



Celebrating 125 Years

First Things First

A time for bold and courageous leadership

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First Things First
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On April 28th First United publicly announced its commitment to a \$31.5 million redevelopment on our existing site at the corner of Gore and Hastings. Standing with Sandra Severs in front of the Paint Your Faith mural, Ric Matthews explained that “It has been very tempting to delay the announcement until we had more details and more funding in place but I am convinced it is necessary to make the announcement now.” He stressed that despite the significant efforts by the Provincial Government and by the City to address homelessness, the need remains overwhelming. “We cannot leave it all to Government. Nor can we pick away at this, addressing it bit by bit over a number of years. There are real people, in real need, right now. There is an urgent requirement for bold and courageous leadership from all of us”.

Don Evans and his team are hard at work preparing for the launch of the Capital Campaign. Ketchum Canada Inc., one of Canada’s top fundraising companies, has been guiding the process. Consultations, in the United Church and the wider community, have been held and there appears to be strong support for this initiative.



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Centre for Research and Policy Development

It is with great pleasure that we announce that Stephen Gray has agreed to take on the position of Director, Research and Policy Development for First United. In this role Stephen will be building off his many years of work as an Advocate to deepen the impact of First United’s strategic advocacy by helping us better understand the issues that challenge the Downtown Eastside. Stephen’s primary tasks in his new role will be to lead and coordinate research and analysis into needs and responses related

to injustice, homelessness, poverty, addiction, mental illness, community development, social action, and other areas of concern typically evident at the margins of society. He will also help First United develop and articulate the approach and policies that First United adopts in response to the above including the role of prophetic witness, public voice, and advocacy in all its forms. His work will also help shape what we do in our day-to-day operations as well as the response we make to issues in the community and province.

Expanding our understanding of inclusivity



Rabbi David Mivasair soon to join the staff team.

First United is excited to welcome Rabbi David Mivasair who joins the staff team in the role of “Pastoral Presence”. David has been a long time supporter of First United having been instrumental in launching the Jewish-Muslim peace group which serves a meal at First each month.

David in his part time work with First United will be responding to and initiating pastoral conversations with individuals and couples within the building as well as providing pastoral support for persons in time of crisis or in celebrating special circumstances. Other responsibilities will include leading the development and use of the prayer room and being a key contribu-

tor and leader in the 9am Reflections. David will also be providing leadership and input to develop further the Wednesday Evening Celebration for content and process and be supporting Ric in coordinating a “Theological Reflection Group”. In addition to this, he will be visiting with individuals outside of the building to offer pastoral care as referred by other Community Workers. Most of all, he will be helping to build theological reflection into our culture amongst staff and non-staff. Ric Matthews, Executive Minister says, “David brings a wealth of experience, deep compassion and exuberant energy. We look forward to his increased presence in our community.”

War resister marks first anniversary in sanctuary



Rodney Watson, Iraq war veteran and resister currently in sanctuary at First United.

On September 18 Iraq War veteran [Rodney Watson](#) will have spent one year in sanctuary at First United Church. Mr. Watson is living in the church with his Canadian wife and son.

After completing one tour of duty in Iraq, Mr. Watson was informed that the U.S. Army was unilaterally extending his contract in order to send him back to Iraq. While serving in Iraq, Mr. Watson saw the true nature of the illegal occupation and refused to return.

Despite two motions to let Iraq War Resisters stay in Canada that were adopted by the House of Commons on [June 3, 2008](#) and [March 30, 2009](#), Mr. Watson was ordered to leave Canada on September 11, 2009. Mr. Watson appealed to First United Church for sanctuary. After careful theological reflection with Church leaders and prominent theologians, First United accepted his request.

“This year of Sanctuary has been a very important pause in the unfolding application of the law, allowing critical space for upholding justice rather than simple legal process,” said Ric Matthews. “It is our deep hope that Bill C-440, the ongoing protests of those seeking justice for war resisters, and the support of the citizens of Canada will soon allow Rodney – and other war resisters – to be welcomed fully and freely into Canada.

To embrace those resisting war is part of our heritage, the will of the majority in Parliament and the desire of the majority of Canadians.

The time in sanctuary will be well worth it if it prevents Rodney from being summarily deported and finally allows him to be given a fair opportunity to be accepted into this country,” said Ric Matthews. “The year has been a time of learning for both Rodney and the church. It’s been inspiring to see how Rodney has redefined himself from war resister to peace maker.”

Rodney is still awaiting a decision on his application to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Emerging models of Church

Sandra Severs writes

The question of what it means to be a church in the 21st century is one that will dominate denominational conversations for the next few decades. That we are in the midst of a major shift in understanding is self-evident.

What we will look like when we emerge from the changes that are taking place among us is unclear. While there are models of ministry that have been alternative to the dominant paradigm during the latter part of the twentieth century (base Christian communities in Latin America, retreat centres like Iona), it is unlikely that we will be able to shift from what is traditionally understood to be church to embrace something that has already been tried before. Change is constant and what worked in the 1970's is unlikely to work 40 years later. Models like the intentional community of Sojourners in Washington, DC., for example, no longer exist.

