# Mission and Service Stories: April‒June 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

## April 7: United Church Camps—but Make Them Year-Round!

On a windy weekday morning in February, you might expect a camp to be quiet, anxiously awaiting the hustle and bustle that summertime will bring. But on the escarpment in Lincoln, ON, Cave Springs Camp is anything but quiet.

A Nature School for youth operates daily on the lower floor of the new Conference Centre. Staff take bookings for weddings, corporate events, and birthdays, and in the afternoon a youth group will arrive to enjoy the year-round facilities.

Cave Springs Camp hasn’t always been this way. Not so long ago, programming would only run in the summertime, with some bookings into the fall if weather permitted.

Program Director Lance Wright enthusiastically expresses his deep gratitude for the people who have made year-round facilities and programs possible. Looking outside on a February weekday, Lance can see children at the Nature School experimenting with the wind instead of hiding from it indoors on a phone or computer. Lance’s passion for creating lifelong memories and inspiring faith and self-confidence shines through his work to build a caring and dynamic community atmosphere.

From the vibrant colours of spring to the warm sunshine of summer, the crisp air of fall, and the magical snow-covered landscapes of winter, Cave Springs Camp provides an ever-changing backdrop for people of all ages to appreciate outdoor activities and adventures.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) is helping children, teens, and adults to reconnect with nature at any time of the year. Thank you.

*Stay tuned for a video from Cave Springs Camp coming later in 2024!*

## April 14: Supporting a Rights-Based Approach to Growing Food

The Association of Economic and Social Development Santa Marta (ADES), a Mission and Service partner, is located in an area of Central America that is very vulnerable to climate change. This hot, dry region regularly experiences drought. Mining projects have also negatively affected the environment and the people in the region. ADES and other community organizations decided to act to protect the community’s right to a healthy environment.

An example of how ADES has responded is a three-year agroecology project co-funded by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation and The United Church of Canada Foundation, along with Mission and Service. Agroecology benefits the land and water because it recycles nutrients back into the soil. It also reduces production costs, lessening the financial burden on rural farmers.

In this project, ADES works closely with the community to grow food in a rural region of El Salvador, promoting sustainable agriculture that protects biodiversity, maintains the integrity of the land, and upholds rural culture.

At the centre of the project is the Dora Alicia Sorto School Farm, where rural families, mainly led by women, learn about agroecology. The school provides training, technical expertise, and seeds indigenous to the region. It focuses on preserving the surrounding environment and on upholding gender and human rights as part of its approach to food security.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help support ADES’ agroecology project. Thank you for your generosity!

## April 21: Building and Strengthening Community through Art

*We would like to share a wonderful thank-you letter we received from Bissell Centre, a Mission and Service partner located in Edmonton. We're sharing it with you with deep gratitude and thanks for your generosity.*

Thank you to the wonderful people of The United Church of Canada. It’s with gifts like yours that we’re able to meet people facing poverty and houselessness where they’re at. We look forward to collecting and sharing more stories with you, like this one about Jon:

Jon is one of the community members at Bissell Centre, and has a passion (and talent) for art. In fact, he’s been named Bissell’s artist in residence. His work has been commissioned by Bissell to provide an authentic, community-made element to our event advertising, our annual impact reports, and several donor thank-you gifts.

His pieces often feature powerful imagery drawn from his Indigenous heritage and always in a spirit of celebration. His art was the focal point of the event poster for Bissell’s celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day [in 2022]. Inspired by the love and support he has received, Jon wanted a way to give back.

He designed, organized, and now facilitates a weekly art program called “Good Art.” In the workshops he guides people to express themselves in a healthy way through art that means something to them. Folks are encouraged to share about the art they make at the end of each workshop as way to build and strengthen community.

Your support provided a space for this to happen, and your gifts are having a palpable impact in the lives of Edmontonians facing poverty and houselessness.

Thank you very much United Church of Canada.

Shared with gratitude for your gifts through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service). Thank you for your generosity.

## April 28: Healing through Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful way to preserve and share history. The theatre performance, Bunk #7, does just that.

Bunk #7 shares the true story of six boys rioting against the mistreatment and many forms of abuse they received at Edmonton Indian Residential School in St. Albert, Alberta, in the early 1960s. Written by the late Nisga’a MLA Larry Guno, the play is based on his own experience at the residential school and named for his bunk number.

The cast features Indigenous youth and young adults, offering a powerful way for the cast and audiences to learn and share the story of cultural resilience. In November 2021, the play premiered at Raven Theatre in British Columbia to a full audience. With overwhelming support, the performers went on a tour of northwestern BC to share the transformative journey. Performances in fall 2023 were once again met with great support.

Your gifts to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) open opportunities for storytelling to move forward in an impactful and powerful way. Thank you for your generosity.

## May 5: A Beacon of Hope

When we hear of a global emergency, our minds often jump to “How can we help?” Your gifts to Mission and Service enable partners to immediately get to work providing crucial basic needs: food, water, shelter, and medication. But after the initial response, and after headlines fade away, the emergency and urgency remain.

