica Ward-King and Zachary Houle)

Let's Talk About Mental Health began in 2019 in response to a need for members of the First community to have a place to gather to talk about their mental health and to gain support from other, like-minded individuals. This group offers hour-long, confidential sessions that do not feature the intervention of a mental health professional – just peers. It quickly evolved from a monthly, in-person peer support format, where members dropped in and chatted over snacks and coffee, into a more frequently needed biweekly online peer support group when the pandemic hit. The group went

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strongly throughout the pandemic, when need was high. When First began its return to in-person worship, Let's Talk tried to make the transition as well, but the uncertainty surrounding the return to in-person translated to poor group attendance. The decision was made to take a hiatus in July 2022. Due to personal circumstances of the leaders, the decision to resume the activity of this group was only taken in January 2024. This group meets once per month with a hiatus in the summer months of June-August.

Emerging Themes

We are looking forward to growing the group and perhaps later in the year focusing on ensuring that those in the wider First community know about the service. Peer support is an incredibly useful mental health support that can be provided for such low cost to groups at a time; it is worthwhile making this group widely accessible.

MEDITATION

(Liz Tyrwhitt and Cathy Nobleman)

Sitting in silence, creating community.

We have a committed group of meditators of between 8 and 15 people. One Monday, we had 22 people! We have become spiritual friends and greatly appreciate our time together. We begin with a welcoming prayer, readings by John Main and Laurence Freeman, 30 minutes of silence, and 10 or 15 minutes for discussion about the reading, our meditation practice or other issues of a spiritual nature. We welcome new members. If you would like more information, contact Liz Tyrwhitt at liz.tyrwhitt@gmail.com

SOUL SPACE COLLECTIVE CARE

(Danielle Rolfe)

About Soul Space

Soul Space is a ministry of First United that provides holistic spiritual support to frontline street health, harm reduction, community and social service workers in Ottawa. This includes individuals who work with people and families experiencing poverty, homelessness, complex substance use and mental health issues. Soul Space aims to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue among workers so that they are able to continue their meaningful work of caring for some of our community's most vulnerable members. Reflective spiritual practices are offered to frontline workers in group settings via collective care circles, social events, and retreats that include peer support and offerings led by professional facilitators.

Leadership

Since 2021, a First United-led steering committee has provided financial and programming oversight for Soul Space programs. In 2025, the committee included Lynn Fischer (chair), Danielle Rolfe (program director), Andrea Prazmowski (program support), Neil Knudsen (treasurer), Ken Hoffman and Brenda Cleary. The steering committee's monthly meetings ensure financial and administrative oversight of Soul Space programs, with administrative, financial and technical support offered by Cindy Cherry, Andrew Clark and Scott Radloff,

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respectively. Soul Space programs are additionally supported by seven Frontline Worker Advisory Group team members, and 25 community-based wellness providers (including Andrea Prazmowski and Lynn Fischer, both from First United).

2025 Highlights

In 2025, Soul Space hosted over 125 frontline workers across three retreats, three collective care circles, and one café social. This included teams from Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre's Families First program, Fairview Childcare Centre, Centretown Community Health Centre's Urban Outreach and Alternate Neighbourhood Community Response teams, and Somerset West Community Health Centre's Mental Health and Newcomer Clinics. Additionally, a clay workshop was hosted for students enrolled in the Art and Social Transformation course at St. Paul University, and a presentation about Soul Space was made at an international conference on Law Enforcement and Public Health here in Ottawa.

Emerging Themes

In August 2025, after four successful and supportive years as a ministry of First United, Soul Space became a registered non-profit organization; it is now known as *Soul Space Collective Care*. In December 2025, with the approval of the church council, an agency agreement was developed, recognizing the evolution of Soul Space from a community ministry of First United into an independent non-profit organization governed by its own board of directors. The agreement acknowledges the important historic support and financial stewardship provided by First United. As such, the balance of funds from the Soul Space ministry was transferred to the stewardship of Soul Space Collective Care's new Board of Directors to continue to offer programs in support of frontline workers within our community. Danielle Rolfe and all involved in Soul Space are ever-grateful for the support and guidance received from the community at First United in support of frontline workers.

