

# Deep *Roots* | Bold *Action* | Daring *Decisions*



Faithful  
Footprints

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA  
2023 and 2024  
**Sustainability Report**

# Moderator's message

The late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in increased public and church awareness about human impacts on the rest of God's created order. As a result of a sermon preached by David Hallman—a known environmental leader in The United Church of Canada—a proposal came in 1992 to General Council 34 in Fredericton to add wording that included the importance of God's created order in *A New Creed* (originally released in 1968). Wording the amendment was another challenge—one that was delegated to The Very Rev. Stan McKay, the Moderator at the time.

After some consultation (as is always his orientation), he brought the amended words "To live with respect in Creation" to General Council Executive for approval. And The United Church of Canada continues to live into this tenet of our Creed—to live with respect in Creation. That is why we take the time and resources to report on our efforts to live in more balanced ways as stewards and recipients of the whole of Creation that God loves.

During a conversation with climate leader Seth Klein (author of *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*), he told me that polling he'd done through the Climate Emergency Unit of the David Suzuki Institute revealed approximately 70 percent of Canadians believed that recycling was the biggest action they could take as individuals to help mitigate the human causes of climate change. Many others feel that reductions in travel have the biggest impacts. In fact, [more than 40 percent](#) of our greenhouse gas emissions in Canada come solely from heating and cooling buildings. [An additional 28 percent](#) come from transportation, with the majority of that coming from on-road transportation (46 percent passenger cars and 33 percent on-road freight; air and rail travel bring up the rear at 5 percent and 4 percent respectively).

The single most effective thing we can do as a denomination is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by getting off fossil fuels for heating and cooling our buildings. But to be inspired to do that, we need to *know* that it's the highest return on investment. This report both imparts that knowledge and inspires us to do even better—because now more than ever we need daring climate justice.

Carmen



**The Right Reverend  
Dr. Carmen Lansdowne  
Moderator  
The United Church  
of Canada**

**This Sustainability Report shares how we are greening our buildings, raising our spirited voices, connecting with the Earth and responding to Climate impacts.**

# Our Four Climate Pillars

We're living out our climate commitments by amplifying and integrating current initiatives in a bold, hopeful denominational climate strategy that accelerates reductions towards the goal of an 80 percent decrease in emissions by 2030.



**Putting  
our house  
in order**

**Raising our  
spirited voices**

**Connecting  
with the  
earth**

**Responding to  
climate  
impact**



# Putting our House in Order

We are contributing towards more resilient communities by putting our house in order. By greening our buildings, sharing our spaces, and decreasing our carbon footprint, we are lowering operational costs, creating revenue-flowing opportunities, and building capacity for additional programming.

## Congregations are renovating green, moving their buildings towards net-zero.

Through the investment and tailored guidance offered by the church's [Faithful Footprints](#) program, delivered in partnership with Faith & the Common Good, inspiring communities of faith are reducing the energy and carbon footprint of their buildings, transforming to remain resilient, responsible, and ready for the low-carbon future.

Since 2018, 546 communities of faith have engaged with the program thus far, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 5,303 metric tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e in 168 United Church buildings. This is equivalent to the annual energy use of 1,242 homes.



Credit: Gordon Memorial United Church, Alberton, Prince Edward Island

Project team standing near newly installed heat pumps at Gordon Memorial United Church, Alberton, Prince Edward Island.

## Educating communities to plant the seeds of sustainable change.

Since building green and planning lasting sustainable solutions take know-how and resources, our communities are equipping themselves for change by embracing education initiatives and knowledge-sharing discussions [on topics including](#) low-cost retrofits, heat pumps and geothermal systems. Communities like [Transcona Memorial United Church](#) have adopted [action plans](#) to minimize their footprints, and the Youth Councils of Chinook Winds and Pacific Mountain Regional Councils put forward an emissions audit proposal for their regional councils and communities of faith, [Get Rid of Greenhouse Gases](#), which has been approved and is being implemented.



