



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA/L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

2019 Year in Review

Dear friends in Christ,



The Right Rev. Dr.
Richard Bott,
Moderator

We originally wrote this letter in early 2020 in the pre-pandemic days. At the time, we focused on the transformation of the structure of The United Church of Canada in 2019.

Needless to say, COVID-19 has presented everyone around the world with a transformation we never imagined. Times have changed and continue to change. We will certainly face challenges as a church and as a society for some time to come. Still, we are learning to live as God's people in this time and place. We are grateful to the communities of faith that are living out their ministries every way they can. We are grateful for the hard work and vision of regional council leaders as they faithfully navigate uncharted waters. We are grateful for the General Council Executive, smaller in numbers but mighty in spirit, who listen, discern, and guide the work of the church.



Nora Sanders,
General Secretary

This is a time for us to remind ourselves of the many ways we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. This annual report highlights only a small part of this work. We are always eager to hear from you about the things you see and do in your part of the United Church.

As we look at 2019 from the strange time we find ourselves in in 2020 with COVID-19, sincere thanks to all of you as you continue to celebrate God's presence, live with respect in Creation, love and serve others, seek justice and resist evil, and proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, in these times of change and renewal for our United Church.

Blessings,
Richard and Nora

To celebrate God's presence



Photo: Scott Bourassa

MacKay United in Ottawa co-hosted the Beechwood Night Market in the church's Memorial Hall, 2019.

Nurturing Innovation

Embracing the Spirit, the United Church's learning network and innovation fund supported by Mission & Service, nurtures experimentation in communities of faith. Since 2016, over 400 initiatives have been funded, each of which have impacted an average of 310 people and engaged 4.7 partners, with 50 percent of the leadership being new. EDGE supports funded grantees in developing partnerships and financial sustainability through learning cohorts.

The projects are diverse—from spiritual practice to technology to reconciliation to community hubs—in urban, suburban, and rural areas. There is always something exciting emerging! Here are only two examples:

At MacKay, we're appreciating that fun can be one of the key characteristics of neighbourhood engagement. In 2019, MacKay co-hosted the first-ever Beechwood Night Market, where 700–900 people (we lost count!) chatted and danced and shopped. Best of all, people lingered together. –Pete Woods, Minister, MacKay United Church, Ottawa, ON

As a teen, my life was changed by United Church summer camps. But beyond summer camp we found there was a critical lack of spaces to continue growing in Christ into our 20s. That's how the vision for The Hub was born. We started by gathering 30 people in a cramped basement for dinner and worship. Four years later, The Hub has become a thriving movement, and our Sub-Hub home churches meet weekly in seven cities from London to Sudbury. The craziest part? We believe we're just getting started!" –Adam Cresswell, Director of Youth Ministries and founder of The Hub, Wellington Square United Church, Burlington, ON.

To celebrate God's presence



Photo: Sara Stratton/The United Church of Canada

Eight members plus two alternates make up the National Indigenous Council. Left to right: John Thompson, Tonya Antone, Cathie Cunningham, William Miller, John Snow, Nicky MacKay, Leeann Shimoda (alternate), Beverly Brown, Russel Burns, Samantha Miller (alternate).

Indigenous Church Forges New Path

In August 2019, more than 150 people from Indigenous communities of faith across the country gathered at Rama First Nation in Ontario to forge a new path for the Indigenous church. The restructuring of the church from four courts to three councils ended the 30-year-old All-Native Circle Conference, and the Indigenous church took the time necessary to discern its future.

The Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle developed the Calls to the Church, which set out a path of self-determination. A national consultation led to rich and sometimes difficult discussions at the 2019 National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering.

Framed by ceremony and worship, and grounded in the presence of Elders and youth, the self-determining Indigenous church, including a National Indigenous Council and an Elders Council, was called into being.

The National Indigenous Council holds the powers and responsibility to decide which regional council responsibilities it can undertake and when—and continues to work to foster a close relationship with the regions as it further refines its priorities and structures.

The new structure offers the church a path to healing in keeping with the Calls to the Church and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that the church adopted in March 2016.