Additional Information

www.soulpaceottawa.ca
info@soulpaceottawa.ca

Follow Soul Space Collective Care on:

[Facebook](#) (soulpaceottawa) and
[Instagram](#) (@soulpaceottawa)

Our Commitment to Social and Ecological Justice

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

(Wallace Beaton)

2025 marked the committee's first full year of activities and we continued to be guided by our mission which includes promoting calls to action from the United Church and its partners as well as supporting concrete steps to reduce First's ecological footprint. Below are some highlights of our work.

Waste management & diversion

Improving how First manages its waste and strengthening a culture of reduce, reuse and recycle was a major area of focus in 2025. A Waste Management sub-committee (which included an All Saints representative) was formed and met monthly. Key accomplishments included:

- partnering with a community service-learning program at uOttawa to develop a formal waste management strategy with both short and long-term actions.
- conducting a baseline waste audit to see exactly what we're throwing out and whether it's ending up in the right bins. (Thank you to our volunteers who supported this event!)
- switching the church over to the City's residential waste collection program.
- installing a new shed to provide more storage space for cardboard recycling.
- updating the building's supply of recycling, organics and garbage bins so they are colour-coded, labelled and easy to use.

In 2026 we will be engaging with both congregations and other users of the church to minimize our waste and maximize recycling and organics diversion.

Water Allies

The Water Care Allies group (which is affiliated with the committee) participated in several Sunday services to promote the protection and conservation of our water resources. Our primary message was simple: water is a basic human right and a sacred gift from the Creator. As a community of faith, we are called to honour and protect this life-sustaining resource.

Sustainable transportation

- We helped match members of the congregation in need of rides to church with those who could offer them.
- With support from the City's Travelwise program, we carried out a confidential survey to gather data on the congregation's current travel patterns to and from First on Sundays and throughout the week. Thank you to the 109 people who responded! A preliminary report has been received that will inform future work to promote sustainable mobility options and lessen demand for parking.

Other initiatives realized over the course of the year included planning and leading the annual Earth Sunday service (April); taking part in the Draw The Line March for climate justice (September); and collecting signatures in support of the Kairos Turn Debt Into Hope campaign (November).

My heartfelt thanks are offered to all of my fellow committee members for their time, ideas, energy and commitment to heeding the Creator's call to care for the Earth to the benefit of all living things.

Committee members in 2025:

Wallace Beaton, Chair

Nira Dookeran

Paul Durber

Rob Grimwood

Chris Henschel

Maryanne Macdonald

Katrina Pilkington (from November)

Andrea Prazmowski (until October)

Bibiana Seaborn

Judi Varga-Toth (until September)

FIRST CONNECTIONS LUNCHEON

First Connections was started in the early 2000s as a luncheon for the participants and workers of Project Upstream and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for a good meal, conversation and connection.

Those who attend are grateful for the gathering. The hall and kitchen are available once a month for the Project Upstream workers and their clients. Workers set up, provide food for lunch and then clean up. This will continue into 2026.

FOCUS ON PALESTINE (FOP)

(Sandra Ballantyne)

This is the first FoP report printed in the congregational AGM record, but the second year of the Team's learning, networking and acting regarding Palestine. Israel's now 100-year effort to dominate Palestine and subjugate its indigenous Palestinian peoples has climaxed and continues. In the past 31 months, at least 71,000 Palestinians are reported to have been killed (of which about 25,000 were children) and well over 121,000 injured or maimed, including the largest number of child amputees in any known conflict. Gaza has been bombed into a wasteland. Settler violence in the West Bank escalates.