That we will change is undisputed. Some expressions of the church will change as a result of seeing the writing on the wall and being open to the movement of the Spirit. Others will be forced to change as supporters depart, energy is lost and buildings can no longer be sustained. There will be grief for what has been lost and fear about what the way forward might look like. In spite of that, there will also be hope that something new can emerge.

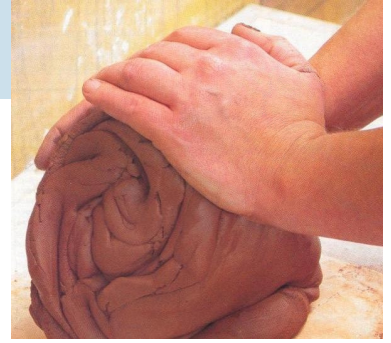
There are no experts to point people of faith forward in this time period. There are no programs that will provide a map of the way forward. There is no one model that will work for all. A paradigm shift in our understanding of what it means to be church is underway and the faithful expressions of a 21st understanding of that will be determined through trial and error. We will only know who we are when we have engaged in an on-going process of action and reflection. First United is uniquely positioned to be one

of the models that helps to point the United Church of Canada forward into the future. Its long history of exceptional leadership, its ability to shift to meet the changing needs of the community, its historically hybridized identity as both congregation and mission, its alternative governance structure, and its strong funding and volunteer base has meant that it has weathered the late 20th century/early 21st century storms successfully. The closure of the congregation, while a source of great sadness for many, has also provided a conceptual space in which new thinking about what it means to be church has become possible.

The Board began the process toward a new model of being church through the visioning exercises which took place in 2007. The changes in the leadership model and subsequent hiring have moved the process forward beyond the original reflection and visioning towards the implementation of change. And change has happened! The most visible changes have been in terms of the expansion of hours and programming. The questions of meaning and identity, while not as visible, are of equal if not greater importance.

Because we are treading on ground previously untrod, the process of self understanding is an emerging one shaped by the action- reflection model. That reflection has taken place with the Board and staff, with members of the community and in response the changing needs of the Downtown Eastside that we serve.

Like the relationship of the potter to the clay, we can only move forward by leaning into the process of discovery, by exploring the possibilities before us, by experiment and failure. We trust that the Spirit which has shaped this ministry for 125 years will continue to move within this place called First United Church.



"I am being formed by the clay.

I am reconnecting with the earth, and with the other basic elements, too — air, water, fire — and life itself.

Working with clay is so tactile and tangible, so immediate. Every gesture leaves its trail in the clay.

Every fingerprint, a message. My breath fills the cavity. My touch curves the wall of a bowl. And inwardly, I am being formed by the outward practice. I am learning to trust the process, to lean into the possibilities rather than strive for some predetermined goal. I am being hollowed out, stretched and constricted, trimmed and sometimes reworked entirely."

*Marjory Zoet Bankson,
"The Soulwork of Clay"*

Host a "First Supper"

First United is celebrating 125 years of service in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community. Rev Sandra Severs points out, "This is an exciting opportunity for all of us to mark the occasion by connecting our home and neighbourhood with the community at First United and at the same time, in the course of one evening, help to raise significant funds for work it does." It is hoped that during October there will be many anniversary celebrations across the country in individual homes. Sandra says, "As a friend of First we invite you to host an October dinner in your home. Invite your friends and family to an evening of fun, food, and fundraising for First United. We will provide you with a kit that contains a DVD with a short overview of our work and an invitation from Ric Matthews, Executive Minister to help support the work of First United."



FIRST SUPPER

The kit also contains helpful information & ideas, invitations, donation envelopes, and cards containing interesting topics for conversation. If you're interested in hosting a "First Supper" and would like more information, please contact Isabelle Pecqueur at 604-681-8365 (x 121), or email ipecqueur@firstunited.ca, or sign up online at www.firstunited.ca.

Your vote will make a difference

The storage facility opened a few months ago has been a much-needed and well-patronized service. Start-up funding was received from the City of Vancouver but further funding is needed in order to keep this facility open. It currently provides storage of personal belongings for just over 200 people and the facility has created employment for seven Downtown Eastside residents.

With the help of documentary film-maker, Billy Wong, a short video was made and posted on YouTube as part of a competition to win a \$25,000 grant from Pepsi. The winner of the competition will be the entry that receives the most votes from the public over a two month period. Voting started on September 1st and ends on October 31st. At the beginning of the competition our entry was placed 11th and has steadily crept up to 1st place. Your participation will help us stay on top and win the \$25,000 grant.



Isabelle Pecqueur explains how you can help: "Go to <http://www.refresheverything.ca/login> And then go to <http://www.refresheverything.ca/firstunitedchurch> Click on the 'Vote for this idea' button. You will hear the sound of a pop can opening and your vote will be counted. Please vote every day for the next 2 months (as the winner will be the idea with the most votes by October 31st)." Isabelle asks "Tell everyone you know! Send emails to friends and family. Post the link on your Facebook page. Tweet about it. Invite everyone to vote and vote and vote!"

*Purchase
your tickets
today!*

*The Sacred
Music of
Duke
Ellington*

*co-presented by
First United
and
Coastal Jazz*

*November 19th,
2010
At 8:00pm*

*St Andrew's
Wesley
United
Church*

*Tickets available
at
www.firstunited.ca*