



Celebrating 125 Years

First Things First

Celebrating our life and the Sacred together

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First Things First
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If you would like to receive a monthly electronic News Update, please send an e-mail to nina.matthews@firstunited.ca.

Inside this issue:

- Share the Gold 2
- Paint Your Faith Event 2
- I open my mind and my heart... 3
- Surviving the Change you Initiate 4
- Building an Inclusive Community Project "Hope Lives Here" 5
- Fund Development Activities 6

The Sanctuary has undergone radical changes. Symbols of a gathered community have been removed. The pulpit, choir loft and pews have been replaced by bunk-beds. A development which has given us the opportunity to think about the meaning of church and the ways in which this community meets to celebrate its life.

The First United Church community gathers most frequently over a meal - three times a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It is over a meal that stories are shared, relationships are built and bodies are nourished. Recognizing the importance of eating and being together, and recognizing the need to name that as the activity that binds us, our Wednesday night Celebration of Life provides a time of reflection which allows us an opportunity to give thanks together for the gift of life and to think about our lives in relation to the Sacred. Because a variety of different faith traditions gather in that space at that time, we have made our language inclusive so that everyone might find themselves welcomed.

More recently we have been in conversation about the importance of traditional and non-traditional symbols of faith and how we might make those symbols visible in our gathering place. Rev. Ric Matthews explains, "While this place accommodates up to 300 people every night it also remains a Church - one that includes significant contributions from people of other faith traditions. It makes sense to try to find new ways to reflect a common spirituality across our different faith perspectives."

Recently we were honoured to raise a totem pole carved by Bernie Williams of the Haida Gwaii nation and fourteen other carvers. The traditional Haida pole was carried into the Hall by community members and unveiled by the elders and chiefs of the Coast Salish territory and Haida Gwaii nation and clergy from First United. It is flanked by banners painted by artist Ann Thorsteinsson and community members who offer symbols of their own faith to the space.

Plans are also being developed for a small prayer chapel which will remain open to the community during the day and evening hours and will provide quiet space for individuals of any faith tradition to use.



Bob Burrows and Sandra Severs watch the raising of the Totem Pole. It is a gift for homeless people and to honour the murdered and missing women of the DTES.



Community members wearing their "Share the Gold" scarves as they gathered on February 18th to attend

Share the Gold is a call to leverage creativity, energy and commitment to address the Olympian challenge of alienation, addiction, poverty and homelessness

Share the Gold

First United recently launched its Share the Gold campaign with a press conference supported by Mayor Gregor Robertson, anti-Olympic activist Dr. Chris Shaw, members of the municipal, provincial and federal governments, the First United Church community and the media. We received good media coverage and what was especially uplifting was the sight of the crowd, the Mayor and Dr. Shaw wearing their gold scarves!

Whether we supported or opposed the 2010 Olympics, the efforts of VANOC have proven that we have the ability and the resources to overcome massive obstacles and achieve significant outcomes. Share the Gold is a call to leverage the creativity, energy and commitment which have been directed at successfully responding to the challenge of hosting the Olympics to addressing the Olympian challenge of alienation, addiction, poverty and homelessness.

Ric Matthews comments, "This is not about simply throwing more money at doing 'more of the same'. It's about establishing a VANOC-like organization, (with authority and clear accountability) to deliver a comprehensive and integrated end to homelessness. It's about recognizing this need as a priority and providing a vehicle for addressing it effectively and urgently. Together we can focus political will and access the resources to move from responsive compassion to proactive commitment in addressing the real challenges of our time."

A Solidarity Stand was held on February 24th for 30 minutes to raise awareness of the Share the Gold Campaign. Despite the rain, Vancouver City Councillors, First United Supporters, staff and community members lined Hastings Street for two blocks wearing yellow scarves and toques and received loud encouragement from passing motorists. We thank those who came out in the driving rain, missing the Canada-Russia men's hockey game to stand with us.

Paint Your Faith Event

Paint Your Faith is an extraordinary celebration of faith and art supported by the United Church of Canada's Emerging Spirit initiative and Wondercafe www.wondercafe.ca Paint Your Faith brings together artists from around the world to express their perspective on faith through public art projects. The collaboration of the artists in a public space creates conversation and dialogue about beliefs, values, and art and how these elements can transform lives and change communities.

First United Church is partnering with Emerging Spirit on a Vancouver Paint Your Faith project (www.paintyourfaith.ca) which will take place in the Downtown Eastside during the week of April 21st to April 28th. A wall on the side of the building at 55 East Hastings (Hastings and Abbott) will be painted with images of faith. Four artists from Vancouver, San Paulo, Brazil; Padano, Italy; and Johannesburg, South Africa will create this work of art for the community and for all who travel along Hastings Street. Add your thoughts about the meaning of faith for you by following the link to the Paint Your Faith website and blog.