Motivated by our rage and grief and by faith commitment to the United Church 'principles of justice,' the Team persists, with concerned others, to advocate for justice, peace and liberation for the peoples of Palestine. In continuity with our actions in 2024, here are some of our activities during 2025:

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- Update is a regular information e-mailing sent by Sandra Ballantyne to over 100 others in First United and beyond, sharing news, resources, appeals from Palestine Christians, United Church resources, and cooperative actions with kindred organizations;
- Film showing of *Letter to My Tribe*; letter-writing campaigns to the Prime Minister, focused on arms embargo and the need for ceasefire;
- A *What Can I Do?* workshop for 45 participants; participation in a St. Paul University conference on faith groups' tepid response to the moral crisis; online church-wide Advent vigil;
- Raising concern about Canada's Gazan refugee program and other correspondence to the federal government urging that actions accompany the verbal warnings issued to Israel;
- Promoting awareness of the Palestinian crisis among candidates in the federal election in April;
- Cooperating with civic organizations to highlight the threat to free speech and peaceful protest in the proposed municipal 'Bubble Bylaw.'
- Participation in the weekly demonstrations in downtown Ottawa organized by Palestinian Youth Movement and other groups;
- Presentation by Sandra Ballantyne and Diana Ralph (Independent Jewish Voices) at Parkdale UC;
- Consultation with the Regional Church's Executive Minister about influencing the UCC's 45th General Council's actions regarding Palestine;
- Sharing letters from Palestinian church leaders, in particular a wide ecumenical distribution of our response to the letter 'A Jerusalem Voice for Justice';
- Raise awareness regarding BDS—Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions—to pressure Israel to observe international laws and conventions;
- Encouraging prayerful reflection on the suffering and unjust treatment of the Palestinian people and, by their courageous example, strengthening determination for their liberation.

The Focus on Palestine Team members in 2025 were Sandra Ballantyne, Ibrahim Daibes, Judi Varga-Toth, Nira Dookeran, Paul Durber, Glenys Huws and Harry Oussoren, as well as Heather Douglas of Parkdale UC. For 2026, Judi is giving priority to leading the J2A group and Polly Varga Toth has joined the Team. Interest in this work is welcome, as is possible participation in the Team.

LIVING INTO RIGHT RELATIONS BOOK STUDY

(*Maryanne MacDonald*)

The Living in Right Relations Book Study group brings together members of First and other faith groups in Ottawa and beyond. Meeting via Zoom, we engage in in-depth discussions focussed on Indigenous-authored literature and perspectives. In 2025 the group dedicated five months to discussing two major books. The first one was *Who We Are - Four Questions for a*

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Life and a Nation, a memoir by the Indigenous elder, Murray Sinclair. Sadly, Murray Sinclair passed away merely two months after the book was published. The memoir provided a profound foundation for our year. As part of the discussion of *Who We Are*, we were honoured to host a Zoom call with Niigaan Sinclair, Murray's son, who generously shared his wisdom and time, and engaged our group in a deep Q&A.

As a follow up, the next book chosen was *Wînipêk, Visions of Canada from an Indigenous Centre* by Niigaan Sinclair. The book was the winner of the 2024 Governor General's Award for Literary non-fiction. It offered vital insights into how to take meaningful steps toward reconciliation.

The Living in Right Relations book study group was paused for the remainder of the 2025 to reassess direction and possible actions that could be taken from the various learnings. We look forward to creating a path forward together in 2026.

Miigwetch

MEN'S BREAKFAST (SUNDAY MORNING)

(Don Brodie)

On the second Sunday of each month (September through June), men of the congregation gather at 9:00 a.m. for breakfast, fellowship and conversation at the Newport Restaurant (corner of Churchill Avenue and Scott Street). All are welcome. A reminder notice appears in First Glance at the beginning of each month. Six to eight people attend regularly. For more information contact Don Brodie at donbrodie44@gmail.com.

PARTNERSHIP MINISTRIES

First United has formal partnerships to support our Christian witness and commitment to justice promoted in our faith tradition.

Affirm United: As an affirming congregation, we are a member of Affirm United. For many years, First United was the only affirming congregation in the city and often walked alone in the Pride Parade. This has changed. First United, along with many United Church congregations, marches in the Pride Parade and celebrates as more and more Ottawa area United Churches become affirming.

