

## **PARTNERS IN MISSION UPDATE: THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA FOUNDATION**

### **Origin: The United Church of Canada Foundation**

#### **History and Purpose**

The United Church of Canada Foundation's purpose is to foster deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice by attracting and deploying financial resources. Through capacity building, convening, granting, and careful stewardship of funds entrusted to us, we support congregations, ministries, and programs that enrich The United Church of Canada, create a more just planet, and celebrate God's abundance in the world.

The Foundation was established as an independent public foundation in 2002. In the intervening 22 years, the Foundation has grown and increased its capacity to be of service to the church. Our strategic plan focuses on four major themes that are important to the people of The United Church of Canada: Communities of Faith, Anti-racism, Care for Creation, and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

#### **2024 Highlights**

In 2024 alone, the Foundation processed 403 gifts of stocks and mutual funds for a total of \$5.2M – most of which was designated for congregations.

We also granted \$542,160 to 91 projects through the Seeds of Hope granting program and \$196,274 to 35 individuals as scholarships, bursaries, and academic awards.

Additionally, we granted \$344,182 to 35 projects through other granting program and \$1.6M to Mission and Service.

In October 2024, the Foundation was proud to be included in the prestigious list of the 2024 Top 50 Equitable Funders in Canada, coming in at number 7! This recognition underscores the Foundation's commitment to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion practices in our grant-making activities.

The Top 50 Equitable Funders in Canada ranking recognizes organizations that have implemented innovative practices, policies, and initiatives to advance equity and inclusion in their funding activities. The annual research and ranking, compiled by Future of Good and QuakeLab, highlights organizations that have demonstrated notable progress in promoting equitable funding practices and fostering positive social change.

The Foundation's inclusion in this group reflects its ongoing efforts to support initiatives that address systemic inequalities and enable a more just and inclusive society. In striving to be responsive to the changing needs of the many people and diverse communities served by United Church ministries across Canada, we've been on a journey to intentionally embed our values in everything that we do. We're connecting resources—generosity, faithful stewardship,

capacity building, shared learning- with the United Church community and its partners working to create a more just planet and celebrate God's abundance in the world. But if our practices are set up to reinforce systems of oppression and power, then no "one" part of our work is going to make that happen by itself. It has to work holistically. So for us, that means having our values show up in our investments, in our grants, and how we do our work.

It's an honour to be recognized among the Top 50 Equitable Funders in Canada, but it isn't just about recognizing achievements; it's about envisioning a future where equity isn't aspirational but foundational to every act of grant-making driving meaningful change for generations to come.

### **Supporting our Priorities**

As we strive to embed our priorities in all our work, we lift up the following examples for your reference and information.

#### *Communities of Faith*

Each year we provide support to Communities of Faith such as our Gifts of Securities program where we facilitate gifts of stocks and mutual funds so that congregations and other ministries do not have to maintain brokerage accounts. We offer information and guidance around the creation and management of long term funds such as endowments so that Communities of Faith have sustainable, reliable annual funding for their ministry. We are leading the Centennial Legacy Campaign to help congregations speak with their members about leaving gifts in their wills in support of future ministry. We offer grants for innovative programming, Centennial events (limited time), and other meaningful expressions of ministry.

For example, buoyed by a Seeds of Hope grant from the Foundation, Oasis United Church in Penticton, BC hosted an art show as part of their Holy Imagination initiative.

The Holy Imagination project involves several initiatives aimed at experiencing the Holy through various creative opportunities. At their Pentecost Art Show, intergenerational artists explored the theme of Transformation.

"This was a wonderful community event. People brought their art to us from all over the community. The majority of the people who took part had never exhibited art in a public show before," Oasis minister Rev. Keri Wehlander tells us. They received over 90 pieces of art to display, from participants ranging in age from 4 to 91 years old.

It was a time of connection and learning for the community of faith. Several people from the congregation submitted art and Keri says that others in the congregation were "astounded that members of the congregation had made these pieces of art! It was a delightful way for us to get to know each other." On the last day of the show, they held an ice cream social that attracted many people from the wider community, facilitating conversation about the art amongst folks who had never met before.

