



Syrian Refugees



The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to grow exponentially. In April 2015 Mission & Service partner ACT Alliance reported 12.2 million people urgently needed basic assistance like shelter, food, and water. About 7.6 million people have been internally displaced in Syria, fleeing their homes to try to escape continuing violence. Over 3.9 million Syrian refugees have fled to neighbouring countries, 1 million to Lebanon alone.

In Lebanon the Joint Christian Committee for Social Service, part of Mission & Service partner the Middle East Council of Churches, is looking beyond basic humanitarian needs and developing programs that will help refugees when they can hopefully return to Syria.

One of those needs is ensuring Syrian children can still receive an education. Refugees are not able to attend Lebanese schools, and for those in higher grades this interruption to their education can compromise their future. The Joint Christian Committee for Social Service has begun working with grades 9 to 12 students in particular, using Syrian curriculum, textbooks, and teachers. Students are then able to take Syrian school exams. One young woman, Nowar, who passed her exams, had lost two years of schooling because of the conflict. As a result of this program she has now graduated from high school and plans to attend university.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service that, in partnership with others, are creating a more hopeful future for young Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith.

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Guide us to shine brightly in the world. Amen



A Message of Hope



Bridges to Hope in St. John's, Newfoundland, one of our community ministry partners, is committed to reducing the effects of poverty on individuals and families. The centre's Community Kitchen programs are in great demand, with many individuals and community service and public health organizations signing up for four- to six-week sessions. In 2014 the Food Pantry served 8,200 people, 1,800 of which were children.

The Bag to School and Passion for School Projects initiatives continue to be in great demand. Bag to School provides 900 school bags filled with curriculum-based supplies for students in grades K-12 and Adult Basic Education. Passion for Projects provides supplies for heritage and science fairs for students throughout the English School District.

The programs at Bridges to Hope are successful because of the dedicated staff and volunteers who give of their time and talents—a true community endeavour.

We are thankful for our Mission & Service gifts that support dozens of community ministries across Canada like Bridges to Hope!

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Farming Partnership

Smallhold farmers are some of the most important growers of food in Africa. According to some estimates, almost 80 percent of food for African families is supplied by smallhold farms. The health of those farms is therefore essential to solving chronic food insecurity in Africa.

Mission & Service partner The National Council of Churches in Kenya, in collaboration with The United Church of Canada and Canadian Foodgrains Bank, is undertaking a major initiative in Tharaka Nithi County in the upper eastern region of Kenya, working with Kenyan farmers to improve yields and practices using conservation agriculture.

Many of the households in these areas are headed by women who depend on farming for their livelihood. Poor yields have an immediate impact on daily life. There is no money for school fees. Families reduce food consumption at the same time that significant energy and labour on the farm are required. These farms are very vulnerable to climate change-related issues such as drought.

The project will focus on access to resources such as land, water, and drought-resistant seeds as well as training in farming techniques such as mulching to maximize the use of local resources. Preserving and harvesting water as well as small-scale irrigation will all help vulnerable households improve their farm yields and family nutrition.

We are thankful that our Mission & Service gifts are supporting farmers in Kenya as they work to feed their families and care for the land.

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Companion
video
available



Heaven among the Stars, Trees, and Lakes!

Every summer, United Church kids pack their hockey or duffle bags, backpacks or suitcases for a week or two in the Canadian wilderness. United Church camps offer a place of faith and fun. Children, youth, and staff gather, giving thanks to God for the beauty of creation.

Many United Church camps offer camperships, where campers are able to attend at a reduced cost so that those who wouldn't normally be able to attend can have a wonderful experience in the Canadian wilderness. Campers experience a community surrounded by God's creation. Many campers who have struggled at home and at school find their time at camp life-changing.

Mission & Service supports camping in the United Church through networking and camp accreditation, supporting and strengthening the camping experience for United Church kids across the country.

We are thankful for the generous gifts that make it possible for children to have an experience of faith and fun in the Canadian wilderness.

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Ecumenical Chaplaincy

The Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto has a presence at the university's downtown Toronto and suburban campuses in Mississauga and Scarborough. Jeannette Unger and Ralph Carl Wushke are two halves of the downtown chaplaincy, which is a partnership between the Presbyterian and United churches on campus and are part of a larger multifaith network of chaplains.

The chaplaincy touches on various aspects of campus life. It offers interfaith co-creative programs on ecology and spirituality, as well as a safe space for students who are often struggling in the university environment.

Ralph describes one student who was on the verge of suicide. Suffering from depression in his second year, he found his way to the chaplain's office at Knox College. After finding the support he needed, he is now close to getting his undergraduate degree.

"Students come from small towns and start questioning everything when they arrive. University is also often when mental illnesses appear. We are here to lend an ear and guide the students in the direction they need to go," says Ralph.