Centre 507: First United maintains a close relationship with the drop-in Centre at 507 Bank Street (where Centretown United Church is located). With the congregation's support, many people, among them the vulnerable and the lonely, find community. Each Advent, the Centre is grateful for socks filled with essentials and treats, gifted through First United. In addition to providing nutritious meals seven days per week, Centre 507 members also participate in several events within the Centre and around Ottawa. Some recent activities included attending

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Ottawa 67's games, beach days, banking classes and more!

Centre 507 also provides access to community resources including resume help, tax and legal assistance, help with housing and other needs-based services.

KAIROS: This ecumenical ministry focuses on social justice issues and has taken an important lead on Truth and Reconciliation. We work to promote their events and many times they offer leadership to educational events here at First. We have formalized our membership as a congregation and pay an annual fee. The United Church of Canada is a main funder through the Mission and Service Fund.

Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI): First United is a member of MHI, a coalition of over 40 faith communities and hundreds of individuals committed to providing affordable housing to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In fall 2024, Gloucester Housing Corp. officially amalgamated with MHI, expanding MHI's housing portfolio and increasing its reach to over 422 units and 1,000 tenants across nine housing communities. MHI's portfolio includes 62 one-bedrooms, 171 two-bedrooms, 161 three-bedrooms, and 28 four-bedrooms.

REFUGEE MINISTRY

Since 2015, First United has been involved in over 60 official refugee files either as a congregation or in partnership with community sponsorship groups.

2025 highlights:

This year was a fairly active one in our Refugee Ministry which currently co-sponsors third-party sponsorships with either other community groups or families seeking to reunite with members who are still refugees. First United acts as the Constituent Group. As the Constituent Group we act as bankers for the co-sponsorships, as well as provide assurance that these sponsorships are done in accordance with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) guidelines, providing backup support as necessary. At this time and given other priorities, First is not undertaking any direct sponsorships of refugees and we are limiting the number of active files to ten. The ministry is overseen by a refugee advisory committee reporting to Council and is currently made up of Norman Ball, Andrew Clark, Paul DeGiacamo, Roger Butt and Patricia Wilson.

Current Status of Refugees file: During the year, eight refugee sponsorships were completed and closed. We completed the complex Jabbour family reunification closing the six files of the family members who arrived last year. We also closed the sole sponsorship file (Heidi Honneger) and one Ottawa Centretown Refugee Action (OCRA) file. During the year, three refugees arrived and their one-year sponsorships began. Two of those arrived through a family reunification plan that brought over the mother and the brother of a previously arrived refugee. Those two arrived in July having fled Afghanistan and living in Turkey as refugees for many years. The third refugee from Syria arrived from Jordan in December and it is hoped the rest of her family will follow shortly. They are being sponsored by OCRA. In total, First United

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has five other families in the sponsorship queue awaiting IRCC processing which is currently taking up to three years to complete. Three of these families are co-sponsored by OCRA, one is co-sponsored with the Extended Table group and one is a family reunification with one of the Syrian refugee families that First directly sponsored.

Finally, after due consideration by the refugee advisory committee, Church Council agreed in October to add a new co-sponsorship of a family who have fled Afghanistan and are living in Pakistan. The co-sponsors are made up of three individuals in Ottawa, one of whom has a connection to First through our meditation group. This refugee family is currently in the United Church of Canada's waiting list to be submitted to IRCC. The federal government continues to drastically limit new refugee sponsorships as IRCC tries to clear its backlog of files so much so that one can sit on United Church waiting list for over a year before being submitted to join the IRCC waiting list.

A special thanks to Cindy Cherry for her bookkeeping on the refugee file.

REMEMBRANCE AND CALL TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ever since 1989, First United has held an annual service on December 6 to remember the fourteen young women who were murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal, murdered because they were women. This event sparked a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, a day set aside to mourn those killed in gender-based violence, to express solidarity with all those who suffer violence, to encourage survivors of violence, and to provide support for those who work to end violence.