Photo: Sara Stratton/The United Church of Canada

Youth and Sandy-Saulteaux students in worship at the NISG

Youth Protest to Protect Creation

On May 24, 2019, students inspired by young activists like Greta Thunberg and Autumn Peltier walked out of schools around the world to demand that their governments take action to end climate change. In September, the United Church was able to support, with staff and website resources, youth leaders who were encouraged by the global climate strike movement.

In faithful discipleship with their faith communities, young people have led the march for climate justice, both organizing and participating in the climate strikes. They have inspired people of all generations to live out our faith by speaking out to protect creation and by taking part in the global youth-led Fridays for Future movement.



Photo: Jennifer Reed/The United Church of Canada

United Church members and staff at the Global Climate Strike in Toronto, September 27, 2019

Calling for Climate Justice at COP25

In December, the United Church sent the Rev. Wendy Evans, Tony Snow, and General Council Office staff person Christie Neufeldt to Madrid, Spain, to participate in the UN Climate Change Conference, COP25.

The delegation represented our church's belief that the global climate crisis is a moral and spiritual issue requiring urgent action. The delegates participated as part of ecumenical and civil society delegations with partners the World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, and Climate Action Network Canada, which pressed global leaders to respond to climate change and respect human, Indigenous, and intergenerational rights in the process. The United Church delegation's presence contributed to the powerful message from people of faith that churches around the world are calling for climate justice.



Photo: Rev. Wendy Evans/The United Church of Canada

The Rev. Wendy Evans, Christie Neufeldt, and Tony Snow were the United Church's COP25 Madrid delegates.

Responding to a Modern-Day Exodus

From supporting food assistance in refugee camps in Syria and Jordan to welcoming refugees in Canada, The United Church of Canada responds in many ways to the needs of some of the 70.8 million people who are forced to be “on the move” around the world.

In 2019, the United Church worked with local congregations and other community groups to sponsor 362 refugees. It has also continued to decry a safe third country agreement with the United States that limits the rights of potential asylum seekers here.

After a visit with partners to the US-built wall in Nogales, Mexico, Jim Hodgson, Program Coordinator for the Caribbean and Latin America, said, “Sounds of music, traffic, and street vendors filled the air as we reflected on the significance of the crosses, which represent people who died trying to enter the United States in search of jobs or refuge. Soon we joined the line at the border, where our Canadian passports—our privilege—made it easy for us to continue our journey to Tucson.”

As climate change, social violence, and extreme poverty drive an exodus from Central America toward the United States, United Church people have supported efforts by Mission & Service partner ACT Alliance and its members to provide access to safety, basic needs, and information for asylum seekers about their rights.

Mission & Service contributions—often in combination with funds from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Global Affairs Canada—also sustain the work of partners around the world who



Photo: Jim Hodgson/
The United Church of Canada

The United States–built wall that faces Nogales, Mexico

work with people fleeing violence and the effects of the climate crisis. The United Church also participates in a global network, Churches Witnessing With Migrants, that supports migrant workers.



MISSION & SERVICE

Review of 2019 Giving

Dear Friends,

We give thanks for all gifts in 2019.

Together we make great things happen through Mission & Service and through the ministry of our local churches. Thank you for generously supporting Mission & Service to help build a better world.

In 2019 we gave thanks for the visionary gifts in wills and other planned gifts like life insurance policies that continue to support the important ministry of Mission & Service with gifts totalling \$2.2 million. The legacy of our United Church saints will live on in lives that have been transformed by these gifts from those who have gone before.

Thank you to the UCWs, congregations, and individuals who gave \$21.0 million for our shared work through the Mission & Service of the church.

Even as the church continues to experience significant change and decreased numbers of members and adherents, generosity continues with giving from congregations, UCW, and individuals only decreasing by $-\$1.1$ million (-5.09 percent). We note, with thanks, that this is close to the previously budgeted decrease for 2019.