### Green shift towards zero- and low-carbon travel.

We are encouraging carbon-reducing action by sharing success stories and developing new policies. For example, [For the Love of Creation](#) retreat attendees travelled by carpool, train and bicycle to attend their retreat at Five Oaks, and staff members opted [to take the train from Toronto to Winnipeg](#) rather than a plane for a national meeting. Institutionally, travel guidelines now limit the number of in-person meetings a General Council committee may hold. A new eco-transit incentive has also been established within the United Church travel policy to encourage staff travel by train, bus, subway, or carpool.



Credit: The United Church of Canada

Members of the For the Love of Creation Initiative biking 60 kilometers to the Spring 2024 retreat at Five Oaks Retreat Centre.

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Equivalent to the annual energy use of **1,242 homes!**



### Did you know...

By the end of 2024, Faithful Footprints had approved funding for over 300 retrofit projects across all regions, with more than **290 already seeing measurable impact**. In 2023 and 2024 alone, 57 energy audits were conducted nationwide.

Credit: Smithville United Church, Smithville, Ontario



Project team standing near newly installed HVAC system at Smithville United Church, Smithville, Ontario.



## Did you know...

In 2023 and 2024, over a dozen United Church communities [hosted building tours](#), showcasing their energy-efficient upgrades and inviting local members and the public to learn from their experiences with green building.

## Interesting fact:

Across Canada, several United Churches have already achieved net-zero operations by adopting clean-energy solutions.



New heat pump ventilation system at St. George and St. Andrew United Church.

## Featured story

In 2023, [St. George and St. Andrew United Church](#) in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia found itself in a situation which communities nationwide may find familiar: its heating system, featuring two oil furnaces and an oil-fired water heater, made them dependent on oil to keep warm through the winter. Thanks in part to a grant from Faithful Footprints, they were able to replace those high-carbon emission systems with three new heat pumps, a high-efficiency electric water heater, and 44 rooftop solar panels that provide energy for the building. Other emission-cutting features introduced included LED lighting, an upgraded electrical system, and industrial-strength fans for the sanctuary's 35-foot ceilings. A year following the upgrade, St. George and St. Andrew United reduced its total greenhouse gas emissions by 13.8 percent, and energy costs by 34.4 percent. In recognition of its exemplary success, the project was recognized with a [Sustainable Communities Award](#) from the Gulf of Maine Council. Similar revamps have been taken on across the country, including at the [United Church in Meadowood](#) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which [installed](#) a two-kilometer ground-source geothermal system and electric hot water heating, and [Old Barns United Church](#) in Lower Truro, Nova Scotia, which uses on-site solar panels and heat pumps.



Workers installing solar panel system on the roof of Old Barns United Church.



# Raising Our Spirited Voices

We are raising the alarm to do more (much, much more) for climate, social, and ecological justice. In a world facing intersecting crises caused by colonialism, capitalism, and supremacy mindsets, it is critical to respond with public advocacy, collaboration with allies, and financial resources to repair damage and promote healing.

## Investing with respect in creation.

Each of the United Church's three national investment bodies (the Treasury Fund of the General Council, The United Church of Canada Foundation, and the Pension Plan of The United Church of Canada) are committed to [Responsible Investing](#), which takes into account environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. The United Church Pension Plan, through its participation in [SHARE](#) (Shareholder Association for Research and Education), met with CN Rail to assess the company's progress on setting a 1.5-degree Celsius pathway and setting more ambitious net-zero goals and absolute reductions.

## Uplifting youth voices.

We are offering opportunities for youth to raise their voices and become catalysts for action on climate issues across the country, such as our Youth [Climate Motivator](#) program. On July 22, 2024, Climate Motivator [Lachlan Duncanson-Hales](#) hosted a [climate action event](#) in Sudbury as part of a global day of action in partnership with [Fridays For Future](#) and the [Citizens' Climate Lobby](#). Featuring a series of speakers, the event [emphasized](#) the urgent need to reduce fossil fuel pollution to limit the Earth's further warming.