We are thankful for Mission & Service, which supports the University of Toronto Ecumenical Chaplaincy and is inspiring the transformation of communities and students.

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A Call for Peace and Prayer

A prolonged civil war that began in 1996 has led to extreme violence and human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women and girls are bearing the brunt of the atrocities, suffering widespread sexual violence and abuse.

Mission & Service partner L'Église du Christ au Congo has issued a "cri d'alarme" to the world highlighting the urgency of the situation. The Rev. Nzeba Katombo Berthe, General Secretary of the Department for Women and Family of the ECC, says: "This cry of alarm invites us into national solidarity and compassion to assist these innocent victims to recover their dignity—but also to offer them hope as future professional women and honourable mothers."

Supported by L'Église du Christ au Congo, local women volunteer to support and accompany survivors, war orphans, and women's groups. Families receive support to foster war orphans and provide them with a loving and safe haven. ECC also provides funding for school, medical care, and psychosocial support.

The United Church, in partnership with others, is answering a call for prayers and action supporting peace in Congo and an end to the war on women.

We are thankful that our Mission & Service gifts support the women and children of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who seek security, dignity, and healing.

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Mino-o-dapin Means Welcome: Alderville First Nation

In southcentral Ontario, on the south side of Rice Lake, approximately 30 km north of Cobourg in a valley, you will find the beautiful Alderville First Nations Community.

Through support from Mission & Service, Alderville First Nation is a thriving, Spirit-filled community that is rich in heritage and Native culture. Visitors are able to interact with the community at the Annual Pow-wow and at Drum Socials.

The little white church that was originally Methodist is still a thriving part of the community. Alderville United Church has produced many ministers over the years to offer a place of spiritual reflection for Alderville.

We are thankful to those who give for Mission & Service that allow communities like Alderville to continue to thrive!

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Heart Gardens

On Sunday, May 26, 2015, congregations all over Canada created Heart Gardens to honour the memory of Aboriginal children who died in the residential schools over the 120 years the schools existed. Over 2,000 Heart Gardens were created.

Faith United Church in Kingston, Ontario, was one of those congregations. Faith United is entering its 25th year. It began its ministry through a Mission & Service-funded mission support grant. The congregation gathers in the small theatre of La Salle Secondary School every Sunday morning and was able to plant their garden on the school grounds.

The hearts were made over two Sundays and symbolized Faith United's deepest hope and prayer that the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will allow truths to be spoken, and healing and a new relationship to begin between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this land.

The congregation sent one heart made by their youngest member to Ottawa to be part of the Heart Garden planted on the lawn of Rideau Hall, the Governor General's residence.

"The heart has an image of an alien because the artist said we should be nice to everyone, including aliens!" says the Rev. Nan Hudson.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service that support congregations in transition or in remote locations so faith can be shared and grown!

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Music in Our Lives!

Companion
video
available

We experience a lot of sharing when we gather in faith communities. Singing and playing music together builds community and strengthens communal bonds. Competent and confident church musicians are vital to that process.

Music United provides a nurturing forum for church musicians on its website (www.musicunited.ca) and Facebook page. The Music United annual meeting and learning events across the country provide professional development and kinship.

Whether it is helping a pianist learn the mysteries of the organ, exploring fresh ideas on how to support liturgy, problem-solving, or understanding music as a means of pastoral care, Music United provides help and support for hundreds of church musicians across our church.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service that assist programs like Music United to continue.

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Disponible en
français!



Mission & Service: With Thanks

The work of Mission & Service continues because of us. Support from our congregation and congregations across the whole United Church make vital ministry possible.

Our gifts for Mission & Service change lives daily. Because we give to Mission & Service, thousands of meals are served, unemployable people find new hope in work programs, and people in need of housing find places of shelter.

We have done so much with our Mission & Service givings. Imagine with me what could be accomplished if more people joined us and gave for Mission & Service!

Mission & Service is like a stone dropped into a pool of water: the ripples span out from that rock, creating a reaction in the entire pool. Mission & Service is like that rock. The ripples of support spread across communities in Canada and in other parts of the world!

All the people whose lives are touched and transformed because of our gifts for Mission & Service say THANK YOU.

Thank you for being part of that giving with me.

And if you have not given yet, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith!

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Interfaith Peacemakers

Founded in 1990, the Asian Muslim Action Network, or AMAN, has members from over 20 Asian countries. The network seeks active collaboration with other faith communities to promote the human dignity of all, regardless of religion. Its programs of training and capacity development emphasize creative thinking, right understanding of religions, respect for diversity, and service to humanity. Based in Thailand, this Mission & Service partner brings people of many faiths together to promote peace and tolerance.