Keri shares the story of a couple who participated in the show. “Her spouse has been suffering from Alzheimer’s. She had a series of paintings that he had painted, prior to the time he had developed Alzheimer’s and afterwards. The initial paintings were very detailed. Very realistic. And he has gradually become more abstract. There was a story that was told there in terms of what has been happening”.

Keri also tells of a social worker who invited two of her clients to submit art to the show. One of the men displayed a series of pencil drawings which served as a sort of diary of his experience in the shelter system. “He was very moved by having people come and see his journey and to be recognized as an artist. We had such a wide variety of people in this art show and every one of them felt like they were offering something that people appreciated. It was a way to celebrate the creativity in our midst.”

“It was my first show I’d ever considered entering into... I never thought I’d be good enough. But it really surprised me when people liked my art and someone even wanted to have it. My first painting I ever did!” shares Dot, an artist who participated in the Holy Imagination art show.

Describing her painting which began as just seven spots on the canvas, Dot says “it became a beautiful ring of flowers and that said a lot to me. It gave me encouragement to trust myself that I can make a mark on paper and claim it. It made me feel a lot stronger... I was kind of secretly building up my personality with each dot on the paper. I fought it for so long, but I finally opened up my heart to whatever—I figure it was the Holy Spirit—if I just acknowledge that I will be giving something of value. And all I can do is thank God! Becoming an artist made me appreciate and recognize our Creator.”

Margot Newton, member at Oasis United Church, expresses her thanks for the Seeds of Hope grant. “I want to say how grateful I am for the support given for the Art show. There were so many people from the community that supplied art for people to view, sell or just enjoy and it was a real delight.” Fellow Worship Team member Nancy Wise echoes Margot’s thanks. “A huge, heartfelt thank you to the United Church Foundation for making something pretty amazing possible. We came up with the idea of “holy imagination”, and the creative arts and how the Holy is so much a part of that. And holy, did we ever experience that in our community art show!”

In addition to our grants and investments, the Foundation provides assistance for Communities of Faith in a number of ways:

- The Centennial Legacy Campaign
- Management of Long term funds
- Processing gifts of stocks and mutual funds
- Webinars on a variety of subjects

The Centennial Legacy Campaign supports congregations and communities of faith in conversation with their friends and members to encourage people to make gifts in their Wills. Gifts can benefit congregations, Mission and Service, a new or existing Foundation fund and other ministries close to the hearts of United Church people. We offer support, resources, training and accompaniment to make the work load as easy and light as possible. Please visit <https://centennialcampaign.ca> for more information.

The Foundation holds nearly \$115M for the benefit of congregations, Mission and Service, Communities of Faith and United Church ministries. We are happy to share our learnings, offer options for investment management and work with congregations and communities of faith to find solutions for funds that support ministry into the future. We also have a guidebook on creating and managing endowments that is free to any individual or Community of Faith that would like a copy. More information can be found on our website: <https://unitedchurchfoundation.ca/giving/long-term-giving/endowments/organization-endowments/>

As mentioned above, we facilitate \$5-\$6M in gifts of stocks and mutual funds every year for congregations, communities of faith and United Church people who use this tax-advantageous way of giving to support the ministries they love. It's a simple and straightforward process. Forms and details are on our website: <https://unitedchurchfoundation.ca/giving/immediate-giving/gift-of-securities/>

Finally, we host webinars every two weeks for most of year highlighting the work of grant and scholarship recipients and important conversations in the Church. To hear about these webinars and more, follow us on social media (Facebook, Instagram, BlueSky, LinkedIn), check out our YouTube playlist, and sign up for our e-newsletter – links for all these and more are available at: <https://linktr.ee/uccanfoundation>

#### *Anti-racism, Racialized Peoples, Newcomers, and Immigrants*

In 2022, the Foundation committed to becoming an anti-racist organization. We have also named anti-racism as a priority in our impact investments (investments intended to provide a social or environmental return as well as a financial return). We have invested in Windmill Microlending, an organization that provides loans so that newcomers and immigrants can attain Canadian accreditation in their chosen field. The individuals accessing loans from Windmill see their income grow more than three (3) times, experience a 75% decrease in unemployment, and have a 96% loan repayment rate. Not only do these individuals benefit, but their communities benefit as well because they have additional doctors, lawyers, nurses, trades people, teachers, etc.

