

**FIRST  
UNITED**

# 2020 Annual Report

January 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020





# Message from Leadership



Our 2020 fiscal year was shorter than usual to transition to new fiscal year dates, but we fit a lot into those nine months.

Early 2020 feels like another lifetime in a different world. We had so many plans for connecting, gathering, and togetherness. The Roddan Lecture Series featured Stéphan Corriveau to discuss housing as a human right. We had planned to visit communities of faith throughout the Lower Mainland to speak about our shared vision of bringing sanctuary and justice to the Downtown Eastside. Being present in and with our communities is central to our work at **FIRST UNITED**, and 2020 promised to be a year of connection.

When the COVID-19 pandemic became real we knew we had to quickly pivot to support our community members in the Downtown Eastside and our staff. We knew we could not simply shut down. Those we serve rely on our services, sometimes for survival: food, shelter, safety, and justice.

Collectively, we rose to the challenge. We began serving meals through a service window. We created self-isolation spaces within the shelter in case residents became symptomatic. We limited our drop-in space to shelter residents while ensuring toiletries, mail, socks,

and essential items could still be accessed by those who needed them. **We feel a deep pride for how our team persevered in the face of hardship and uncertainty to do one thing: help.**

And our broader community: you, our supporters...You opened your hearts to us and the Downtown Eastside like we've never seen. Your generosity and compassion allowed us to keep going day after day. You made sure we had the resources to both provide direct services and build our capacity for bigger systems change. We thank you!

Our capacity did grow. We welcomed four new board members and five new administration directors to our leadership team. Throughout a tumultuous year, you helped us grow into an organization that will march forward with clarity, determination, and focus for the years ahead, including a redevelopment initiative that is critical to FIRST's mission. As we look toward the future, we feel great joy that one day soon we will be able to gather and connect with you in person.

**The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne** Executive Director  
**Dr. Heather F. Clarke** Chair, Board of Directors





# Vision Mission Values

Our vision is a neighbourhood where every person's worth is celebrated and all people thrive.

We seek a just society by nurturing each person's spirit through ministry, housing, advocacy and community services.

Our values are acceptance, discernment, empathy, accountability, and social justice.



# We Are FIRST UNITED



**FIRST UNITED** strives to be a respectful resource to the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and to those who are most in need of a welcoming place to be, to find support, and feel safe. We have operated in the DTES for over 130 years, and plan to keep our doors open to the neighbourhood as a place to find sanctuary and connection.

Our work nurtures each person's spirit through ministry, housing, advocacy, and community services in the face of the often-intersecting challenges of extreme poverty, historical and personal trauma, mental illness, and oppression. At our core is the mission, ministry, and call to social justice of the United Church of Canada.

## FIRST UNITED Board of Directors 2020:

- |   |                               |  |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| ▶ <b>Dr. Heather F. Clarke</b> , Chair          | ▶ <b>Scott Griffin</b>        | ▶ <b>Dave Munroe</b>                         |
| ▶ <b>The Rev. Dr. Brian Thorpe</b> , Vice-Chair | ▶ <b>Jeremy Hermanson</b>     | ▶ <b>Walter Rilkoff</b>                      |
| ▶ <b>Jacob Black-Lock</b> , Secretary           | ▶ <b>David Jiles</b>          | ▶ <b>David Walkem*</b>                       |
| ▶ <b>John Christie</b> , Treasurer              | ▶ <b>Elizabeth Kerklaan</b>   | ▶ <b>Aaron Wilson*</b>                       |
| ▶ <b>The Rev Dr. Daniel Bogert-O'Brien</b>      | ▶ <b>Kathy Kwon</b>           | ▶ <b>The Rev. Jennifer Goddard-Sheppard*</b> |
| ▶ <b>The Rev. Dr. Debra Bowman</b>              | ▶ <b>Stanley Lanyon</b>       |  |
| ▶ <b>Jean Budden</b>                            | ▶ <b>Margo McQueen Dunnet</b> |  |
| ▶ <b>Judy Graves</b>                            | ▶ <b>Paul Mitchell-Banks</b>  |  |

## Non-voting board member:

**Treena Duncan**, Executive Director, Pacific Mountain Region, the United Church of Canada

## Leadership Team 2020:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ▶ <b>The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne</b><br>Executive Director                | ▶ <b>Keely Hale</b><br>Director of Programs                                |
| ▶ <b>Gillian McLeod</b><br>Managing Director                                | ▶ <b>The Rev. Jim Hatherly</b><br>Director of Community Ministry (retired) |
| ▶ <b>Mayleen Ahoy</b><br>Director of Housing (formerly Director of Finance) | ▶ <b>Sean McCaughey</b><br>Director of Facilities                          |
| ▶ <b>Dr. Cheryl Bear</b><br>Director of Community Ministry                  | ▶ <b>Rob Vandermeij</b><br>Director of Finance                             |
| ▶ <b>Amanda Burrows</b><br>Director of Development                          |  |





# Programs and Services



**10,693**

nights of safe refuge  
(shelter stays)

## Shelter

We believe housing is a human right. It provides the safety and support necessary to survive and thrive. To meet the most essential needs of our community, our 60-bed (reduced to 45 during COVID-19) emergency shelter is low-barrier, trans-inclusive environment, that also provides a women-only space. Our shelter is unique and meets the complex needs of some of our most marginalized community members who cannot find other spaces to safely stay because they have pets, actively use substances, or need space for both members of a couple.