Contributions to Mission & Service

1. \$21.0 million in annual giving by congregations, UCW, and individuals
2. \$2.2 million giving through wills and other planned gifts
3. \$1.1 million in grants from The United Church of Canada Foundation

Total: \$24.3 million in gifts to Mission & Service unified fund in 2019

Contributions to Mission & Service partners and other mission and ministries

4. \$1.3 million in specific designations and Gifts with Vision gifts to Mission & Service partners
5. \$0.5 million in Emergency Appeals gifts
6. \$0.8 million in specific designations to other work of the denomination

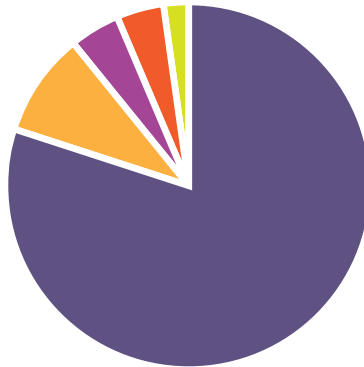
Total: \$2.6 million in designated gifts in 2019

Total contributions received at the General Council Office: \$26.9 million



Photo: Fiona Imbali

Thank you all
for your generous gifts!



■ Congregations: \$19.5 million

■ UCW: \$1.0 million

■ Wills and Planned Giving: \$2.2 million

■ Individuals and Organizations: \$0.5 million

■ United Church Foundation: \$1.1 million

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well." Psalm 139:14

You are at the centre of the **Mission & Service** story. Your generosity is a tangible example of God's love in the world. Each and every day you are saving lives. Your gifts to our shared work through **Mission & Service** are an outward expression of your faith in a loving God who calls us to care for all creation.

Financial Snapshot

The United Church of Canada

The year 2019 was an extraordinary one for church operations and finance across the church, as it was year one for a new funding model and new structures. It was the first year of assessment being administered at the denominational level, with equal sharing of assessment and Mission & Service revenues across the 16 new regions. Considerable effort and one-time investment continued in building a more modern infrastructure and supporting the transition. It was also an exceptional year for investment returns, with an annualized total return exceeding 16 percent.

Operating results for 2019 were therefore much better than expected. Operating revenues and expenses were largely within budget expectations, with a positive revenue contribution from legacies. A significant deficit was avoided, with over \$10 million in unrealized investment gains more than offsetting the operating deficit and investment in restructuring costs. The financial result for 2019 is an overall \$2 million operating surplus and an actual increase in total assets—reversing the recent trend. This is of course a point-in-time view, but a relatively strong 2019 left us in a better position to respond to market turmoil and subsequent events in 2020. Adjusting cost structures to align with the reality of static or declining revenues will be a recurring theme.

The audited financial statements are available online (see www.united-church.ca/community-faith/get-involved/ways-give.)

In 2019 we also saw a further commitment to the Faithful Footprints program, which offers educational materials and congregational grants for upgrading environmental efficiency and reducing our carbon footprint. The United Property Resource Corporation was established and initial funding provided to support more strategic use, redeployment, and/or disposition of properties. The denominational and regional councils are now operating on a common technology platform and increasingly using the same systems and tools as a way to achieve economies of scale and save money. Technology to support pension and group benefits administration is being upgraded significantly. All of these activities reflect the need for faithful stewardship and ongoing cost containment as the church at all levels lives into new ways of being church.

The United Church of Canada Foundation

Thanks to generous United Church members, in 2019 alone, the Joint Grants Committee reviewed over 160 applications and the Foundation's Board awarded \$1,607,248 to 133 programs and scholars. The people and projects these grants support represent a tremendous amount of energy in our communities for living out God's mission, examining new ways to invite people into our church, and exploring fresh approaches to providing service.

In early 2020, the Foundation made a \$3 million grant to The United Church of Canada to support the emergency loan program the church created to help communities of faith meet their financial obligations during the coronavirus pandemic. This grant was possible because of the faithful forethought of United Church people from across the country who made gifts in their will. We are so grateful for these generous planned gifts from those who have gone before us to benefit the future work of the church.

To love and serve others



First Steps provides a daily snack to 100,000 children in North Korea.

First Steps to Child Nutrition

Patti Talbot, Team Lead, Church in Partnership, shares this story from a partner visit:

“We are giving our everything to the children to make sure they will grow up healthy. Thank you for your support.”

The principal of the Hyesan city daycare in Ryanggang province, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), beamed as the small children received their daily morning snack of soy milk and biscuits. We were in this small city on the border with China as part of a monitoring visit with colleagues from Mission & Service partner First Steps Health Society.