Each year AMAN gathers 30 young peace activists from across Asia for its peace studies and transformation course in Bangkok. The course aims to equip these young people to be the faces of peace in their respective communities. Ekraj, a young man from Bangladesh, explains that “living together for three weeks with all our cultural, religious, and social diversity showed us all how we can embrace our differences in a modern world.”

We are thankful that our Mission & Service gifts support young people in Asia learning to be interfaith peacemakers.

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Companion
video
available



Whole Life Ministry

The community gathers, and music fills the air. Slipping effortlessly between Anishinaabemowin and English, the gathered congregation sings their favourite hymns to piano and guitar. Christian Island United Church serves the Ojibwe, Potawatomie, and Odawa people of Beausoleil First Nation located on beautiful Georgian Bay.

The Sunday morning congregation is tiny, but the pastoral care needs of the community are never-ending. This is a place where the United Church tries to live out in practical ways our apology to First Nations.

The United Church, and its predecessor the Methodist Church, have had a presence in this community for approximately 175 years. The early missionaries were both teachers and ministers. The United Church ran the Protestant school on the reserve, with the minister acting as the principal and the pastor. The band took over the responsibility for education in the early 1970s, amalgamating the United Church and Roman Catholic schools. For the first time, the pastor was freed for full-time ministry.

Fully funded by Mission & Service, this ministry is broader than just care for the families that identify as United Church. This ministry reaches out to the entire First Nation, offering spiritual care, counselling, and religious services where needed.

Thanks to our contributions for Mission & Service, together we can offer the gift of God’s presence in tangible, everyday ways.

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A Safe Place under the Rainbow

In northern Ontario, Camp McDougall runs a week-long Rainbow Camp for LGBTQ campers and their allies.

Director Deb Woodman talks about what makes this camp unique:

Our goal is to educate and promote awareness in society regarding gender, sexual identities, and expressions. Camp is organized around the philosophy of safer space; in other words, no questions will be asked and no explanations are needed for campers to live in their chosen identities and be honoured in this. We support this each day by offering campers the opportunity to claim their identity for the day or moment.

We use educational programming on gender, sexuality, sexual health, trans issues, and body image to structure the day. The programming also includes fun activities, singing, running, and exploring as well as going on a nature hike, watching films, and discussing topics. We do all of these and many more traditional camp activities like having bonfires, holding an open stage night, playing cards, and just being silly.

Each year campers have opportunities to have positive experiences that will help them deal with any negative experiences after they leave camp. We are thankful that through our gifts for Mission & Service, campers are offered a safe space to explore what it means to truly be themselves.

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Thank You to Our Ministers

The Rev. Bronwyn Corlett, Program Coordinator for Ministry Recruitment, shares her reflections on those in ministry.

I have met serious ministers and funny ministers; ministers who arrive early and overprepared for every meeting; ministers who arrive late with a disorganized bundle of papers. I have seen ministers preach with a seeming relaxed ease and ministers who have fumbled anxiously through their notes, both actively sharing the Word of God. I have seen ministers put their own problems and pains on hold so they might hold someone else's problems and pains for a little while.

My favourite question to ask a minister is "How did you get into ministry?" Nine times out of ten they will reply, "Well, I didn't go into ministry in the usual way. I avoided my call until I couldn't avoid it any longer." Nine times out of ten, they will tell you they do it for the love of God and the love of people.

Thank you to our ministers. Thank you for the sermons, the prayers, and the visits. Thank you for the laughter and the tears and the times you leave your own families to sit with someone else's. Thank you for your leadership and your late nights and your theological reflection. Thank you for answering God's call. Thank you for living out that call in The United Church of Canada.

We give thanks for Mission & Service, which helps support theological schools and education centres that provide training and continuing education for our ministers. Mission & Service also provides support through discernment and settlement processes through Conference leadership.

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Mutuality in Ministry

“This is the church of William Scott,” the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea reminded delegates to its General Assembly in 2015. The General Assembly approved an agreement of Mutual Recognition of Ministry with The United Church of Canada. Unanimously approved by our 42nd General Council in August 2015, the approval in Korea heralds a new step in the partnership journey of our two churches.

The Rev. William Scott (1886–1979) was a Canadian missionary who answered the calling of global mission, arriving with his wife Kate Scott in Korea in 1914. He and the Rev. Chai Choon Kim became allies in challenging literal and conservative interpretations of scripture in Korean seminaries in the 1950s. Refusing to back down from their beliefs, they were expelled as heretics from the Presbyterian Church in Korea in 1952. In 1953 they joined with like-minded ministers and others to form the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. The United Church of Canada supported this new denomination—the only global partner church in 1953 to do so.

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea was founded on principles of inclusion and public witness for justice and peace. The church reaches out to the *mirijung*—the oppressed, exploited, and despised people of Korea. It is also an active and prophetic voice for democracy, human rights, and reunification of North and South Korea.