“I open my mind and my heart”

In the fall of 2008 I was looking for a photography project. With two amazing photographers, Wayne Kaulbach and Adam Blasberg, I approached First United. We pitched the church on creating portraits to add to an existing program that supplies and mails Christmas cards for community members. Wayne, Adam and I made up the criteria and process as we went along, not knowing whether we would get any uptake from the community at all. In the end, over 4 weeks of shooting, we photographed almost 200 amazing folk.

The paybacks were huge and unexpected. Community members got as much from the process as the product. They had 30 to 45 minutes where someone really looked at them, focusing on positive features, where they had an opportunity to talk about their lives, and where we created an image that excluded their physical surrounding and showed who they were, inside. The three of us each came away from our experience convinced that we had got significantly more than we had given. We met funny, engaging, thoughtful people that shared their stories of community, hope, despair, and victory. And the connection with those people has grown outside of the project.

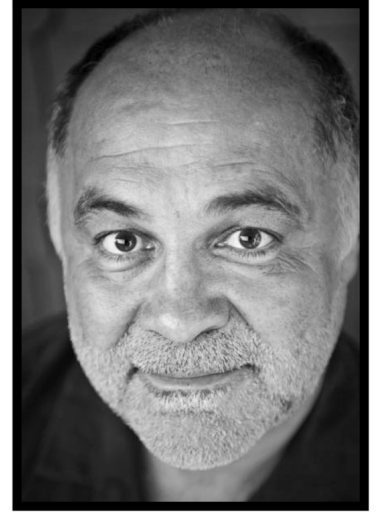
Over the past two years we have portrayed over 500 wonderful people. The images we created reconnected families, were gifts for special friends on the street and, for eight people, were used at memorial services.

It would have been a wonderful thing if that’s all that happened. But I found myself drawn into the rich and vital community at Hastings and Gore. Shortly after beginning the project I started helping out in the kitchen, and that led to developing great friendships with staff and community members. I found myself realizing that my time at First was intensely selfish. My commitment to the community was mirrored by a great gift from the First United family. I was given trust, humour, compassion and honesty from people that I call my friends. I came to learn the ebb and flow of First, and I found that attentiveness, compassion and humour could break down just about any barrier.

I had a woman ask me one afternoon, “What do you do here anyway?” And it’s certainly complicated. In the last few weeks I’ve help serve over 600 breakfasts on the day before welfare cheques, I’ve handed out rigs, I’ve gone with my 12 year old and community members to an Olympic hockey match, I’ve sat with a drug sick 16 year old girl as she wept about where her life has taken her, I’ve held my friend Phillip’s elbow as he left to go to a treatment house, and I’ve shared great jokes with dozens of my pals. And occasionally I pick up my camera.

So what do I do? I open my mind, and my heart, to receive a gift that can only come from loving and being loved.

Noel MacDonald, member of the Community



Noel MacDonald

*“So what do I do? I open my mind and my heart to receive a gift that can only come from loving and being loved”
Noel MacDonald*



Bernie Williams Master Carver
picture by Noel MacDonald



Gillian Rhodes and Ric Matthews who will be leading the workshop "Surviving the Change you Initiate" On April 15th and 16th.

Surviving the Change you Initiate

The writing is on the wall and the message seems clear : The church is in trouble. Faced with declining revenues, fixed property maintenance costs and fewer people with energy and time to participate, the pressure on Order of Ministry and Church Leaders to **"do something different!"** is clear. But what should we do? What kind of change should we instigate and how will we find the energy to drive the change forward? And what do we do with the resistance of those who do not want significant change to happen?

Join us with your questions in a two-day workshop led by First United Church's Ric Matthews and Gillian Rhodes who between them have over 45 years experience working in Change Management across industries and in the public sector in many different countries.

Location: First United Church Boardroom

Dates: Thursday, April 15 -Friday, April 16

Times: 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Cost: \$245 (lunches and snacks provided)

Registration: Online- www.firstunited.ca

By Phone- Nina Matthews, 604-681-8365, ext. 117

By email - nina.matthews@firstunited.ca

For further information, phone Sandra Severs at 604-681-8365, ext.120 or contact her by email ssevers@firstunited.ca

First United Thrift Store
Your donations of gently used casual clothing and household items are important to us.

Please call ahead to arrange for drop-off at an appointed time between 10:30 am and 2:30pm Monday to Saturday.

Call Leona Bentz at 604-569-1117

Storage space & volunteer time at our disposal is very limited and in order to make the best use of your donation we appreciate being able to control the volume and the type of clothing that is donated and to be able to space donations throughout the year.

Items always in demand:

Men's casual clothing: jeans, sweat pants, pants, casual shoes, runners, socks.

We are accepting Spring Clothing

New Programs being offered

A number of different groups are being organized for those who wish to participate in the life of the First United Church community and receive support. There is no cost attached to them and we welcome participation from the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood and the wider community. Among the courses being offered are the following:

Health and Wellness, Relapse Prevention, Yoga, Grief and Loss, Chronic Disease self Management

If you would like more information about any of these groups or would like to participate in our weekly community art program or board games activities, please contact Gillian Rhodes at 604-681-8365, ext 123.

