



News Update

A Fine Balance

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The ministry of First United Church has always been about creating a place of hospitality, support and nourishment, both physical and spiritual, with those whom society stigmatizes.

John Dominic Crossan wrote in his book *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, “miracles are not changes in the physical world so much as changes in the social world... We ourselves can already make the physical world totally uninhabitable; the question is whether we can make the social world humanly habitable.”(93). According to Crossan, when Jesus went throughout Galilee proclaiming the good news and curing every disease and sickness, he was not so much curing disease through an intervention in the physical world as he was healing the illness of stigma and isolation through an intervention in the social world.

For decades, the Downtown Eastside community has looked to First United as a Church that ministers to the broken, lost and vulnerable. After we answered the call to be part of the City of Vancouver’s Homeless Emergency Action Team’s strategy to end homelessness back in December 2008, and subsequently entered into a funding contract with BC Housing to provide 200 overnight beds, we faced, and still face today, the immense challenge of continuing to be Church to the Downtown Eastside while operating, within our walls, the largest homeless shelter in the city.

At First United Church, a ministry of healing, community building, and social justice frames and informs all of our work, be it advocacy, housing, storage, table fellowship,

foot care, grief and loss, lego therapy, Wednesday evening Celebration of Life, supportive funding, the shelter beds program and even, believe it or not, the dental clinic.

In carrying out these programs and many more, we depend on funding and other forms of support from governments, institutions, foundations, Church bodies, congregations, businesses and individuals. It requires a fine balance to be an inner-city Church with a community ministry in which there are so many partners and stakeholders.

That is what is so exciting and challenging about being part of First United during this time of re-imagining what our work is, and will be in the months and years to come.

As we reach out to United Church congregations, open our doors wider to volunteers who have always been the mainstay of this ministry, and work in concert with our government partners, the higher courts of the Church and neighborhood community organizations, we will deepen and strengthen our understanding of what it means to be a Church with a social ministry that is responsive not only to the broken and stigmatized, but also to its supporters, stakeholders and governing bodies.

That is indeed a fine balance, but one that we ignore at our peril. And it is, we believe, our only hope of being able to make our little piece of the social world humanly habitable. ♦

Stephen Gray and Don Evans
Co-Executive Directors

Open for Business

Thank You!

As we begin the New Year, we want to send a HUGE thank you to the hundreds of volunteers who give their time and energy to the daily programs and services at First United. Without your commitment, many key activities just wouldn't happen. The Board, Staff and Community Members are very appreciative of all that volunteers do. You make First United Church the Community that it is.

Urgently Needed

**Men's Sweat Pants,
Jeans, PJ bottoms,
Socks, Towels, Runners
and gloves/mittens**

**Spring and Summer
Clothing**

The Thrift store is open from Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The phone number of the Thrift store is: 604-569-1117. Please call to make your drop off appointment.

First United is open 24/7 and provides a wide range of services to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Our low barrier shelter continues to:

- Offer shelter for up to 200 people nightly and others during the day
- Serve 800 - 1,000 meals per day
- Be a place where community can gather and be together with dignity and self-respect
- Offer daily necessities such as toiletries, hygiene products and showers
- Provide storage for shopping carts and belongings for over 200 homeless people per day
- Offer services ranging from foot care to emergency aid to pastoral care
- Be a much needed mailing address for over 600 people
- Engage with hundreds of community members monthly, creating care

plans, providing counseling and making referrals

- Work with the Carnegie Outreach Program, the City of Vancouver and BC Housing to get permanent housing for people who find shelter in the church
- Prepare over 3,000 tax returns per year for low income earners - more than any other similar service in BC
- Intake over 200 legal cases monthly in our poverty law advocacy program
- As Vancouver's largest shelter, offer a home to people with multiple barriers to permanent housing, employment and fuller inclusion in more mainstream society
- Welcome thrift shop donations for spring and summer.♦



Emerging Mission Congregation:

The Wednesday evening meal is over. Chairs are re-arranged in a circle and the Community begins to sing. People slowly gather, some from other faith traditions, some from the neighbourhood, some United Church folk. We are, all of us together, a "Raggedy Ann band." We sing, we pray, we are silent, we talk together. We want the heart of First United to be a spiritual, reflective, worshipping community. Step by step, we are seeking to connect our

Faith stories with the stories of our lives and, importantly, with the life of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. The "Emerging Mission Congregation" is a very exciting work in progress. We welcome you to join us any Wednesday from 7:00 p.m. — 8:30 p.m.♦

Sandy and Don Robertson

For more information contact Sally McShane at: smcshane@firstunited.ca (See welcome on P.4)

Comments from the Community:

"I appreciate everything that you do for people and what you did for me when I had nowhere to go. I have a lot of friends that depend on the Church. I pray for good things to happen in the Shelter and for the Church's future." - Facebook posting

Taxes with Love

In 2011, First United Church processed over 3,200 tax returns making us the largest Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) in British Columbia. Started over 12 years ago, First United noticed a huge need for Income Tax preparation in the Downtown East Side (DTES).