The United Church has long been committed to working with partners in South and North Korea toward peace and reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula. In September 2019, we were in the

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea, because of the growing humanitarian crisis there. Severe environmental and climate change–related challenges in recent years have led to prolonged dry, hot spells in some areas and major flooding in others.

With international sanctions blocking access to agricultural inputs and tools, food insecurity has steadily increased throughout the country. Widespread undernutrition threatens an entire generation of children, with one in five children’s growth stunted due to chronic undernutrition.

Our faith teaches us to reach out in compassionate response to human suffering. Through First Steps, the United Church supports a child nutrition program that provides a daily cup of soymilk for some 100,000 daycare and kindergarten children in five provinces in North Korea.

To seek justice and resist evil

Youth for Peace in Palestine

In August, Mission & Service partner Wi'am, The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, hosted 11 United Church young adults and two leaders. They were responding to the invitation from Palestinian Christians to "come and see" conditions in Palestine to understand the reality and to act for justice.

Coming from diverse circumstances and contexts across Canada, the group met primarily with children, youth, and Palestinian and Israeli young adults to listen to their stories and learn about their realities, hopes, and aspirations. Through the No Way to Treat a Child campaign led by Mission & Service partner Defense for Children International–Palestine, the United Church and other Canadian civil society groups are drawing attention to the numerous violations of the rights of Palestinian children arrested, interrogated, and detained by the Israeli military.



Photo: Youth for Peace in Palestine

Finding hope in Palestine

Some members of the Youth for Peace delegation will visit members of Parliament in Ottawa to urge elected officials to protect the rights of all children, including Palestinian children.

Equality: A Precondition for Justice

In November, Mission & Service partner Wi'am hosted eight KAIROS member church leaders for 10 intense days in Palestine and Israel, travelling to Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah, Gaza, Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Tel Aviv. They visited women's groups, community development and infrastructure projects, civil society organizations, Canadian government representatives, human rights groups, and religious and community leaders.

From the beginning, delegates committed to education and advocacy upon their return to Canada—to share what they had heard, amplify voices, and make visible the work of partners. Delegates wrote a daily blog series about what they learned; see kairoscanada.org/blog. The delegation is bringing to the Canadian government the messages



Photo: Catherine Rodd/The United Church of Canada

Girls take part in a trauma counselling program run by the Near East Council of Churches, Gaza.

received during their visit, urging Canada to take an active leadership role internationally to support a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis. The key message from partners: "Equality is the precondition for justice, and peace will be its fruit."

To seek justice and resist evil



Photo: Marianne Ejdersten/WCC

World Council of Churches delegates from all over the world met in Johannesburg, South Africa, in December. Michael Blair is first on the left.

Mission from the Margins

Michael Blair, Executive Minister, Church in Mission, shares some of how the United Church is working to seek justice with partners at a global level:

One of the ecumenical partners The United Church of Canada collaborates with is the World Council of Churches. Using the Council's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace framework, which calls on churches to join together to take concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence, we have participated in the work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs on Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia; and in the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

In June, we hosted a consultation with a working group from the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, and the Council of World Mission. The theme was evangelism and the legacies of slavery, and the consultation brought together participants

from every continent. The Canadian participants presented Canada's Black church history.

In December, I was a delegate in a pilgrimage to South Africa at the invitation of the South African Council of Churches to bear witness to the impact of racism and xenophobia on society. As well, as a church we have participated in a number of United Nations gatherings related to anti-Black racism.

I am always moved as I see how deeply appreciative partners are of these acts of solidarity and accompaniment that they experience by our presence. And I am thankful that these are principles rooted in the United Church's understanding of partnerships.

We continue to be part of efforts to broaden the global churches' commitment to the principle of "mission from the margins"—looking at the contributions of Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, racialized persons, and all who live at the margins.

To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen

Full Communion Celebration

A highlight of 2019 was entering into a full communion agreement—a new ecumenical partnership—with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in July 2019.

The agreement allows clergy to move freely between the United Church and the Christian Church if they choose, and recognizes each other's sacraments of baptism and communion.

A formal worship service to celebrate the new partnership between the denominations was held on October 6, World Communion Sunday, at Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg.

In photo on right, the Rev. Belva Brown Jordan, Moderator of the Disciples, with Moderator Richard Bott



Photos: Rudy Gauer



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