First United has a YouTube Channel: 4 clips and more to come!

<http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=FirstUnitedVancouver>

Building an Inclusive Community Project “Hope Lives Here”

We have been hard at work preparing ourselves to redevelop our site at the corner of Hastings and Gore. The redevelopment will be about more than simply putting up a building (housing and services) to meet the needs of the community we serve. We have been hard at work creating a place of inclusion and belonging that aims to banish the alienation and marginalization that plague too many in Canada's poorest urban neighbourhood. Only through the restoration of that spiritual sense of belonging can true healing and hope take root.

Why our approach?

Other approaches haven't worked. We pour millions into the Downtown Eastside, but the chronic, toxic mix of mental illness, addiction, crime, injustice and poverty breeds an intractable alienation that resists our efforts. Well-meaning attempts to help often breed suspicion and hostility. It's time for a different approach, one that focuses on the heart and soul as well as the body. It's time to go deeper and address the alienation that keeps people in isolation, pain and fear.

It's time to recognize that we all need a place to belong. At some level, to some degree, we all experience this sense of alienation. We've all experienced the marginalization that has become the chronic state for many in our community. The need to belong and have a place we can call home in the most complete sense unites us all. This place is what we're building at the corner of Hastings and Gore, the heart of old Vancouver.

It is important that we build on the resilience, the strengths and the talents of the residents of the Downtown Eastside. This community has an enviable record of survival, self-advocacy and accomplishments against odds that others would find overwhelming. Campaigns to improve standards and safety in accommodation, to build affordable housing, to create parks and establish the Carnegie Community Centre are all huge accomplishments. More than in any other area of Vancouver local arts and culture are in the forefront of expressing hope and possibility for the future. First United is part of that tradition.

More information will soon be available about Project "Hope Lives Here." We are excited about what the future holds and look forward to sharing that excitement with you!

Collecting E-Mail addresses

Communicating news about changes at First United is an important priority for us. We value your input and we value the opportunity to share our good news with you! In addition to our printed newsletter “First Things First” that you will have received by snail mail, we also produce a monthly newsletter which we send by email. If you would like to receive our short monthly update by email, send us a message at nina.matthews@firstunited.ca



The Totem Pole being carried from the Parking Garage where it was carved and prepared



A portion of the three panels flanking the Totem Pole

You can find us on Facebook:

“First United – Building True Community in Vancouver Downtown Eastside”

and on Twitter

look for Sandra Severs

Please help us keep you informed!

Torch Bearer joins Run/Walk Team for May 9th

Robert Milton, member of the community and celebrated Olympic torch bearer will be part of the First United Team participating in the Vancouver Sun Run on May 9th. He has agreed to join the other members of the team in collecting pledges to raise funds to support our work.

Very proud to have carried the torch a few weeks ago representing the Downtown Eastside, Robert told us with a big smile on his face, "I love what is happening at the Mission and would love to help." If you would like to support Robert's participation you can make a direct pledge to Robert's run or you can collect pledges on his behalf. For more information please contact Isabelle Pecqueur at 604 681 8365 (ext 121).



Jerri Morricks (staff member) and Robert Milton on the day the Olympic torch came through our neighbourhood.

Have you signed up with the First United Church Team To take part in the Vancouver Sun Run?

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/2010sunrun/index.html>

Golf Fore The Homeless—May 3rd

Golfers mark your calendars! The 3rd Annual Golf Tournament will take place on Monday May 3rd at The University Golf Club. Tee time will be 1:00pm with a shotgun start. The Registration Fee is \$200.00 which includes golf, light lunch, pull cart, barbecue dinner, silent auction and a tax receipt for \$60.00.

To REGISTER – CONTACT Bob Burrows – 604 681-8365 or 604 290-6159; Bob_Burrows@telus.net or fax 604 681-8928.

Pay in advance or at the tournament. (The first two tournaments have raised \$80,000. Please consider being a golfer, a sponsor or donating to the silent auction!) Set up a date with three friends and come and enjoy a day at this beautiful course.



Our Wish List

We are hugely encouraged by the generosity of First United Supporters and we can only do the work we do because of your support. Our constant quest is to find ways to improve what we do and to provide better service to the community. Staff members have identified a "Wish List" of items that would help us tremendously in providing more efficient services. You may be able to help us make connections with someone who may be able to help with these items and/or be willing to donate these items. Tax receipts will be issued for the value of the items.

Paraffin Wax Bath (footcare)

New Prayer Room

A 15-passenger van.

Stacking Washer/Dryer

PA & Stereo System

Lease or Purchase of a Cargo van

New Kitchen Floor

New Shower Facility

For more information please contact Don Evans at 604-505-5921 or don.evans@firstunited.ca