The objective for the CVITP is to help low-income individuals who have difficulty preparing their income tax and benefit returns by themselves. This program is in partnership with Canada Revenue Agency which hosts tax preparation clinics and arranges for volunteers to work with community organisations such as ourselves to deliver the program.

This is a huge source of pride for us and our volunteers as we help so many to obtain previous tax credits, GST claims and individual refunds. If you would like to know more or are willing to volunteer your time to this amazing program, please contact First United Church. ♦

*Amanda Pellerine
Program Manager*

Upcoming

**5th Annual—Golf for the Homeless
Community Tournament
May 28th, 2012
University Golf Club**

Visit our website for more information and to purchase tickets.
www.firstunited.ca

The Word on the Tweet

Welcome to the Twitterverse!



Twitter is a part of the social media revolution, a completely new way for people to communicate over the internet that combines the best elements of blogging and texting.

Have I lost you already?

Twitter is a 'right now' communication tool that shows you a continuous, scrolling list of what's up in the world (like the flowing screen of code in The Matrix). Yes, it's a way for people to announce what they had for lunch today. But it's also shown itself to be a vital tool for social justice, even revolution!

Twitter was how freedom fighters in Burma got around the media blackout. Twitter was how news of injustices in the Middle East got publicised. And Twitter has been critical in the organisation of the Occupy Movements.

First United Church is now on Twitter, and we'd love you to join us! If you're familiar with Twitter already, our handle is @FirstUnitedDTES.

If the platform is new to you, drop me an email at nlanoville@firstunited.ca and I'll send you a link!

It's a great way to stay up-to-date on what we're doing. We post up to 10 times a day! ♦

Natalie Lanoville

Annual Walk/Run for the Homeless

**Start your own Team or
Join Us!**

Training Sessions
Tuesdays @ 2:00 pm.
Meet in the Lobby at First United
(Rain or Shine)

Everyone is welcome and
no experience is necessary.

For more information contact
Ray Lam @ 604 - 681 - 8365
Ext. 120



THE VANCOUVER
**SUN
RUN**

Please donate and help First United maintain essential services in the Downtown Eastside.

Donate online: www.firstunited.ca

Mail cheques to First United Church - 320 East Hastings St Vancouver, BC V6A 1P4

Pastoral Care

Welcome to Rev. Sally McShane who joined us, on a part-time basis, on January 4, 2011. Sally brings a breadth of experience including work as a chaplain in a corrections centre, in a women's shelter, and also serving on the First United Board in the late 90's.

Sally is originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, is married with 3 sons, and was ordained in 1992. Her most recent Ministry was at Knox United Church in Vancouver. We are happy and blessed to have her here.

A message from Rev. Sally McShane:

Almost anyone in the United Church of Canada has heard of First United Church on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver in beautiful British Columbia. I was a young Mom when the name appeared on my horizon. A minister from Brunswick Street Mission in Halifax came to my home church in NS and spoke for an evening about the work of both churches on either coast of Canada. She spoke of the social gospel in a time when we, the younger generation, were inspired by Trudeau's "Just Society".

The idea of a social gospel was introduced in question form, "What would Jesus do for the "poor" among us?" What would Jesus do?

Thirty-five years ago (yes, I still remember it well) the Reverend defined the word "poor" not so much in monetary forms as much as in "poor of Spirit" terms. She named compassionate listening toward understanding (or as Thomas Aquinas would name it, Faith Seeking Understanding) as our basic ministry to one another. Send food, money, blankets, socks and clothing but most of all she said never forget to listen and break the mistaken notions of poor which we have been taught. These notions are harmful and perpetuate the situation.

OK, I don't remember much more and even the name of the Reverend escapes me but the question has never left my thoughts or the need to listen to another person whatever their background.

As an aside, I should also mention it was the first time I had seen a woman minister. Impressive.

As I thought about this question myself that first time, I did not suspect that I would be repeating the words over and over in years to come. I had little notion that God would call me into ministry. I certainly never dreamed or imagined that I would be serving as Pastoral Minister at First United Church in Vancouver thirty-five years later. So here I am, blessed.

Yes, here I am in this rather ugly, odd shaped building with many strange corners and hallways. A building made beautiful by the people who are answering the question every day in so many ways whether it's those who rest their heads here, staff who have been at First for over twenty years or more recent arrivals such as myself.

I share the ministry of pastoral care for staff and community members with Rabbi David Mivasair who has been at First for over a year. He has a background in social work, a wonderful understanding of most faith traditions within the First community and an amazing ability to facilitate discussions. As well there are many volunteers and community workers who listen daily with care and compassion.

There is a gentleness in the listening and support, a recognition of the preciousness of each life. There is also a new sense of calm and quiet for those who stay here since some simple boundaries have been introduced.

I love it here at First. I love the variety of faith expressions, the laughter and the honor of listening and supporting another person.

When I finish typing this I am heading over to First for morning worship. The topic is "Love your neighbor as yourself and your God above all else".

The discussion will be fascinating.♦

First United also welcomes new Oversight Board Chair, Stan Lanyon

"Stan is one of these very steady and deeply committed persons," says a friend. He is by vocation a labour lawyer and recently retired as Chair of the First Church Housing Society Board. He has deep roots in the United Church and is a valued member of the Emerging Congregation group.