In 2025, we gathered utilizing the format adopted in 2021 where, in addition to the candlelight liturgy, we engaged in conversation, allowing us to tell and hear stories as well as name the ways in which we remain committed to action. Approximately 40-50 people, including attendees from All Saints Westboro, joined in dialogue and a shared meal.

We are grateful to Patricia Mayberry for her musical contributions to this gathering. Thank you to those who organized: Brigitte Demers, Claire Savage, Ruby Alguire, Gail Webber, Rachel Dietrich, Patricia Mayberry, Nira Dookeran, Nikki Nel, and Kanana Muketha.

Our Partnership with All Saints' Anglican (Westboro)

PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

(The Venerable Kathryn Otley)

The Partnership Management Committee oversees the partnership between All Saints' Westboro and First United. This committee provides a forum for resolving any issues that might arise and meets every three months to advance the necessary work identified by the Joint Property Committee and to ensure the partnership agreement is being followed.

In September we welcomed the Rev. Dr. Kanana Muketha as the new minister for First United. Kanana and I, along with the parish representatives, continue to live into the fulsome agreement created by the two churches and their leadership.

Some of the issues we addressed and ideas we encouraged this year: new parking arrangements, use of space, accessibility in the sanctuary, garbage disposal/recycling, rentals, room booking etiquette and continuing to create opportunities for both churches to serve the community and celebrate our faith together.

Both churches are equally represented on the committee. Membership from All Saints includes The Ven. Kathryn Otley, Ken McMillan (Senior Warden), Barbara Fisher (Treasurer), and Steve Sibbald (ASW member-at-large). Members from First United are the Rev. Dr. Kanana Muketha, Andrew Clark (Treasurer) and Robert VanderBerg (Council Chair). This leaves two vacancies (one from each congregation) to be filled.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE

(Lamar Mason)

The members of the Joint Property Committee (JPC) for 2025 were Don Brodie and Rob Grimwood from First United and Chris Kirch, Greg Snow and Lamar Mason from All Saints Westboro. We continued to seek a third representative from First United.

To assist with the budgeting of both churches, the JPC operated with a slightly reduced budget in 2025. This was possible as no major projects were planned.

Work in 2025

Work to upgrade our electrical panels to handle the improved power feed into the building continued in 2025 and is now complete. Additional outlets were installed in Stacey Hall to assist with the added use of this space for community events such as the Westboro BIA Stew competition.

Thanks to a donation from the Rotary Club of West Ottawa and a separate grant, we were able to proceed with renovations in the Westboro Region Food Bank. The existing asbestos floor tile was properly removed and new flooring installed in the back room. This was followed

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by a repainting of the front Food Bank room, new bulletin boards and some new furnishings. JPC would like to thank all of the volunteers who came out to assist in emptying everything out of the back room and then restocking it. This was a major undertaking and would not have been possible without everyone's assistance.

Other projects completed include installing sun-blocking film on windows in Stacey Hall and the Food Bank, adjusting and moving pews in the Sanctuary to improve accessibility, participation in the efforts of the Environmental Justice Committee's waste management strategy, refurbishing the benches in the courtyard, installing the Rotary Peace Pole, and innumerable small projects that always crop up in our building.

Looking forward

Looking forward, there are a couple of larger projects that will require our attention including a new lighting system for the Sanctuary, repaving of the Madison Ave parking lot, and investigation of ways to cool the Sanctuary beyond fans. We will continue to work on recycling and waste management with the Environmental Justice Committee.

We have been asked to develop a Fire Safety Plan for the building. If there is anyone with experience in this area, we would greatly appreciate your assistance.

Appreciation

The day-to-day cleanliness and physical operation of the building depends on the hard work of our dedicated custodian, Paul Dumais. We appreciate the work he does to keep the building functioning. This year, Paul was assisted in his duties during the winter months and in his absences by Ben MacKinnon. The work that Paul and Ben do is critical to our enjoyment of our worship space and the comfort and safety of our building. Thank you to both Paul and Ben.