The life and witness of William Scott is a reminder of the United Church model of partnership in mission, based on mutual respect and faith, and life together in a troubled world.

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Youth at the Crossroads



The Rev. Bronwyn Corlett reflects on being the facilitator at London Conference's Youth Forum 2015.

When I am at a crossroads and don't know what choice to make, especially when I don't want to move forward, I often think of Peter and the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–9). Peter so wants to get it right, so when he sees Jesus transfigured and speaking with Moses and Elijah, he assumes this is a moment to be memorialized.

Suddenly God says, “This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.” When Jesus speaks, he says, “Get up. Don't be afraid.” Jesus then goes back down the mountain with the disciples, enters Jerusalem under palms, flips over tables, eats a meal with his disciples, has doubts in a garden, is crucified, and rises!

If Peter had stayed on the mountaintop building his memorial, he would have missed so much!

It was my honour to join the London Conference, affectionately known as “LoCo,” Youth Forum 2015 and explore with them the theme of the crossroads. Youth and young adults face an overwhelming number of crossroads, and it can be daunting to realize crossroads just keep coming as an adult.

Remember: “Get up. Don't be afraid,” for you are not alone.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service, which help support Conference ministries, including programs for youth and young adults.

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Maritime Conference Becomes Affirming!

The Rev. Bronwyn Corlett reflects on the experience of Maritime Conference becoming an Affirming Conference.

What does it mean to be inclusive? What does it mean to love your neighbour as yourself? What do you do with your concerns when you disagree with your neighbour? How do you live in a community with varying beliefs, understandings, and practices? And what happens when the rules change?

At the 2015 Annual General Meeting of Maritime Conference, a series of votes were passed making Maritime Conference the fourth Conference to become Affirming.

As a visitor at the meeting, it was an honour to witness such thoughtful preparation from those making the motions and those raising questions and concerns. It was an honour to witness such respectful and sincere conversations. It was an honour to witness the way the youth and young adults were determined to have their voices heard, and how eager the court was to listen. It was an honour to witness the court's desire to expand and ensure that youth and young adult voices would be heard in the future. It was an honour to witness how the Affirming process opened up new conversations about what inclusion really means. It was an honour to experience the joy of the court when the work was done and the singing began.

It was an honour and a privilege to witness God's people at work.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service that support Affirm United and the Affirming process.

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We Become Family at Camp!

What would you say to the whole United Church of Canada about Camp Lorrain? The question brings smiles to the faces of campers and counsellors sitting in Murphy's Lodge.

"When I was younger, I didn't fit in at school. I was bullied a lot," says Liz. "When my church sent me to Camp Lorrain, I found a family—people who accepted me and cared about me. Here I was a person, not a problem. Now I get to be a counsellor with girls who are like me. We become family."

Chris shares his story: "I have been coming here since I was only seven, even though it means travelling hundreds of miles. I've changed here at camp. I am now a counsellor-in-training, helping other kids to have the same experience that I had."

Connor chimes in: "I've grown spiritually since coming here. I've met new people and become open to them. I'm growing into a better leader because now I am able to work with and learn from kids who are different from me. My favourite memory is sleeping out under the stars, listening to the waves crashing on the rocks. I'd never had a chance to do that in the city I'm from."

Torrin says: "I wouldn't be the same person without Camp Lorrain."

Camp Lorrain, on the shores of Lake Temiskaming in northeastern Ontario, has been supported by Mission & Service for many years. Our gifts change the lives of young people for the better. For this most valuable gift, the gift of lives changed—thank you!

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Shirley Goodness and Friends

Jane Harding, Stewardship and Gifts Officer for BC Conference, shares her joy over the giving heart of Shirley Goodness, who has raised thousands of dollars for Mission & Service.

Shirley Goodness (a.k.a. the Rev. Deb Hinksman) is a well-known character in British Columbia Conference who lifts up the work of Mission & Service every time she speaks.

Shirley, together with the Stewardship Team of British Columbia Conference, offered an old-fashioned music and comedy cabaret at a local theatre as a Mission & Service fundraising event.

Shirley invited some of her fantastic friends to perform, including pianist and entertainer Perry Dickson; the Spirit Sisters, a talented group of women who sing sacred and secular a cappella music; and the musical duo of Linnea Good and David Jonsson. There was a bit of a Scottish theme throughout, with a bagpiper and a Scottish dancer rounding out the entertainment. Prizes were donated and sponsorships procured, and after all was said and done, \$4,123 was raised to go to Mission & Service for ministry and mission.

We are so very proud of the work the United Church does in Canada and around the world, and so thankful for the many gifts of time, talent, and donations for the work of Mission & Service.

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Companion video available

There Is Hope!