## Calling for responsible investment.

United Church members and regional councils are calling for financial institutions to divest from fossil fuels and invest in a sustainable future. In 2023, retired United Church minister Lynda Trono led [weekly prayer gatherings](#) at Royal Bank of Canada branches in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and in April 2024, Rev. Cameron Watts of [Fairlawn United Church](#) in Toronto, Ontario, along with other United Church members, joined a [pray-in at a RBC branch](#). Both demonstrations urged the bank to stop funding fossil fuel expansion and prioritize the future of the planet. In June 2023, Prairie to Pine Regional Council passed [Faith Communities to Divest from Fossil Fuels](#), a proposal to advocate for divestment from fossil fuels. The council's Climate Finance Task Group has since convened meetings and released [resources](#), including letter templates and guides, to help communities hold financial institutions accountable.



Credit: Thea Sheridan-Jonah

2024 Climate Motivator program participants.



### Advocating for a sustainable future.

Communities of faith are uniting to publicly advocate for a safer, more sustainable planet at climate demonstrations, and forming coalitions and action groups to drive meaningful change. For instance, the Rev. Carrie Martens of Morden United Church and Sandy Plett of Mennonite Church Canada [founded the Pembina Climate Action Network](#) to help residents brainstorm solutions and [connect the community](#) in southern Manitoba's fight against drought and climate change. United Church representatives have also collaborated as part of the [Spiritual Coalition On Climate Action Nova Scotia](#), a unified interfaith spiritual voice for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and caring for Earth in Nova Scotia.

### Uniting for climate action.

Our members are uniting to address climate change by fostering dialogue, creating opportunities for action, and coming together for a greater cause. During Earth Week in [2023](#) and [2024](#) together with the [For the Love of Creation](#) initiative, the United Church sparked hundreds of events focused on prayer, learning, and action. The church also encouraged its members to join the Citizens for Public Justice's [Give it up for the Earth!](#) campaign to urge the federal government to strengthen emissions reductions, expand climate finance, and end fossil fuel subsidies.

**United Church of Canada members and staff join River Run, led by youth and elders of Grassy Narrows First Nation for Mercury Justice.**



Credit: The United Church of Canada

### Did you realize...

[Halton Hills Climate Action](#), co-founded by a member of St. John's United Church of Georgetown and Glen Williams in Ontario, has organized over 10 [climate rallies and events](#) in 2023 and 2024, advocating for action at all levels of government. In December 2023, members successfully urged their town Council to [reject](#) a fossil-fuel plant, with 16-year-old Matthew Tyhurst, a Climate Motivator, delivering a [persuasive speech](#).

### Check this out:

On September 18, 2024, youth, Elders, and leaders of Grassy Narrows First Nation led the [Grassy Narrows River Run](#) in the streets of downtown Toronto, calling for action to address the ongoing impacts of the dumping in the 1960s of tonnes of poisonous mercury in their community, lands, and waters. We [endorsed the march](#), and over 50 United Church ministers, members, and staff [joined 8,000 allies](#) in the march. [Indigenous-led](#) actions and perspectives are integral to climate justice.





Credit: Conor Russell

COP28 Candlelight Vigil held in Guelph, Ontario, December 2023.

## Featured stories

[Sustainable Brandon](#), a community-based environmental action group, was founded following a Faithful Climate Conversation by Madelyn Robinson, a member of the Green Team at [Knox United Church](#) in Brandon, Manitoba and Debby Dandy, a [KAIROS](#) member. The group brings together community members, students, environmental organizations, and concerned citizens to [address local climate issues](#). Their [efforts](#) include advocating for the city's climate plan, securing grants for projects, and organizing workshops on composting and non-toxic cleaning. They also support initiatives for electric vehicle awareness, wetland protection, transportation, and sustainable housing.