I would like to especially thank Julie Cross for her continued work in the Courtyard Gardens. Julie has indicated that this past summer was her last. The garden and courtyard are our face to the community and it takes work to ensure that face is always at its best. Julie would like to thank Julie Newlands for her valued assistance over the past few years as well as everyone else who volunteered their time in the garden. If you would be interested in taking on or assisting with this important ministry, please reach out to the office or Lamar. Interest from First United would be most welcome. Thank you, Julie Cross, for the years you have spent serving in this ministry.

Much of the work of the Joint Property Committee is invisible to the congregations at large, but it is essential. Our congregations are fortunate to have such dedicated JPC members who spend considerable time researching the right solutions to the many issues that crop up in a building of this age. Often that research results in everyone pitching in to do the work ourselves at considerable cost saving to both congregations. I am very appreciative of the dedication of our current members to this work.

I also appreciate the members of both congregations who step in to help with specific projects when asked. In particular, this year I would like to acknowledge Peter Newlands who is always

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available to answer questions, provide his expertise and offer his help on key issues. Thank you.

How you can help

The Joint Property Committee is always happy to receive comments or suggestions from members of the congregations. Let us know if there is something you think we might be able to improve around the building. In addition, if you have any skills, from carpentry to lighting, and would be willing to lend a hand or your expertise, please reach out to a member of the JPC. We would be happy to hear from you.

Lamar Mason, Chair
Lamarmason4@gmail.com

WESTBORO REGION FOOD BANK

2025 was another busy year at the Westboro Region Food Bank (WRFB)!

In a snapshot:

- This year we served 2868 households, putting food on the table for 6885 individuals.
- We were open for three sessions a week.
- Volunteer hours exceeded 2,000 for the year between our regular sessions as well as special events.
- Our current active volunteer roster includes 53 volunteers.
- Purchased \$22,000 of food (up to end of November 2025); estimated to be approximately \$25,500 allocated specifically from grants (Global/Healthy Market, December Grant, and Home Delivery)

There were many changes at the systemic level this year, mostly driven by changes at The Ottawa Food Bank (OFB).

Link2Feed opening

- In June Link2Feed (L2F), the database used by Food Banks Canada, OFB and the local food banks and food cupboards, moved to an 'Open System.' This meant that, for the first time, each food bank can see the visits at any food bank, allowing for changes to create more equity across the city food banks.
- With this change, OFB changed the members' Mutual Support Agreements to allow more flexibility and discretion in the boundaries. Now food bank neighbours can choose the food bank closest or most convenient to them, rather than being driven predominantly by a catchment map, which was often quite arbitrary.
- There were many changes and growing pains but, after six months in the new system, we can see the positive results. This has deepened the collaboration between food banks, helped reduce duplicate accounts and provided for more consistent services.

Changing quotas

Responding to an unprecedented increase in demand for services over the last five years, OFB temporarily decreased our quotas (amount of food we can order free of charge each

week) from January to June. With the L2F opening, they temporarily increased our quotas and they have remained at these increased levels since, although they are potentially decreasing again in March.

Changes to home delivery

During the pandemic, Ottawa Food Bank (OFB) offered delivery services to households who were unable to access services due to social distancing. In 2025, this responsibility moved to the community food banks and we were one of them that has received a grant to establish the infrastructure within our food bank.