In Chiclayo, Peru, there is an organization of people who aren't afraid to show their light to the world. They determinedly work day in and day out with people who live with poverty, marginalization, and oppression. They are known to many as "las Esperanzitas"—"the hopeful people." This group of people shine their light onto the world with passion, dedication, and a spirituality of hope.

They make up the Hope Centre, or Centro Esperanza. Centro Esperanza has outreach programs engaging children, youth, and women in marginalized communities in the city of Chiclayo. The work of Centro Esperanza has produced many fruits. Women become entrepreneurs and bravely speak out on key issues. Children learn to dance, play a musical instrument, and express themselves in non-violent ways through creative arts programs. Youth become inspired to chase their dreams and find their self-worth through after-school programs and workshops.

Las Esperanzitas are people who bring to life vibrant and healthy communities in Chiclayo, Peru. They pass their light of hope and genuine appreciation for all people in a broken and unjust world.

We are thankful that Mission & Service supports people so they can rise above poverty, marginalization, and oppression and share their colourful gifts with the world.

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A Fertile Ground for Learning

Bethel Benjamin-Cameron, who has begun a new pastoral relationship as a member of the Order of Ministry in Prince Edward Island, reflects on her years at the Atlantic School of Theology.

Following a call to ordained ministry in your mid-40s can be a daunting task. It was indeed a little scary but not impossible with God's help. Balancing a half-time pastoral charge, family, and studies was easier than it looked with the support of the professors, staff, and other students at the Atlantic School of Theology. The school offered a fertile ground for academic learning as well as space for creative spiritual experience and expression.

Our gifts for Mission & Service generously support the work of the Atlantic School of Theology and six other theological schools across the country where students become members of the Order of Ministry.

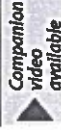
Meister Eckhart said: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

Students like Bethel offer prayers of gratitude to Atlantic School of Theology and to the generosity of Mission & Service for recognizing the importance of supporting our theological schools so that well-equipped, educated, and caring people can offer ministry in many ways in The United Church of Canada.

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Toward Sustainable Agriculture

Agriculture is an important part of Haiti's economy, but the country produces only about half of the food its people need. The rest is imported.

In developing countries, the gap between the food that people can grow locally and the imported food they need to purchase is often called "food security"—or in this case "food insecurity." In Haiti the gap means many of the poorest and most vulnerable people can't afford enough to eat, resulting in a multitude of health problems. Farmers in Haiti work with the practice of food sovereignty in mind. They work to increase food production even as they struggle to reduce soil erosion in the mountains, and try to work with nature as they manage ever more erratic cycles of rain and drought. They form local organizations to support one another, shape local food systems that are fair, press for collaboration from government, and work with international development agencies.

In Haiti, Mission & Service helps support two partners: Haiti's Methodist Church and the Karl Lévêque Cultural Institute. Both organizations support local farmers with microcredit, livestock, and seed programs, and both participated in a two-day forum on food security with the representatives of six Canadian churches and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Through our gifts for Mission & Service, Haitian farmers are able to help ensure the social, economic, and environmental well-being of their communities.

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Uniting Hands for Life

Bolivia is changing fast. It's a South American country where Indigenous people who once had no power have had an Indigenous president for a decade.

In Bolivia, The United Church of Canada works with a network of three national churches and seven non-governmental organizations. The network is called Uniting Hands for Life, or UMAVIDA (*OOM-ah-VEE-dah*). The members of the network help one another understand and take action on complex issues such as climate change and address the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion.

The groups come together in common cause around ecological issues (particularly water contamination and access) as well as poverty, human rights, a just society, and relationships of respect and equality.

Each member of the network brings a particular focus of activity and expertise to the collaboration. One organization, for example, works with children and youth in southern Bolivia, lifting up alternatives to earning a living from working in the underground silver mines. Another works with local farming communities on the impact of mining on water quality. A third promotes use of small-scale gardens in urban neighbourhoods, partly to create more green space and improve nutrition but also to provide people with a good, lived experience of being part of a process of social and ecological change.

Our gifts for Mission & Service are creating positive change in Bolivia. Thank you!

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Communicating with Sign

It started with an idea.

Why don't we gather Deaf ministry leaders from different denominations in one place? We could talk about what we have in common and see what happens next.

That idea led to forming the Canadian Consultation on Christian Deaf Ministries. Bringing together a broad and diverse group of leaders who use American Sign Language in their communities of faith, this group has been working on worship resources, theological training for Deaf students, sharing ministry ideas, and leadership.

Mission & Service supports the work of this group and the work of Deaf ministries congregations across the country. Most church worship services are designed for people who can hear, so Deaf people have no idea what is happening if there is no sign language. "Deaf people are not disabled; we are a cultural group who use American Sign Language to communicate," one person shared.