The United Church sponsored a young adult virtual delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, [COP28](#), in 2023, highlighting the role of faith leaders in climate advocacy. One of the delegates, Shane Goldie, Indigenous ministry personnel in Alberta, [represented](#) those most affected by climate change. He [addressed](#) the challenges of engaging Albertans in faith leadership, while [offering a prayer](#) at the Animators' Circle Meeting. Members also hosted Candles for COP Vigils for [COP28](#) and [COP29](#), creating space for prayer and climate justice advocacy. 25 vigils were held nationwide, from Parksville, British Columbia, to [Parliament Hill](#) in Ottawa, to Wolfville, Nova Scotia and many points in between.

## Did you realize...

In August 2023, the Climate Motivators gathered at [Camp Pringle](#) in British Columbia, where they [hosted a panel](#) with Members of Parliament. During the gathering, the Motivators wrote letters to their MPs and Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, incorporating [policy requests](#) from For the Love of Creation.

In 2024, federal legislation to address environmental racism [became law](#) in the form of Bill C-226. Together with ecumenical allies, the United Church [rallied support for this bill](#) as it made its way through parliament. The bill was made possible by the dedicated leadership and advocacy of the [Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice](#), the [ENRICH Project](#), the [Black Environmental Initiative](#), and others.

United Church members collaborate with members of [For the Love of Creation](#) to host and promote [Faithful Climate Conversations](#). These [series of guides](#) and conversation starters help build community and trust, a foundation for the big changes that are needed.



# Connecting with the Earth

Creation, in all its diversity, complexity, and interdependence, is a reflection of the divine Creator. The earth is our ground of being. To stay attentive to this, we connect with the earth by immersing ourselves in nature, nurturing ecosystems, sharing liturgical resources, and exploring new environmental ministries.

## Creating forests and restoring healthy biodiversity.

Our communities are rolling up their sleeves to heal ecosystems, integrating native plants into their landscapes to support pollinators and increase healthy biodiversity, and planting trees and restoring forests to promote long-term environmental health for future generations. [St. Andrew's United Church](#) in Lacombe, Alberta, is working to restore the [Woodland Municipal Reserve](#) with a [100-tree legacy forest](#), planting native trees, shrubs, as well as perennial plants and grasses, and the Green Team at [Mount Forest United Church](#) in Mount Forest, Ontario, recently provided restorative care to the town's first ever [Tree of the Year](#), a mature Amur cork tree, and planted additional native tulip trees.



Credit: Sue Hogenkamp

Arborist Manuela Demedeiros shows attendees how to properly plant a tree at the Tree of the Year ceremony in Mount Forest, Ontario.

## Walking amidst nature.

United Church members are cultivating deeper connections with nature through spiritual practices and time spent in natural spaces. [Maple Grove United Church](#) in Oakville, Ontario, hosted a [forest bathing walk](#) at Iroquois Shoreline Woods Park, led by a trained [forest therapy guide](#), and [Richmond Hill United Church](#) in Richmond Hill, Ontario, has organized [Forest Church gatherings](#) that offer a chance to connect with nature through personal exploration, followed by group sharing, prayer, and a collective blessing.

## Check this out:

[Leaside United Church](#) in Toronto, Ontario, offers [In the Wild events](#) that connect spirituality to nature, with activities like creating labyrinths from natural materials, learning about local trees, planting pollinator-friendly wildflowers, nature walks, and winter solstice worship, fostering mindfulness and reflection.



## Growing local produce.

Communities of faith are using their land to grow local produce, reducing reliance on imported food, minimizing transportation and packaging, and supporting community access to fresh, healthy produce. In 2023, [Westminster United Church](#) in Orangeville, Ontario transformed its landscape, replacing grass with no-dig food gardens aimed to lower its carbon footprint. Communities including [Okanagan Falls United Church](#), British Columbia, [Trinity-Clifton United Church](#) in Charlottetown, Nova Scotia, and [Heart Lake United Church](#) in Brampton, Ontario have opened free community gardens. Heart Lake United donated hundreds of pounds of fresh produce to the [Heart Lake Community Food Cupboard](#) to tackle food insecurity.