**\$175,133**

returned through 1,296  
tax returns

## Taxes

Literacy challenges, information gaps, and trauma associated with government systems are just a few of the barriers standing in the way of a tax return for many people experiencing poverty. Through our Tax Program, thousands of people get connected with vital benefits for housing, pensions, and other assistance programs every year. At a time when benefits became critical to survival during the early stages of COVID-19, the tax program filled an important role for those without other options.



**998**

advocacy cases  
managed

## Legal Advocacy

Since the 1970's our Legal Advocacy Program has supported low-income Downtown Eastside residents to assert their legal rights. Our advocates offer a lifeline to community members as they navigate life-altering challenges around tenancy, income security, immigration, income stabilization, and human rights issues. For those with nowhere else to turn for help, our advocacy team can offer a path forward. During the pandemic, our advocates have been essential to supporting those with tenancy challenges to remain safely in their homes and avoid homelessness.

## Meals

Food is important for sharing connection and community, taking a moment to rest, and nourishing the body. For so many, food insecurity is a daily challenge, that was further exacerbated in the spring of 2020. Our meal program has operated for decades, providing sustenance and support to any who come to our doors. Though we had to transition to take-away meals for safety, we continued to serve roughly 200 community members breakfast and lunch every day, and still were able to provide a safe, sit-down meal for our shelter residents every day.



**35,613**

delicious meals served

## Spiritual Care

Culturally-safe and inclusive spiritual care is part of our bedrock. Our Community Ministry includes pastoral care, spirit circle, a listening ministry, and memorial services. Our spiritual care services are open to those of all faiths, or none, and seeks to affirm and love all without judgement or exception. While many of our group ministry services had to be put on hold due to COVID-19, we have found opportunities for one-on-one connection safely, when and where people need it.



## A note about our spiritual care

After more than three years with **FIRST UNITED**, I wished The Reverend Jim Hatherly a happy retirement. As Director of Community Ministry, Jim brought a calm and peaceful presence to his ministry and was a friendly face on Hastings Street known as "Pastor Jim". His compassion made a lasting difference to many in our community.

With every change comes the opportunity for new beginnings. In October 2020, we welcomed Dr. Cheryl Bear (Nadleh Whut'en First Nation) as our new Director of Community Ministry and added a new role to the organization: Indigenous Spiritual Care Chaplain. With so many of our community members in the DTES identifying as Indigenous, it is essential that our work to provide culturally-appropriate and safe spiritual care. We are honored to be building our Indigenous spiritual care capacity and furthering our commitment to reconciliation.



# Long-Term Solutions

We pride ourselves on being able to provide immediate care, while also keeping our eyes on systemic change. We know that that to make the greatest impact we must address injustices from both sides. This is foundational to how **FIRST UNITED** will grow, and ultimately achieve our vision of a neighbourhood where all can thrive.

A few years ago, Herb was released from prison after 30 years inside. He found himself at 67 dropped in Vancouver, without a local support network, unable to work, and without a home. For three years, Herb endured homelessness in the Downtown Eastside.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began Herb was 70 and still unhoused. He had been hospitalized five times for pneumonia during the previous winter. He was scared about what would happen to him without somewhere to stay. He came to **FIRST UNITED** and got a spot in our emergency shelter. There, he had access to PPE, washing facilities, and a place to isolate if needed. Our staff were able to meet his most basic needs to stay safe and healthy.

The shelter was an important stopgap measure that provided Herb exactly what he needed when he needed it. But our staff knew that this wasn't a long-term solution for a vulnerable senior. Our staff worked with Herb to apply for an apartment with our

sister organization, **FIRST UNITED** Church Social Housing Society. In early fall 2020, Herb moved into his apartment. His first safe and private home in over 30 years.

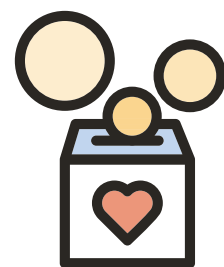
This is where Herb has the chance to stay and put down roots. This is his long-term solution. It wouldn't have been possible without the low-barrier and basic supports that **FIRST UNITED** provides: emergency shelter, food, and staff who care.

We know this isn't the end of the story though. We know we must advocate to end homelessness, and to push for housing for all. Herb's story is one of success. But we know there are too many in the DTES right now who are not as lucky but deserve just as much. Through our social justice committee, leadership, and advocacy we are committed to continuing the conversation with decision makers to ensure that our neighbours like Herb don't fall through the cracks.