But the numbers of Deaf communities in any given geographic location are small, so some experimental worship services are being done online. With leadership from the Deaf community in the United Church, Deaf people in any region can access Deaf-led worship through the Internet. Even if a person is in a place where there is no in-person worship service in American Sign Language, they can view a service online.

We are thankful that our gifts for Mission & Service make it possible for Deaf people across the country to worship freely.

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Guide us to shine brightly in the world. Amen





Typhoon Haiyan

Disponible en français!

Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda), considered the world's strongest typhoon ever to make landfall, pummelled Central Philippines in 2013. Government figures estimate the super typhoon affected about 14 million people and left 4.1 million displaced. More than 6,000 people were killed, and about 44 provinces in 9 regions sustained extensive damage to houses, livelihoods, and infrastructure. About 1 million houses were damaged, half of them completely destroyed. The UN Food Security and Agriculture Cluster reported that the livelihoods of over a quarter of a million small-scale farmers were affected. As is often the case, the most vulnerable were the most affected by the typhoon; many faced devastating loss.

Mission & Service partner the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) was quick to respond and continues to play a key role in supporting communities as they rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Subsistence farmers who relied on their farms to feed their families were devastated and desperately need help. A key part of the NCCP community-building response involved distributing seed for food crops in five of the most affected area villages. The response prioritized the most vulnerable: subsistence farmers, women-headed families, and families caring for elderly people.

We are thankful that, with support from Mission & Service, 763 vulnerable families in the Philippines received the seed that ultimately put food on their tables.

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Overwhelmed with Gratitude!

Disponible en français!
Companion video available

The Rev. Melody Duncanson Hales, Mission & Service Animator for Manitou Conference, reflects on getting to share her ministry with many congregations.

"My name is Melody, and I am your minister." This is the way I introduce myself in Manitou Conference. I serve The United Church of Canada in northeastern Ontario and northwestern Quebec in the area of Mission and Stewardship animation. I am a minister for 60 pastoral charges, from Homepayne, Ontario, to Val d'Or, Quebec, from Kapuskasing to Manitoulin Island.

On paper, my "job description" seems detailed and overwhelming. In any given week, I might lead worship and learn with a congregation about stewardship, meet with church leaders to plan their annual giving program, facilitate a conversation about refugee sponsorship and overseas partnership, resource a group concerned about environmental protection, share the stories of our Mission & Service, and pray with a youth group on retreat.

I love this church, this place, and these people. I am the churches' cheerleader: listening, encouraging, and telling their stories of hope and generosity wherever and whenever I can. Good Friday moments in saying goodbye to ministries, resurrection moments in celebrating new ministries—these are part of it all, and what a privilege to be a witness!

We are thankful for our generous gifts for Mission & Service, allowing those in ministry to see the gospel being made real all over Manitou and across the church.

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Making Dreams Come True

Filadelfia lives in Tizate, Las Flores, Guatemala, supported by Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas. Filadelfia leads a group of 10 women participating in a community microcredit program. The women use loans to purchase and raise steers and produce potatoes for sale. FPM, a partner of The United Church of Canada, brings together 3,000 women of Mayan descent from across Guatemala working for development in their own communities.

With their children sitting on their knees, the women speak about a new and vibrant sense of self-esteem, as well as practical skills around care of the environment, hygiene, parenting, and raising livestock. They want to keep learning so they can teach their children and show them the value of education. Many are working so their children can attend school. They dream of a life with a sustainable, livable income.

With the support of Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas, those dreams now seem possible. The women are excited as they talk about new possibilities for cooperative business ventures and new skills that bring the dreams ever closer to reality.

With pride in their accomplishments, the women also talk about healthy relationships. They dream of being treated with respect and of taking leadership roles in their community, family, and church.

We are thankful for Mission & Service gifts shared in partnership with Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas that have made and continue to make many dreams come true for Mayan women.

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Daring to Imagine Peace

"Children's art is dangerous for war," reads a sign in a school on the south edge of Bogotá, Colombia. The sign reflects the work of building a culture of peace among children and youth in the war-torn country.

In the wake of 60 years of civil war, work for peace in Colombia takes place in many different settings: official peace talks among warring factions; advocacy for victims of violence; and education to strengthen the voices of women, youth, Indigenous people, and Afro-Colombians—all groups that have often been left out of decisions made by those who hold power.

The Latin American Centre for Popular Education, known as CEPALC (*SAY-palk*), is one of three United Church partners in Colombia supported by Mission & Service.

CEPALC is an ecumenical group that helps children who have lived their entire lives in the midst of war imagine peace and experience healthy community. It also offers training in media production to many community radio and cable TV stations in different parts of Colombia challenging the norms of violence and lifting up alternative ways of living in peace. CEPALC makes its own radio, video, theatre, dance, and puppet productions as it works toward a culture of peace throughout Colombia.