In terms of granting, St. Paul's has fostered a growing diverse, intercultural community with the help of a Seeds of Hope grant! St. Paul's United Church (Thunder Bay, ON) has witnessed remarkable growth over the last few years. "The context and the texture of the church [have] changed because, in the history of St. Paul's, there were no people of colour coming to church,"

explains Rev. Desire Tiriwepi, “But since these intercultural services started, we have seen an influx of people coming in.”

In 2023, St. Paul’s received a Seed of Hope grant from the Foundation for their initiative St. Paul’s Inter-Cultural Immigrant Community of Faith. “Ever since the funding, we have been able to organize prayers, meet together, and come together as a diverse community of Thunder Bay,” shares Rev. Desire. There has been an increase in the number of people attending services, particularly people of colour.

“We have people, of course, from Africa—not just from one nation, but from many different nations of Africa itself. We have people from South America, from Jamaica... It’s fostering an atmosphere of community, and we really thank the Foundation for helping us in that,” shares Blessing, the church’s Musical Director. Rev. Desire emphasizes how this growing diversity has enriched their services and their community

With the support of the Foundation, the intercultural community has been able to gather in meaningful ways. From sharing food together to wearing uniforms for performances, having access to instruments, and even going on picnics as a group, these experiences have helped build a deep sense of community. “We are blessed to be part of this group because we have a sense of belonging and community and we have learned a lot,” shares Pamela, a member of the African Praise Choir. While youth participation has been one aspect of the program’s success, the choir has expanded beyond that. Blessing, the Musical Director, emphasizes, “We have not only been able to encourage youth participation in this program, but we’ve also been able to invite a wide array of people from various walks of life.”

The Foundation has helped us invite people into our culture—the way that we sing, the way that we perform, the way that we dance.

The African Praise Choir has become a beloved part of the Thunder Bay community. They have been invited to perform at several events in the city, including Canada Day celebrations, Black History Month functions, and the Folklore Festival. Known for their vibrant performances, this intergenerational choir brings together people of all ages. And as one choir member shares, “We have women who come together with their kids to sing,” shares another member of the African Praise Choir.

Beyond singing, they have also become known for their dance performances. “The Foundation has helped us invite people into our culture—the way that we sing, the way that we perform, the way that we dance,” Blessing shares. Rev. Desire proudly reflects, “We have made a footprint in the city of Thunder Bay.” The work at St. Paul’s continues to grow, fostering a truly diverse and welcoming environment for everyone in the community.

*Care for creation*

We were pleased to support Sylvan United Church's inaugural summer camp with a \$3,000 grant through the Seeds of Hope granting program.

The church offered 4 days of camp that focused on caring for all of Creation through the themes of Shelter, Food, Water, Air and Community, all rooted around Psalm 104.

The Seeds of Hope grant meant that they could offer a low the registration fee; fully fund 3 campers to attend through bursaries; offer the youth volunteers and kitchen coordinator an honorarium and; most celebrated by the parents - include lunch and all snacks as part fee. This last is absolute gold to parents!

All of the children and youth who participated have been part of Sylvan programs e.g. Sunday School, the Children's Choirs and musical events in the past 3 years, or were members of the Girl Guide unit led on site by the minister. Being able to offer this camp helped to strengthen Sylvan's presence in the community as a place that offers safe, engaging and vibrant programming for children, youth and families.

This was a successful camp. The parents all gave feedback about how much their children enjoyed it and the teens and L.I.Ts are eager to come back next year. What a great innovation of service and learning focused on the environment.

Through our investments, we have participated in shareholder engagement related to mitigating climate change and we have a number of investments in our impact portfolio that are focused on a just transition to clean energy as well as other climate change mitigation.

For example, our investment in Active impact has helped save 274M liters of water, generated 273,034 MWh in clean energy, and diverted 28,791 tonnes of waste from landfills.

*Reconciliation*

Both in our grants and our investments we make efforts to support the work and journey of reconciliation. In our impact portfolio, we have investments in a Government of Manitoba Social Impact Bond that focuses on providing interventions rooted in Indigenous culture to reduce the number of days youths aged 12-17 spend in the custody of the justice system. In Manitoba, Indigenous youth represent 80% of the youth in custody while they form approximately 17% of Manitoba's population. This is large over-representation and the bond provides capital that allows for the use of Indigenous cultural and knowledge practices that heal the whole person.

