

First Things First

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF FIRST UNITED CHURCH, VANCOUVER BC

SPRING 2009

Overnight Shelter at First—Three Months Later

On December 15th, 2008 coinciding with the first snowfalls of the winter, First United opened its doors for night-time refuge seven days a week. Temperatures were well below freezing and sometimes as many as 300 homeless people had a warm dry place to sleep. For the three months since then, people have made use of this facility and have not only found it to be a place of refuge, but a place where they found community as well. The Globe and Mail, in an article on March 11th 2009, states that temporary shelters have received praise from downtown businesses for reducing crime and Vancouver Police statistics show 450 fewer calls for public disorderliness. The Vancouver Courier points out that there is a decline in the number of homeless folks turning up in emergency wards. There is no doubt that a sense of community is strengthening among

the people who currently call First United “home”. People are not only given three meals a day in addition to the many services provided here, they are treated with friendship and respect. Ric Matthews, Minister of the Mission and Community Life, is determined to keep open the “Place of Refuge”. He comments that First United is currently an “indoor park” and is convinced that this is a vital stepping stone for those whose mental health issues or addiction issues make it impossible for them to make use of more formal housing options. Ric stresses that there are two critical lessons learned: “Firstly, this is not a need that is going to go away – in addition to affordable and supportive housing, we will need to

keep providing a welcoming space for those at the extreme margins of society; and secondly, this is about Community and Belonging, not about providing a Shelter – we have to *meet* people where they are and address their inherent sense of alienation, not merely provide services that tend to confirm their marginalised status.” Funding has recently been made available by BC Housing that will enable the facility to stay open until the end of June 2009. Ric is determined to find funding that will enable this to be a permanent arrangement.



New Director of Administration

The First United community is delighted to welcome Don Evans as the new Director of Administration. With Tony Weall moving into the leadership role for the Social Enterprise initiative,



Don joined the team a few weeks ago. In his welcome to Don, Ric Matthews pointed out that “Don is not new to First United, having been on the staff some years ago at the front desk – and more recently having led the effort amongst United Church congregations to raise \$10,000 towards opening our facilities for night time shelter”. Ric also thanked Tony for his

contribution and for his willingness to take on the new role of Director of Social Enterprise. Ric stressed that “We have a serious need for developing opportunities for personal growth, self-sustaining enterprises and more effective sharing of the skills and resources within this community – and I am very grateful that Tony has agreed to take on this venture”.

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A publication of the Ministry
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Future Building Plan Developments

During 2008 the Board spent significant time in articulating a clear basis and direction for the ministry at First United. Our commitment to “be and become a new kind of community in old town Vancouver” is reflected on the detailed emerging vision. Sandra Severs (Minister of Programmes and Hospitality) points out that “the activities we envisage are all related to what it means to be a Gospel community; one in which we encounter the Spirit at work, experience a deep sense of belonging, actively support each other in ongoing growth and healing, and are radically engaged in social justice”. Sandra is convinced that the initial design for the new facility as presented

at the February Board meeting is an exciting attempt to accommodate all those aspects of the vision within one building. The Planning and Implementation Team led by James Fulton is currently exploring cost and funding implications. Extensive conversations are underway with various parties (including BC Housing and Vancouver Coastal Health). It is hoped that a detailed outline of what the new facility might look like – and how it might be funded – will be presented to the Board within the next two months. In the meantime Ric Matthews has expressed his own enthusiasm for this initiative, stating “I am very confident that what we are moving towards will

dramatically affirm that we are a community located at the margins, but not a community of the marginalised – rather a community in which there are no margins”. As we move to our 125th anniversary in 2010, we celebrate that our intended new facility promises to be a powerful affirmation of what the community at First United has always been called to be.



Robert Brown
– reSource
Rethinking
Building Inc .

Emergency Food Bags—We need your help

Every week our Emergency Food Program distributes 22-36 bags of food to members of this Community. Community worker Linda Ostrom stresses that this is only possible because of generous and consistent support from the wider community. Linda’s words are succinct and sincere: “First United wishes to thank all you wonderful folks who bring in canned and other goods for our Emergency food. This program is direct outreach to the community and assists those who are eking out an existence on an extremely low or no income”. The program supplies those who are homeless with “street bags”. These bags are filled with items which require no cooking, merely hot water. Flip top cans are highly desirable for those on the street. Linda reports that “We are finding **our cupboards bare and these programs are at risk**. In case you are able to help support this program there is a list of items we could use”.

EMERGENCY FOOD BAGS

Canned Fish - tuna, salmon, sardines
Canned Meat.(turkey, chicken, corned beef, ham, spam)

Kraft dinner
Canned soup...tomato, chicken noodle, cream of mushroom, vegetable, pea soup..etc
Canned beans..pork and beans, mixed beans, Canned vegetables
Canned pasta or stew
Canned Fruit
Cereal,
Pasta 900grams
Rice, Rice a roni..etc.
Noodles and sauce;
Tomato pasta sauce
Peanut butter, Jam
Tea\ coffee\juice

STREET BAGS;

Cup o soup; any noodle meal in a cardboard container
Cereals ...in their own containers
Chef boyardee pastas (flip tops)
Chunky soups. and stews..(flip tops)
Canned meat and fish..(flip tops)
Canned soup etc (flip tops)
Fruit to go
Cheese and cracker pcks; peanut butter and cracker pck
Granola bars
Juice boxes, Any other items that do not require cooking or a can opener.

The Hen House...