After the immediate shock lessens, people living in the wake of a disaster can have difficulty imagining what life will look like down the road. In these times, hope is essential. By giving us the motivation to keep moving forward, hope is a powerful force that inspires us to keep going.

Mission and Service partner the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) continues to be hard at work providing hope. People in Syria are still experiencing the devastating aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes.

From retrofitting buildings and providing medical equipment to education and trauma healing, MECC is dedicated to sustainable relief.

In Aleppo, MECC rehabilitated four schools before the academic year launched in September 2023, providing children with a safe place to learn.

Thank you for supporting the work of our [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) partners. Your generosity is a beacon of hope during challenging times.

## May 12: Educating Future Leaders

Mission and Service does a surprising amount of development in your local church, recruiting new ministers and funding theological schools. It even shapes the hymn books you sing from every service.

Another important way Mission nd Service supports local ministry: by providing academic bursaries for students studying to become ministers and theological leaders.

“The church has a lot to offer in terms of witness to the community and supporting people who are struggling,” explains the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball, the United Church’s Executive Minister for Theological Leadership.

“The money is really helpful,” she says, “but the other thing that is so important to students is realizing that people throughout the church cared enough to donate to Mission and Service.”

The Rev. Alexa Gilmour received one of these bursaries when she was still a ministry candidate. “I was a single parent, and I knew I couldn’t get through without support,” Gilmour says. “I felt blessed by God through people who donated and who, by giving, encouraged me on my journey. I have tremendous gratitude for that important role the church played in my life at that time.”

Janzen-Ball wants you to know that your gifts do matter.

“They matter both tangibly in peoples’ lives in a real way but also in intangible ways because they signal the support of the wider community,” she says. “The care of people who are strangers to one another―the importance and impact of that can’t be overstated.

“Giving to [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) is an opportunity to support future and current leaders. Those gifts make a significant difference.”

A more detailed video, [A Deeper Look: Educating the Ministers of Tomorrow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Egi4hFqZQ), is available on YouTube.

## May 19: Connecting for Global Peace and Security

Project Ploughshares is a Canadian peace research institute with a focus on disarmament efforts and international security. It is also one of our dedicated Mission and Service partners. Project Ploughshares’ important efforts come with many barriers, including discouragement, pushback, and regular exposure to mentally draining work.

Duncan Etches started his journey with Project Ploughshares as a supporter. When he saw an opportunity to be The United Church of Canada representative on the management committee, he felt it was time to step into the key role. He comments on how wise and inspirational the whole team is, sharing that “they keep hope in impossible situations.”

Project Ploughshares includes people from diverse backgrounds who are all deeply committed to making the world a better place. Rooted in the ethics of Christianity—peace, reconciliation, and justice—their work connects with people inside and outside faith communities. Members are respected and invited to be part of important conversations.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) provides encouragement and hope to leaders of Project Ploughshares, a vital connection point for those passionate about global peace and security. Thank you.

## May 26: Your Generosity Is Refreshing

Being able to take a shower can have a positive impact on a person’s mental and emotional health. It provides a sense of dignity, self-worth, and normalcy that contributes to overall well-being, especially to people living on the streets.

In downtown St. Catharines, ON, Silver Spire United Church’s shower and laundry program is changing lives. Three mornings a week, people are offered an opportunity to refresh and recharge. The two shower rooms can be locked and each have a changing area, so patrons have space to secure their personal belongings. The laundry room next door means that after they shower people can dress in their own clean clothing. Cellphone chargers are another small but helpful detail.

This program goes beyond being a practical service. It embodies compassion, addresses fundamental needs, and provides comfort in a welcoming space. In the sweltering heat of summer, a cool shower can make a huge difference.

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) helps programs like Silver Spire’s to support people’s well-being. Thank you.

## June 2: Learning about God’s Love

Queer Kid Bible Camp is a unique and affirming space that has emerged to provide a supportive environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth within the framework of spirituality. Started by Mission and Service partner Silver Spire United Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, Queer Kid Bible Camp blends teachings of God’s love with messages of inclusivity.

Queer individuals have often been marginalized or excluded in spiritual experiences, which can make them feel isolated and alienated. Queer Kid Bible Camp aims to challenge these negative experiences by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance in a spiritual context. The camp offers a place for young 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to explore and reconcile their faith with their identity. Through theological and spiritual discussions, youth can openly ask questions without feeling uncertain about their safety.

The benefits of Queer Kid Bible Camp extend beyond its immediate impact on individual campers. The camp experience sparks conversation with parents and guardians who want to connect and understand their children better. As young participants gain confidence and self-acceptance, they become advocates for change within their own communities. The Rev. Karen Orlandi of Silver Spire United Church has seen a wonderful ripple effect, noting that she’s seen “healing for queer adults as they see queer kids openly embracing their identity.”

Your support through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) provides the queer community with opportunities to thrive in safe environments as they learn about God’s love. Thank you.

## June 9: Advocating for Sexual and Gender Minorities in Other

We are blessed to live in Canada, a country that recognizes the right to love whoever you want, regardless of their gender or sex. And while we haven’t always done what is right, The United Church of Canada now recognizes that all love―including Two Spirit or LGBTQIA+ relationships―is holy and blessed by God. But those rights do not exist in many parts of the world today.