Credit: Heart Lake United Church, Brampton, Ontario

Members of Heart Lake United tending to its community garden.

## Understanding our place in Creation.

We are creating opportunities for members to reflect and deepen our understanding of our place in creation, through [prayer time](#), [webinars](#), and events like the [Cloudwalker Storytelling Event](#), organized by British Columbia's [Oak Bay United Church](#) and [Fairfield United Church](#), which shared the Indigenous creation story of Cloudwalker and the northern B.C. waterways. The [United Church of Canada Foundation](#) has also invested in projects like the [Land Steward Project](#) at [Oasis United Church](#) in Penticton, British Columbia, which encourages congregants to deepen their relationship with the natural world and understand their interconnectedness within the greater web of creation.

## Did you know...

In the summer of 2023, the [Neechi youth program](#) joined with the Mamawe Ota Askihk (Sharing Life Together Here on Earth) program at Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre in Beausejour, Manitoba. Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth connected with each other, to the land and to the seasons. While living together on the land, the rich program included opportunities to braid sweetgrass, make ribbon skirts, make drums from deer hide, harvest wild rice, and to receive many teachings.



Credit: Twila MacNair



## Did you know...

Communities that have planted native plant gardens to foster healthy biodiversity include [Islington United Church](#), [Lawrence Park Community United Church](#), [Fairlawn Avenue United Church](#) (all Toronto, ON), [Kedron United Church](#) (Oshawa, ON), [Centennial United Church](#) (Stayner, ON), and [Norval United Church](#) (Georgetown, ON).



Members of [Siloam United Church](#) purchase fresh produce grown from its sustainable urban farm.

[Siloam United Church](#) in London, Ontario transformed one hectare into a [sustainable urban farm](#) in partnership with [Urban Roots London](#), supplying food to its food cupboard and donating to pop-up markets for families in need. In 2024, they [received funding](#) from the [London Community Foundation](#) to increase food security and provide urban agriculture jobs.



Attendees of [Taddle Creek Wild Church](#) walk along the shores of Lake Ontario during a gathering.

## Featured story

Across Canada, United Church members are bringing spiritual life into harmony with the heart of nature year-round through the Wild Church movement. [Wild Church B.C.](#), which was founded in 2018 by the Rev. LeAnn Blackert with the assistance of a grant from the Pacific Mountain Regional Council, holds bi-monthly and monthly outdoor spiritual gatherings in Kamloops, Kelowna, and Armstrong, British Columbia. Wild Church B.C. was founded to provide a space for all to communally deepen their connection to and love for Earth, and to aid in the healing and survival of the planet. [Taddle Creek Wild Church](#), a community ministry of [Metropolitan United Church](#) in Toronto, offers monthly gatherings that blend eco-spirituality with the teachings of Jesus, including opportunities for contemplation, advocacy, and ecological restoration. These events focus on fostering intimate relationships with the land, waters, and creatures, advocating for their protection and healing in the face of habitat loss and environmental disconnection.



# Responding to Climate Impact

Climate change is a risk multiplier, exacerbating present threats and creating unforeseen challenges, while impacting vulnerable communities the hardest. Flooding, droughts, landslides and hunger are increasing in the Global South. Our church is taking action to assist with mitigation and adaptation to climate change for healthier, more resilient communities, locally and internationally.

## Strengthening food security.

The [Association of Economic and Social Development Santa Marta](#) (ADES) in El Salvador empowers women-led rural farming communities with sustainable practices that enrich soil, protect biodiversity, and lower production costs through its [agroecology project](#). Our church strengthens food security by supporting partner organizations like it in Latin America, Africa and Asia in their sustainable farming and resilience-building initiatives, as well as through advocacy efforts that address global hunger and environmental challenges.



Credit: Christie Neufeldt

Participants of the Dora Alicia Sorto School Farm and agroecology project, accompanied by ADES staff Antonio Pacheco, Digna Martínez, and Blanca Hernández, and United Church staff Christie Neufeldt.