Chicks Only

First United has launched a new program to support women who are accessing services at Church. This initiative runs at the same time as our regular coffee line but provides an alternative for women. The only requirements for participation are: female, not using today and respecting others in the room. This program assists with supporting women where they are and is available to those who need assistance; emotionally, with accessing services and for assessing and referring women to appropriate service providers, or providing a listening ear. Community worker Linda Ostrom, says “We are looking for help in providing sandwiches and baked goods for approximately 20 women Wednesdays and Thursdays”. Linda asks, “If you feel that this is a way for you to participate, please contact Linda Ostrom or Marion Young at First United Church.

Social Enterprise—Providing a ‘Hand Up’

While our new Social Enterprise initiative is still very much in the planning process, there is no shortage of action and activities. Tony Weall, Director of Social Enterprise says “We envision three areas of activity reflecting an emphasis on the words ‘Social’ and ‘Enterprise.’ All activities will support the mission of First and the values and principles of our church”.

1. Social initiatives will closely involve community members providing them with work, supervision and management experience. Outcomes will be measured in the growth of the people involved, the success of these people in finding other mainstream work and the enthusiasm of other members of the community to be involved with the project or business.

2. Entrepreneurial initiatives will focus more on a business case. We will utilize community members whenever we can but more emphasis will be based on employee’s day-to-day performance and the success of the business as a business. We will use out sourcing and manage rather than operate.

3. There will no doubt be a fuzzy area in between these two extremes where performance of the business/project will be measured by a combination of the outcomes of Social and Entrepreneurial success.

Our goal is do more than to provide refuge and food. We want to equip the members of our community who are ready to take their next step towards independent living.

And we need your help!

We have about 20 new businesses in mind. We are enlisting help from students at BCIT, we are talking to other social services and we are talking to everyone we can think of. Where we need help is in direct management and supervision.

If you are interested in providing a ‘hand up’ (as opposed to a hand-out) for the members of this community call me or email me and I will send you a list of projects. Hopefully you will find one or two in which you may be interested in participating – or even taking over!

[Tony Weall can be reached at tony.weall@firstunited.ca or at (604) 681-8365 Ex. 110]

A Journey of Healing—Katy Hutchison at First on April 15th

On April 15th Katy Hutchison will share her remarkable story and gift at First United. In her very personalized presentation, entitled **“Walking After Midnight: The Story of Bob”**, Katy clearly describes how alcohol and other drug use, bullying, peer pressure, and misguided choices in an unchaperoned setting caused devastation to her family. She will share how the murder of her husband in Squamish on New Years Eve 1997 impacted her as a wife and as a mother of two young children. The workshop is designed to explore the dynamics that led to the events that changed everything for her and her family, and to empower communities to make healthier choices so



similar tragedies can be prevented. Most importantly, she explores the power of forgiveness and describes her own grassroots quest for restorative justice. Katy has spoken internationally to over 300,000 people. She presents to community

groups, churches, schools, youth detention centres and prisons. Walking After Midnight has been the keynote address at conferences

focussing on restorative justice, social responsibility, victim services, corrections, parole and law enforcement, and education. Katy was nominated for the Courage to Come Back award in 2004, the Women of Distinction award in 2005 and she received the Canadian Living From Me to We award for social action in 2006.

Katy will be leading a workshop in the afternoon of April 15th from 2 to 4pm (cost of \$25 per person) and will be speaking at the regular Celebration Service from 6 to 7pm that evening. Ric Matthews urges that “if you cannot personally attend, please consider funding someone else’s attendance – better still, come along *and* fund someone else”

Healing for the Global Village

I must write I must speak I must cry out
too long have I struggled with myself
I have questioned debated agonized
over and over I have spoken to me
now I must let the words speak out

Our global village is unparalleled
human spirits have envisioned and created
wonders of beauty and achievement
the common folk have added their humble touch
we have shown we can reach great heights

It seems there is no end to progress
with colossal advances in medicine and science
incredible steps in communication and technology
unlimited information at our fingertips
ours is a highly privileged society

And yet... and yet... I am completely desolated
our village faces intolerable pain
countless multitudes are hungry homeless hopeless
everywhere are the victims of terrorism and strife
casualties of heartless inhumanity

I plead with powers that be
nothing really matters more than healing
neither sport nor entertainment nor prosperity
the wise and the compassionate can show us the way
if we fail we are less than what we can truly be

I feel the pain of the sufferers
I want to be part of the healing
too long have I been silent
little can I do but write some words
humbly and hopefully I send these words upon their
way

Dermott McInnes age:101

Upcoming Fund Raising Events

April 19th—Run/Walk for the

Homeless Runners and Walkers are working on their fitness and raising pledges in an effort to support this initiative organized by Jen Cummings. There is still time to join the team and be part of the Vancouver Sun Run. See www.firstunited.ca for details or call Nina 604-681-8365 X 117

April 26th—Jubilate!

West Point Grey United Church (4595 West 8th Avenue, Vancouver) at 2:00pm: a program of Folk Songs from around the world. Jubilate! Chamber Choir conducted by Fabiana Katz will provide a delightful choral experience for you and your friends.

for tickets and information phone Gale at 604-224-2104 or e-mail JocelynPritchard@shaw.ca

May 2nd—Voices of Hope

presented by the Orpheus Male Choir. A fund raiser for First United organized by Shaughnessy Heights UC and The Orpheus choir at 7:30pm at Shaughnessy Heights United Church. (1550 West 33rd Ave –at Granville) Tickets: \$30. Call 604 681-8365X117 www.vancouverorpheus.org

May 4th—Golf Fore The Home-

less With a shotgun start at 1pm, our second annual fund-raising golf tournament will begin at the University Golf Course. Hole sponsors and

golfers are needed. We hope most congregations will have at least one 4-some. Registration is \$200, which includes golf, light lunch, pull cart, barbecue dinner and the silent auction. To register contact Bob Burrows – at First United Church (604 681-8365) or 604 290-6159 (cell) or Bob.Burrows@firstunited.ca.