Through the Seeds of Hope granting program, the Foundation supported the Inlet Connects and Art Wall Ministry of Inlet United Church Port Moody. On October 9, 2024, the community celebrated the completion of its 3-year Art Wall Project, with a Blessing Ceremony and Feast in Coast Salish tradition. Kwantlen Nation artist, Nash'mene'ta'naht (Atheana Picha) was blessed,

along with the mural that she designed and installed on the exterior wall of The Springs. Funding from the Brian and Belva Piercy Endowment Fund of the United Church of Canada Foundation helped to support this celebration.

The Blessing Ceremony and Feast took place with community involvement honouring Coast Salish protocols and traditions.

This project provided many positive experiences and learnings. The members of the Inlet Connects and Art Wall Ministry, Minister Jennifer Swanson and the Board Chair, Jan Morrissey, represented “the family” in Coast Salish tradition. The Family as well as the participants, including the Inlet United Church congregation and community members, learned about Coast Salish traditions and protocols including the traditional cedar sweeping of the artist to cleanse and set her free from the mural painting, the giving of gifts to acknowledge the sharing of knowledge by of Indigenous elder performing the role of Speaker, the Floor Manager as well as the drummers.

Positive relationships were built with Indigenous Cultural Liaison, Tasha Faye Evans and artist, Atheana Picha. The collaborative process of planning and experiencing the Blessing Ceremony and Feast resulted in a greater understanding and appreciation of Coast Salish knowledge and traditions. The community also came together to celebrate, and experiencing Inlet United Church as a place of authentic welcome, where community members with diverse backgrounds can gather to connect, learn and heal together.

Challenging aspects of the project offered genuine learning opportunities. It was difficult and took more time than expected to find Coast Salish Elders to conduct the ceremony. Leading ceremony is serious and demanding work, made difficult by the history of churches, and their harm to Indigenous people. By building a positive relationship with the Cultural Liaison, Tasha, she was able to find elders from the Tsleil-Waututh community to accept the role of Speaker and musicians. Tasha stepped in to fill the role of Floor Manager.

Top three learnings:

- Building trust takes time. The Art Wall Ministry learned about Indigenous lived experiences, adjusted timelines, planned additional time for communication, meetings and completion of tasks and built positive relationships with Indigenous participants. With open hearts, attentive listening and observation, and prayer and discernment, Ministry members came to know that Indigenous participation involved heavy emotional work and it was important to make space for this, to appreciate the courage and determination of Indigenous participants, and to have faith that the project would unfold in the fullness of time.
- To welcome can be an expansive gesture. Participants gained an expanded understanding of the meaning of welcome. In Coast Salish Tradition, it is important to welcome and connect to all Creation – people, animals, plants, water, sky, earth, the universe.

The community is hungry for opportunities to heal. Many participants voiced their gratitude for the Ceremony, Blessing and Feast which included experiential learning, and the opportunity to create and celebrate a safe and welcoming artwork and space for everyone.

The short-term outcome of this project is the blessing of the mural, experiencing and learning about Coast Salish protocols and the coming together of diverse community members to celebrate. Many relationships have been fostered and maintained through the course of this project. With respect to the celebration specifically, these included relationships with the artist, Cultural Liaison, Indigenous elders, sponsors, neighbouring businesses and organizations include Community Ventures (the next-door neighbour whose parking lot was used for the installation and celebration), volunteers, community members, residents and organizations in The Springs, City of Port Moody staff, neighbouring churches, and Inlet United congregation members and staff.

The long-term outcome of this project is the lasting gift of the mural in our community as well as the positive relationships built and lessons learned. Approximately 200 people participated in the community art process, over 3 years of meetings and events. Each time these participants see the mural, they will be reminded of lessons learned and friendships built. They will tell the story to others and keep the story alive as part of the history in this building and community. The mural is a visual representation of the congregation's commitment to welcome, heal and build positive relationships in the community.

If you have questions regarding this report please email them to [fdn@united-church.ca](mailto:fdn@united-church.ca)