“One of our partners in Kenya has advocated strongly for the human rights of sexual minorities, and that has caused him to be in jail, caused him to risk his life to be able to do that,” says the Rev. Michael Blair. The church’s first openly gay General Secretary is now helping to advocate for sexual and gender minorities in foreign countries.

“When we hear these stories, we can see that this is a life and death matter.”

Your gifts for [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) help shelter refugees as they escape repressive governments. Same-sex attraction is a crime in 71 countries, and 11 of them have the death penalty.

Mission and Service also holds consultations in other countries to discover how we can best work with our partners to protect sexual and gender minorities. “A few years ago, we hosted a consultation here in Canada with several partners and asked how we can be supportive of their work,” Blair says. “They told us we needed to come and help in their context.”

To date, Mission and Service has supported consultations in Latin America and the Philippines.

“We are bringing together leaders to explore how the church can be a place of liberation and life for sexual and gender minorities in those communities. That is happening because of the folks who contribute to Mission and Service,” says Blair.

Thank you for helping to protect sexual and gender minorities. You are saving lives and changing views around the world!

## June 16: Rainbow Camp Is Welcoming

Rainbow Camp® in northern Ontario has welcomed young people of all sexual identities since 2012. From the beginning, Mission and Service has supported Welcome Friend Association, which runs the camp.

“Initially, we wanted to bridge the local LGBTQ community with area churches. We started the association, and then we launched the camp. We had no idea what we were doing at the time. Only one person on the board had camp experience, but we knew that young people would benefit,” says Chris Southin, one of the camp’s co-founders.

Rainbow Camp® now serves up to 50 youth each week for four weeks, with expansion plans in the works.

Above all, Rainbow Camp® provides campers with a safe space to be who they are without judgment. “I’ll never forget our first year of camp,” says Harry Stewart, also a co-founder. “It was the second full day. A camper told us his mom had found a dress in his closet. He lied to her and said that it belonged to his girlfriend. He had brought the dress to camp and said he would like to wear it. High heels and sand don’t mix!” he explains, laughing, “But the warmth, love, and compassion that the camper received from everyone at camp was amazing.”

Southin and Stewart want the camp experience to be memorable, fun, soul-searching, and supportive. “We don’t want any camper to feel afraid to be who they are. I think that’s why so many now call it their home.” This important work was recognized with a Governor General’s award in 2021.

Your generosity through [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) supports safe, welcoming spaces like Rainbow Camp®. Thank you!

## June 23: An Act of Generosity

Those who work in the United Church’s Philanthropy Unit have the privilege of hearing the stories of generous supporters. Each story shared is inspiring, but this note included in a cheque sent by Rock Lake Pastoral Charge in Manitoba is especially delightful:

“Please find enclosed our cheque for $125.00. One of our member’s great-grandchildren rolled loose coins they found around the house. There was 1 roll of loonies, 6 rolls of quarters, 6 rolls of dimes, and 5 rolls of nickels. The three children ages 12, 9, and 7 were told if they rolled the coins, they could use the money however they wanted. They decided very quickly that they wanted to give it to children/people of Ukraine. They brought the money to Rock Lake Pastoral Charge and asked to have the money sent through The United Church of Canada for Emergency Response―Ukraine. They wanted it to go through the church because their great-grandmother loved the church.

“The children could have gone and bought a toy or chocolate bar but they thought about it and decided to give it to help the people of Ukraine. They were so proud when they came into the office. It was a big heavy bag of coins they carried for seven or eight blocks to get here. They were really pleased to present it,” says office administrator Linda Sharpe.

This story represents thoughtful, intentional giving at its finest. Every gift given is a treasure. Every gift given tells a story about generosity.

Thank you for [supporting the work we do together](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) as a United Church. May the story we tell in our giving and receiving bring us ever more near the heart of God.

## June 30: Life-Changing Arts Programs for Children

For hundreds of children living in Córdoba, Colombia, arts programs supported through your [Mission and Service](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service) gifts teach children about their rights, give them an opportunity to express themselves, and promote peace-making as well as gender justice.

“Providing workshops for children that teach them about their rights empowers them to think critically about themselves and their country. Through media, art, music, and theatre, they learn about important social issues, human rights, and gender equality,” says the Latin American Center for Popular Communication (CEPALC).

Children are the most vulnerable group in Colombia. Eighty-four percent of violent acts in Colombia are committed against children. Two and a half million children living there work to sustain their families. Many are forced into dangerous labour. That’s why CEPALC designs programs in sectors hardest hit by poverty and violence.

“I told my mom that we had seen some works of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Flora Tristan. I remember that they taught us that we must defend the rights of us women. What I like, in general, is that they taught us that we must make peace,” says Amelie, an eight-year-old girl who lives in Bogotá and workshop participant. “Thanks to CEPALC workshops, I’ll be a writer, and I will write things so that children will promote and defend peace, following Jesus’ examples. I will defend and promote our rights in my stories so that nobody can disrespect us or the rights that we have. When I am an adult, I won’t be doing violence against anybody.”