



Celebrating 125 Years

First Things First

Working with UBC to pursue research into compulsive hoarding

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First Things First
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For the past two and a half years, First United has been pioneering work on the treatment of compulsive hoarding disorder.

Compulsive hoarding is a mental health issue in which a person accumulates and is unable to discard a large number of possessions. Don Collett, a therapist on contract at First, has been providing free individual and group therapy to people in the DTES who struggle with clutter in their lives. As a result of his work and together with housing staff, First has created strategies enabling people to maintain housing.

A new partnership with UBC researchers will enable First United to better understand hoarding. Research undertaken by Dr. Sheila Woody (psychologist) and

Dr. Nathan Lauster (sociologist) will focus on low-income individuals studying housing instability, social isolation and how possessions are viewed. This research will provide the foundation for better clinical treatment of hoarding, more informed integrated practice for social housing providers dealing with hoarding, better advocacy for and community inclusion of hoarders, and better public health policies to prevent the conditions that lead to and exacerbate hoarding. Ric Matthews, Executive Minister said "It's wonderful to see how the work done by Don, Sandra Severs and Graham Bullen has provided the platform and momentum for an integrated approach across the city."

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Sport building community and belonging

Strathcona United Soccer team led by VST student, Michael Politano-Bowles has made enormous strides in fostering inclusive community. The beginning of the season saw the team numbers and morale at a low point but the team grew in number, confidence and skill taking them all the way to a cup game. Michael says "It is gratifying to see the sense of community and belonging in the team and what it has meant for individual players." Rick Gill, has been in conversation

with Raycam, Strathcona and Carnegie Community Centres around opportunities to use sport to foster community.

Strathcona United warming up.



First United Housing Society re-integrated

First United Housing Society has recently been re-integrated with First United Church resulting in a number of changes over past months. Staff members have been integrated to provide necessary support and services to tenants in the three Housing Society buildings – Jennie Pentland Place, Bill Hennessey Place and Ledingham Place. More focused cleaning services have been undertaken, two new roofs have been installed after many years of waiting and additional security measures have been installed in the buildings. At Bill Hennessey better lighting and a fob-reader have been installed to facilitate easier access for tenants at night. Gillian Rhodes, Director

of Operations says, “We are excited about the closer ties that are being forged as this enables the amalgamation of programmes and services and builds community and belonging.” A number of tenants have taken advantage of advocacy services since the First United Advocacy offices were moved to the ground level of Jennie Pentland. A comprehensive Bed-bug Management programme has been instituted (including the training of an in-house bed-bug specialist) as well as a programme that intentionally and proactively addresses clutter issues in the buildings. A recent highlight was the Children’s Christmas party. In coming months work will be focused on addressing issues that have been highlighted by community mem-

Ripples go out far beyond where we can ever know

Rabbi David Mivasair writes:

You never know how wide our circles reach. A few weeks ago, I was shopping at one of those big box discount food stores on Vancouver’s Southwest Marine Drive, miles away from First United and the Downtown Eastside. It was a wet, drippy gray winter’s day. You know the type.

I filled my basket to nearly overflowing, stocking up for my family for months to come. I went through the check-out and ventured out into the rain to get my car. Paying no attention, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a guy trudging along with a wheel barrow, hard hat and steel-toed shoes headed for where some construction was going on. Intent on myself, I didn’t even glance his way.

“Hey, rabbi, that was a great dinner!” I suddenly and very incongruously heard. “What?!”

“That was a great dinner Wednesday night. Yeah. It was good!” Wednesday night? What’s he talking about? Who is this guy, anyway?

“You know, at First United, right? It was awesome. I thank you guys so much, really.”

What could I say? “Oh, wow. That’s great. It’s so nice of you to say that. I’m glad you liked it. See you again, OK?” “Yeah, definitely.”

He went on his way in the rain with his wheelbarrow and I went on mine with my shopping cart. Our two worlds, so separate on the surface, suddenly touched. I felt all the richer for it. It happens all the time for me here at First United. Ripples go out far beyond where we can ever know. I thank you, the supporters of First United, for all we do.