Another sign in the school says, "War is afraid of children's art."

We are thankful that CEPALC, supported by Mission & Service, helps children become a force for peaceful change in Colombia.

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Faithful Decisions

Each year, in each Conference, a group of dedicated volunteers meet. They have two sets of documents for their meeting. One set is the usually large file of community ministries requesting funding and congregations in need of support, and the other set contains information about the allotted amount of Mission & Service funds they have to share in their Conference.

Thus begins the painstaking work of reading about and discerning how the funds will be allocated. Mission Support Grant Committees often meet over a series of days. They prayerfully discern and distribute some of our gifts for Mission & Service so all who have made requests will get at least some money to continue their work.

Without Mission & Service givings, the work of these committees would not touch as many lives as they do. Congregations would not be able to call ministry personnel to offer leadership; community ministries would not be able to serve many people in their communities.

Thank you for all the ways we are making a real difference in communities across the country and other parts of the world. Through our gifts for Mission & Service, people who could be our neighbours, our friends, or our families feel the beating heart of the United Church, supporting and caring for people on the margins.

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Engaged Citizenship

What do you care about? What matters most in your community and our world?

Many of us participated in Canada's federal election in October 2015. This was a time of hope and decision. General Council staff created a 2015 Federal Election Kit to help United Church people learn more about issues that concern our church and our global and Canadian partners. Aboriginal justice, climate justice, refugee rights, and the elimination of child poverty were some of the topics included. The kit also offered instructions for planning and participating in an all-candidates meeting.

Some United Church people are shocked that the church deliberately makes the connection between faith and politics. Yet, our United Church witness is not to a particular person or party but to God's mission of justice and love lived out through policies that promote sustainable communities, build peace, and defend human rights.

The United Church has been active in the public arena, including elections, since its earliest days. The founders of our church believed that ours is a living faith and a witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ that is expressed in active, thoughtful involvement in society.

We are called to be the light that brings God-colours of justice, peace, and healing into the democratic process.

Our gifts for Mission & Service make resources like the 2015 Federal Election Kit possible. Thank you!

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Rewriting the Story

Recently, people with disabilities and their allies were invited to share their stories of living with disabilities in the United Church. Some stories were joyful; many were vulnerable, honest, and painful stories of exclusion.

Some people reflected on how they could not physically access a church. Some noted that their disability was the only thing others noticed or asked them about. Some shared that they could not participate fully in their community of faith. Some explained how difficult it is to read the Bible passages that talk about healing from disabilities. Many noted attitudes of exclusion, and that people with disabilities are not always welcome.

United Church staff and elected members are working to address the hard realities these stories express by offering new ideas about theologies of disabilities, sharing those widely in the United Church, and developing educational resources that will be soon be available to communities of faith. A group of people with disabilities, and their allies, has been following up on ideas through a United Church consultation on disabilities and developing new ones for the church. These are positive ways people with disabilities are changing the church, and they invite the whole church to be part of authoring a new, positive story.

Our gifts for Mission & Service make it possible to be part of the new accessibility story that is being written.

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Conference-Wide Confirmation Retreat

In 2010, a group of Conference staff and youth ministers from Living Waters and Northern Waters presbyteries of Toronto Conference gathered to plan the first of many confirmation retreats. The retreats received funding through the Mission & Service Vision Fund, which offers financial support to new initiatives in youth ministry. Monies that were received subsidized the accommodation and meeting space as well as program supplies.

In 2015, the confirmation retreat became Conference-wide. Our support of youth ministry through the Vision Fund has grown this program over the years.

The retreat offers youth an opportunity to gather for a time of learning about A New Creed through art, games, discussion, and worship. One youth who walked in was overwhelmed by the group. "At my church I am the only youth!" he exclaimed, "Here, I am not alone!"

Through your gifts for Mission & Service many youth can come together for faith exploration and create friendships beyond congregational borders.

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Ministry of Presence

Inner City Pastoral Ministry was established in 1978 by Edmonton Presbytery and grew into an interdenominational community ministry supported by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches. It serves the Boyle-McCauley area of Edmonton, a marginalized community with many people experiencing poverty and homelessness as well as the challenges of addiction, mental health issues, and family dysfunction. About half of the diverse community is Aboriginal.

The ministry of Inner City Pastoral Ministry is offered throughout the week by a full-time pastor, a part-time pastoral associate, and most recently an Oskapew, or Helper, in the Cree language. Sunday worship is held in the Bissell Agency Drop In Centre, with average attendance of 125 people and 250-plus attending a hearty lunch after the service. More than 80 churches and synagogues take turns preparing and serving the lunch 52 Sundays a year.