## Rehabilitating ecosystems and protecting wildlife.

Our members are restoring habitats, protecting wildlife, and advocating to prevent the extinction of native plant and animal species for thriving ecosystems. In 2023, [Carleton Memorial United Church](#) in Ottawa, Ontario [contributed to the restoration of Nesbitt Creek](#) by removing invasive species, cleaning up debris, and planting native pollinators to revitalize the creek's ecosystem.

## Did you realize...

In 2023 and 2024, the church contributed to global partners across a minimum of 15 countries who are responding to climate disasters such as extreme weather, drought, and more with over \$177,377 in emergency funding.



**Building resilient infrastructure.**

The [Guatemalan Conference of Protestant Churches \(CIEDIG\)](#) transforms access to clean water and renewable energy with its [solar-powered water pump project in Champerico, Guatemala](#). CIEDIG’s initiative, in partnership with the United Church, strengthens Indigenous leadership, food security, and community development by enhancing the capacity of local churches and social organizations. Through partnerships like these, the United Church is helping build resilient and sustainable infrastructure and systems that support communities in becoming more self-sufficient, both locally and internationally, in the face of climate impacts.



Credit: German Cabrera

**A newly installed solar-powered water pump in Champerico, Guatemala.**

**Our faith-based response to climate impact.**

Our books, reports, and videos offer a Christian perspective on the ecological crisis, our impacts upon it, and how we can change our behaviours. [Act/Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis](#), a book published in 2024, invites members to deepen their love for Creation and take action or fast for a climate in crisis. [Coming Together for Climate Justice on Loss and Damage](#), produced alongside KAIROS Canada and [For the Love of Creation](#), is a powerful short video drawing attention to the enormous impact of climate change on the global south, and advocating for increased climate justice funding.



Credit: The United Church of Canada

**Moderator Carmen Lansdowne with Act/Fast, Lent 2024**

**Here’s a little-known fact:**

2024 Youth Climate Motivator Nathan Fawkes Talbot from [Mount Seymour United Church](#), North Vancouver, British Columbia [launched a petition](#) with over 9,000 signatures to change black bear euthanization and relocation practices in North Vancouver that are a response to habitat loss. In collaboration with the North Vancouver Black Bear Association, he developed an education campaign, engaged with faith communities and summer camps, and met with Member of the Legislative Assembly Susie Chant to engage her to bring the issue to the legislature.



Credit: Zimbabwe Council of Churches

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches team visits the project of the “Scaling Up Resilience” project in partnership with the United Church and Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

## Featured story

In Zimbabwe, severe drought, food shortages, disease outbreaks, and economic instability have taken their toll on communities. Many people are facing severe food insecurity, including in the Bikita and Gutu districts, where about 43 percent and 60 percent of people, respectively, are affected. The pressure of scarcity doesn't just affect the dinner table—gender-based violence is on the rise, and many families can no longer afford to send their children to school. Led by the [Zimbabwe Council of Churches](#), the [Scaling Up Resilience Project](#) provides long-term solutions to help families strengthen their resilience and build a more secure future. Practical training will be provided to 1,376 households, or 6,880 people, on areas including climate-smart farming, disaster-risk management, promoting gender equality, and building financial resilience. Scaling Up Resilience is built upon a community-led model where farmers learn from one another, ensuring that all have the tools they will need to strengthen their responses to a changing climate for generations. The United Church has been honoured to partner on this project with the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, in collaboration with the [Canadian Foodgrains Bank](#).

### Did you know...

Rev. Chali Mfuta of the United Church of Zambia, who witnessed first-hand Cyclone Ana's devastating impacts and was part of the rescue efforts, joined the COP28 delegation and advocated for a [Loss and Damage fund](#).



Credit: United Church of Zambia

Rev. Chali Mfuta salvaging cassava plants after the flood while visiting impacted communities in Zambia.



**Faithful  
Footprints**

**This report is a collaborative effort of The United Church of Canada and Faithful Footprints (a United Church program delivered by Faith & the Common Good).**

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Project # 2025\_275