Rabbi David Mivasair facilitating discussion at the daily morning devotions

From my perspective

"And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins." (Luke 5:37-38)

When the congregation at First United closed in 2007, a visioning process was held with members of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood to pose the question: What kind of place should First United be as it moved forward into the future? The answer which came back very strongly and clearly was an unexpected response. **First United should remain a church.** Given that the definition of church is one that is most often linked to the existence of a congregation and given that the congregation had closed after 122 years of faithful ministry, the answer that First United should be a church was rather puzzling for both the Board and the staff. If First United no longer had a congregation, how could it be a church?

Four years have passed since the challenge to be a church was issued by the Downtown Eastside community and in that time the Board and staff at First United have continued to wrestle with the question and have searched for an answer that is theologically faithful to our tradition as part of the United Church of Canada and also responsive to this call of the community who have sensed something intentional happening here which recognizes the presence of the Sacred in this place.

The challenge of thinking something new has not been easy. The traditional marks of the church have helped guide us as we have struggled to articulate what it means to be a church in this neighbourhood.

Those marks are:

Proclaiming and encountering the Sacred (God) – *Kerygma*
Teaching, learning and growth – *Didache*
Fellowship and community – *Koinonia*
Service, compassion and social justice – *Diakonia*
Order and ritual in the work of the people – *Leiturgia*

In all that we do, we are working to ensure that our practice of being a church remains faithful to those marks.

We have searched for a governance model that affirms our identity as a church and at the same time recognizes that this place is different from most churches within The United Church of Canada. Our initial

movement towards defining ourselves as a community ministry (formerly outreach ministry) of the United Church felt uncomfortable. While we share the passion, the commitment and the work of community ministries in their focus on housing, social justice, advocacy and support of the marginalized, we understand ourselves to be creating something which cannot be held within the wine-skin of the community ministry model. We believe that what is being

created at First United is a full expression of what it means to be a church – a model that holds together the passion and work of community ministry with an intentional focus on an encounter with that which is Sacred. The result of our efforts is a hybridized model grounded in an expanded definition of a pastoral charge combined with an incorporated society. We are in conversation with Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery and BC Conference to flesh out our model and to secure its structure within the polity of The United Church of Canada. The process of living into this way of being is ongoing.



Sandra Severs
Deputy Executive Minister

Silver Wheaton Golf Day: May 30th

Silver Wheaton Golf For the Homeless Community” benefitting the work and programs of First United Church is on May 30th at the University Golf Club – starting at 1pm with a Texas Scramble format. Golfers of all abilities are invited to join us for a fun day of golfing and an evening barbeque dinner and silent auction emcee’d by CBC’s Rick Cluff.

Registration and information on how you might be able to join Mayor Gregor Robertson’s foursome can be found at

www.firstunited.ca

Contact Isabelle on 604 681 8365 (ext 121)



Mayor Gregor Robertson chatting with Tracey on the second anniversary of First opening overnight

First United’s 125th Anniversary Party in the Park

First United Church will celebrate its presence in Vancouver on Saturday, June 4th. You are invited to join the people of Strathcona and the Downtown Eastside in a party at MacLean Park in Strathcona from 1pm to 5pm. Planned events and exhibits include historical displays, artwork by local Downtown Eastside artists, free barbeque, displays by local organizations, arts and crafts booths, story sharing, family friendly activities, animation and music performances. Mark your calendar and be part of this celebration made possible by grants from the City of Vancouver and the Government of Canada.

Redevelopment News

Progress continues to be made on the redevelopment of facilities on the current site at 320 East Hastings Street. Plans are progressing well for relocating to an alternative site during the building phase. Preparation for the Capital Campaign is completed, printed materials are being finalized and the next phase will be implemented over the coming months.

Proposed building to house First United Church at the corner of Gore and Hastings



Meet the Fund Development Team

Don Evans, Isabelle Pecqueur and Natalie Lanoville together make up the Fund Development Staff team. We value comments & suggestions and invite you for a visit to see First United’s work in action.

For Information contact **Don Evans** (Director of Resource Development) Tel: 604-505-5921 or devans@firstunited.ca,

Isabelle Pecqueur (Fund Development Manager) Tel 604-681-8365 ext 121 or ipequeur@firstunited.ca

Natalie Lanoville (Data Base Manager) Tel: 604-681-8365 ext 104 or natalie.lanoville@firstunited.ca

Mountain Equipment Co-op has donated 50 pinna-vests to enable Hosts to be more visible on the floor. This will help foster safety and peace of mind for community members at First United. Their generosity is greatly appreciated.