Other grants were provided to our food bank and the impact to the operations:

- Summer Nutrition Program
- Wrap-Around Support Initiative which provides a specialized community staff who will support food bank neighbours and community members seeking social services and support. This was a pilot program at this stage. We hope to be receiving future funding to establish this component as a long-term service.
- Core funding to adapt and improve infrastructure of the food bank services, including staff time and training, to
 - replace floor tiles in the distribution room that has traces of asbestos. The funding was in combination with a donation from the Rotary Club of Ottawa West. This was completed within one week during July 2026.
 - refresh paint of front distribution room.
 - purchase new tables.
- Global Market/Healthy Market: purchasing foods familiar and staples in cultures other than Eurocentric and North American.
- Holiday Support Program: support extra food items purchased such as margarine which cannot be included in our regular food boxes.
- Link2Feed opening: as of June 2025, the database system opened up so that all food bank neighbours are able to access services throughout the city without being restricted to a specific catchment. It increases the agency of each individual accessing the services.
- Home delivery: as stated above, home delivery services have expanded to the local community food banks. Our food bank has increased capacity to do this with a new team of volunteers who organize the deliveries and connect with Feed the City, a partner that delivers the groceries with no extra financial burden to our program.
- Partnership with Feed the City is instrumental to increasing access to resources by vulnerable persons. Mobility often is a challenge for food bank neighbours because many of them walk on average three to four city blocks and are required to walk back to their places of residence with bags of cans, rice, frozen protein, milk and eggs. Hence, we were thrilled to have this new service.
- Mothercraft: provides monthly art kits for young neighbours to supply more holistic support beyond food resources.

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- Fundraisers: many of these were community-inspired fundraisers to support the work of the food bank. These are only some of the fundraisers as many companies and organizations also collect food and financial gifts:
 - Westboro BIA
 - Stew Showdown
 - Chef's Cookoff
 - Holiday Food Drive
 - Metropole condominium
 - Ikibana Flower Arranging
 - Powerhaus
 - Black Toe Running
 - Whisper's Pub Auction

In December 2025, we transitioned to a two-person staff team with a Food Bank Coordinator and a Food Bank Administrator. This format was in effect in 2022 (on a 25-hour contract), when we found the workload too much for one person. Therefore, we now divide the responsibilities between a 24-hour position and a 15-hour position. We hope that the two-person team will be better suited for all of our streams of responsibilities and the broadening of our food bank partnership with local organizations. We have performed budgetary considerations before transitioning to this format; that includes a comprehensive approach to grant applications and to protect.

NEW-TO-YOU SHOP

(Beth Murray)

In January 2025, a team of three to four volunteers began meeting weekly for two hours to clean out and organize the storage room. Donations were then sorted by season and condition. Items were identified for our food bank neighbours and outgoing donations were taken to the local Salvation Army Thrift store.

For the months of March and September all items in the shop were reduced 50%; this helped with the switch to the next season.

Barb and Peter Robertson stepped down as organizers of the shop at the end of April 2025 and Reverend Lam took over as Interim Coordinator for the shop.

Over the course of the year, we hosted five giveaway events for our Food Bank neighbours:

- Tuesday, July 22 - sharing tables were set up in Steacy Hall and a meal provided
- Thursday, July 24 - sharing tables were set up in Steacy Hall and a meal provided
- Thursday, Aug 7 – the New to You shop was opened for our Food Bank neighbours who were welcome to choose five items per adult in a family and unlimited items for children
- Thursday, Aug 14 – the New to You shop was opened for our Food Bank neighbours who were welcome to choose five items per adult in a family and unlimited items for children

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- Thursday, November 27 - sharing tables were set up in Steacy Hall and a meal provided.

Each event was very successful. We are still in the learning stages and will continue to improve these events going forward.

Gifts are items offered to individuals coming to the thrift shop and unable to afford everything needed. These are at the discretion of the volunteers authorized by the Shop Coordinator. The clergy also use the thrift shop to help individuals who seek help outside of opening hours of the shop. 'Vouchers' was a pilot program started in December 2024 in partnership with the Westboro Community Association, and benefitting the residents of the Richmond Plaza temporary housing residents. The vouchers are a part of a Christmas hamper program that provides support to families who may need help with purchasing family needs. The first year was 30 vouchers of \$10 denominations. For the second year (2025), the New-to-You Shop matched the donation from the Westboro Community Association and the vouchers increased to \$20. We hope this pilot program will expand to other community ministries such as Cornerstone on Princeton to support their needs beyond limited resources.