# Mission and Service Stories: January‒March 2024

Mission and Service—helping transform lives, inspire meaning and purpose, and
build a better world.



The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada

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## Welcome to *Mission and Service Stories*!

*Mission and Service Stories* are for sharing with our faithful supporters to show them the amazing work their gifts make possible.

These stories can be used in services, in newsletters, and in face-to-face conversations. The more they’re shared, the more people will understand just how life-changing Mission and Service is!

For videos of some of the work you make possible, visit the [Mission and Service playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQDu-SgFb3RgRuLXGcT2-DvK8VeECsVdv) on our YouTube channel.

We hope this resource is helpful and inspiring.

As always, we would **love to hear your feedback**. Drop us a line at ms@united-church.ca and let us know what you like, what we can improve on, and what we can focus on developing.

Blessings,

The Philanthropy Team

## January 7: Learning the Gospel at Camp

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

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

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

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

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

## January 14: Making a Home for Refugees

Imagine being forced to leave your home.

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

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

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

That’s the equivalent of three Canadas.

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

We can help.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## January 21: Providing Tuition Assistance

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

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

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

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

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

## January 28: Your Generosity Revitalizes Languages

Take a moment to think about your favourite story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## February 4: Lessons of Racism Learned When Young

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I hope that you will be too.

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

## February 11: Small Gifts with BIG Impact

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

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

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

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

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

## February 18: Leading Generations

Becoming a parent or guardian is a life-changing, complex experience that doesn’t have a one-size-fits-all answer. As kids, we looked to adults for guidance as we navigated the world with fresh eyes. We looked to teachers for help with schoolwork, and parental figures for managing emotions and fears. Now, as adults, we recognize that we’re still figuring things out as we go, and there’s always an opportunity to grow our skills and minds.

In London, Ontario, [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partners with the London Community Chaplaincy as they respond to parents and guardians who wish to build a network of support, share the parenting journey, and develop new skills as they navigate raising children in a low-income setting. Together, these parents are working hard to build a positive future for their children and families.

Each week London Community Chaplaincy provides a welcoming and safe social setting for adults to connect and grow as parents. Not only do for learning how to guide a child through critical stages of development, but also for navigating the complex mental aspects of being a parent or guardian while also managing financial stress, food insecurity, housing complications, and more. Gathering with other adults in a similar situation allows participants to share their struggles and triumphs, further building a sense of community.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) support partnerships like the London Community Chaplaincy as they help empower parents along the parenting journey. Thank you.

## February 25: Taking Kids to School

How do you make the world a better place?

You can start by taking kids to school.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## March 3: Accompanying Grandmothers

In the Rift Valley of Kenya, 7 percent of the people who live there are HIV positive—nearly 900,000—and many will not survive. Grandmothers whose children have died of AIDS are often left alone to care for their grandchildren, and to add insult to injury, their church community condemns them, leaving them without support as they raise their grandchildren.

Some pastors in the Rift Valley, as in many other places, believe and teach that faithful Christians cannot contract the disease and that it is a judgment from God—a disease for sexual sinners.

“The pastors had little information about HIV and AIDS; to them, and others in the community, it was a strange disease…. [They believed] HIV was a result of sexual sin and was a judgement from God for the sexually immoral,” writes Esther Mombo of the World Council of Churches.

In partnership with the United Church, Mombo and Pauline Wanjuru of St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya, led a series of workshops in one Rift Valley community that has been hit especially hard by HIV/AIDS. They invited grandmothers and pastors to connect and learn from each other.

One grandmother who attended the workshops was 70 years old. She had lost both her daughter and her son and was left to raise three grandchildren on her own. Instead of stepping up to help, her neighbours refused to visit her because they said her daughter and son had been sexually immoral. Her pastor wouldn’t even attend her children’s funerals because he didn’t want to be seen associating with her family. When she went to church, the pastor preached about the punishment for sexual immorality.

At the workshops, this woman bravely told her story to the pastors who attended. She also shared with them how it felt to be shamed for loving her children and grandchildren. Another grandmother explained that her grandchildren were born with the virus and couldn’t have been involved in any sexual immorality. Yet another spoke of God’s love for everyone. Pastors listened and learned, and ended by making a commitment to extend compassion and offer pastoral care to the grandmothers.

All of us know from our own life experience that when we know better, we do better. Your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts gave these grandmothers the opportunity to help their pastors learn to do better by connecting their love for their grandchildren to God’s love for all. Thank you.

## March 10: Public, Intentional, Explicit Inclusion

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for giving through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). God’s compassionate love knows no boundaries. Your generosity shows ours doesn’t either.

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

## March 17: Social Support through Education

Signing up for a course is both exciting and nerve-wracking. We think about what skills we’ll learn, how quickly we’ll see improvement, and how naturally “talented” we may be.

In Sambir, Ukraine, English teacher Ilona is encouraging her learners to challenge that way of thinking and enjoy the aspect of social time with one another while learning English. This class, supported by [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partner ACT Alliance, is part of a psychosocial support program for Ukrainians displaced by war. Ilona and her family were also displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, and she is now actively contributing to the well-being of others in similar situations.

While online learning expands opportunities and access to learning, distance learners miss crucial social engagement and human interaction. Ilona shares, “When we come together and get to know each other, we have a community. We can open up and share our thoughts, feelings, and experiences.” In a low-pressure learning environment, students can feel comfortable as they learn skills and learn about each other.

Thank you for the support you show to through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) as our neighbours endure the ongoing impacts of war and conflict.

## March 24: Preserving Culture through Language Revitalization

Take a moment to think about your favourite story.

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

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

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## March 31: An Easter Message on Education

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

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

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

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

Blessings for Easter.