Midweek finds the ministry team visiting homes, hospitals, and local drop-ins, and on the street building relationships and offering pastoral care, prayer, advocacy, and referrals for local community members. Spiritual wellness groups build trust and provide times of reflection to deepen spiritual life. An annual Men's and Women's Retreat is a highlight of the year. The Oskapew concentrates on Aboriginal relationships, offering teachings and ceremony through a Métis lens.

We are thankful for our gifts for Mission & Service given in partnership with the Inner City Pastoral Ministry, one of dozens of community ministries across Canada.

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Doctor, Missionary: Florence Murray

"Were you a doctor or a missionary?" people asked Florence Murray. "I hope I was both," she responded.

Born in 1894, Florence Murray began her medical studies at the start of World War One. In 1921 she was appointed a missionary medical doctor to Korea. Placed under house arrest by the occupying Japanese in 1941, she was deported to Canada one year later in a prisoner exchange but returned to Korea in 1947 and remained there until 1969.

She became known internationally as an authority on leprosy and respiratory diseases and was one of the founders of the Wonju Severance Christian Hospital and College. With over 5,000 alumni from its schools of nursing, medicine, and dentistry, the hospital is today a centre of medical excellence in Korea.

Dr. Murray is remembered and revered by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and by thousands of Koreans as a compassionate doctor who dedicated her life to living and working among poor and marginalized people. With courage, faith, and ingenuity, she confronted disease, poverty, tangled politics, cultural differences, and the violence of war. She committed her life to the well-being of others, and with fellow Korean workers left a proud legacy of hospitals and schools that continue to serve the people of Korea today.

We are thankful for the cloud of witness found in our history with our partners like the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea—and for the passion of women like Florence Murray!

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Polity in Action

Students who are studying at Emmanuel College had a rare opportunity to delve deeper into the polity of the United Church and to experience polity in action at the 42nd General Council, which took place last August in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. The course, ably taught by Professor Pamela Couture, began its time together through a series of webinars. The 12 students who were enrolled each took a portion of the 1,100-page General Council Workbook, researched the background, and wrote a paper on what it means for the national church moving forward.

Meeting as a class in Corner Brook at GC42, with their teacher as table facilitator, discussed, questioned, and listened intently to discussion from the floor.

The course was created after the "awakened opportunity for learning that came out of General Council 41 in Ottawa," says Steve Willey, the now retired Program Coordinator Education and Leadership Development. Willey and the staff of Emmanuel College saw this as an opportunity for students to see the church at its best. The students attentively observed all, questioned, and came away with a better understanding of the polity in the church and how we as a national body make decisions.

We are thankful to Mission & Service for the grant that covered staff costs and helped defray costs for students to travel to Corner Brook. The GC42 course is a partnership between Mission & Service and Emmanuel College.

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Servant Leadership

Companion
video
available

For over 40 years the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) has been training rural leaders in three core areas: community building, integrated organic farming techniques, and servant leadership.

Servant leadership has been part of ARI since its inception. Participants learn about different models of leadership, such as those personified by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi. At the core of this training is the belief that through understanding current issues and developing management skills, the students will become effective leaders.

One of the participants shared his understanding of servant leadership:

A leader is not a commander but serves the people. I got a great challenge and lesson from ARI on the role of servant leader. The servant leadership methods completely changed me. Staff are always practising servant leadership, and that is why. It is not just taught and learned but also practised every day. All people are equal, no discrimination. I never learned this before. I know the words "servant leadership" as a Christian but not in practice in the community. But from ARI I really came to know its meaning.

Working in partnership with staff members and in work teams allows participants to learn what it means to both serve and follow.

We are thankful for partners like Asian Rural Institute, where our Mission & Service gifts offer many an opportunity to learn what it truly means to lead and serve.

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We Are Pilgrims on a Journey!

Companion
video
available

In July 2015, 13 youth pilgrims and two young adult leaders made a cross-country pilgrimage to the 42nd General Council in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Katelyn Cody from London Conference shares her reflection on day one.

Two hours of sleep and two plane rides later, I'm surprised at how energized I was feeling when all of us pilgrims finally got together. Today has been a day of bonding, getting to know each other, and just pure, authentic fun.

In every smile, in every laugh, in every example of acceptance I am reminded why I wanted to be a part of this excursion. In every person here I truly see the presence of God. Each and every moment so far, and all of them for the next six weeks, are truly a blessing. I cannot stop smiling.

Aside from the fellowship and fun, we have already begun to create deep and spiritual bonds. At worship tonight, we discussed being salty. I don't mean salty as in sassy/crooked/rude—I mean salty as in how one engages with their faith and acts on it out in the world. One amazing connection a fellow pilgrim made was that part of our job this summer is to discuss the future of the United Church so that, as salt, we are helping to preserve the church.

I look forward to seeing what day two, tomorrow, holds.

Our Gifts for Mission & Service supported the life-changing faith experience of these pilgrims!

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