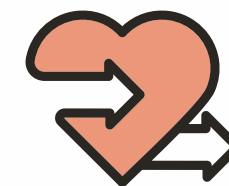
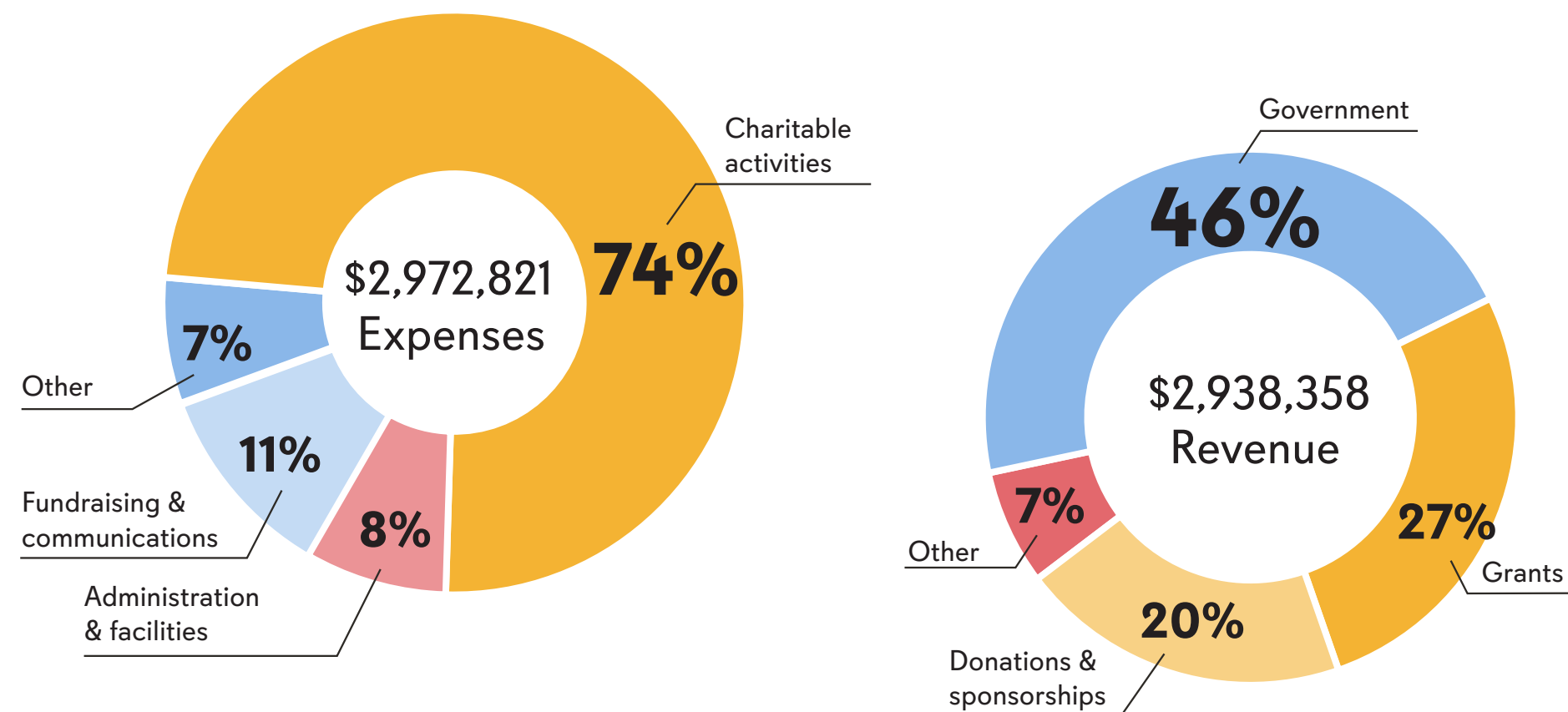
– Herb





# Audited Financial Statements

Representing January 1, 2020–September 30, 2020



## Looking to the Future

Rising to meet the acute challenges that 2020 presented wasn't anticipated, but we are humbled to have done it with grace. Behind the scenes, we worked meticulously to prepare for our future. The growth in our leadership team has positioned us to initiate a decades-long dream: the redevelopment of our site at 320 East Hastings. In September 2020, we took a leap forward by submitting our development permit application to the City of Vancouver. In January 2021, the City of Vancouver Heritage Commission unanimously voted to approve the application to create an 11-storey purpose-built building that will provide all of **FIRST UNITED**'s core services plus affordable housing, in partnership with Lu'ma Native Housing Society.

Demolition of the existing Church is scheduled to begin in Summer 2021. The next three years will provide unique challenges as we move our services to satellite locations through the DTES. This project is the future of **FIRST UNITED**: it will enable us to appropriately address the critical housing, health, and social justice needs in the Downtown Eastside. We hope to connect with you this year to provide more exciting updates and information and how you can help move this project forward.



# Gratitude

**FIRST UNITED** is every person, business, community of faith, foundation, and partner who gives back. 50% of the revenue it takes to offer our services comes from donors and funders. We would not be the organization we are today, supporting countless individuals and saving lives, without their help. To our donors: thank you for believing in this work. We are honoured that you stand with us.

**1,145**

Donors

**1,223**

Financial gifts

**195**

In-kind gifts  
(gifts of goods)







# Frontline Monthly Donors

Our Frontline Monthly Donors provide the stability and security to ensure our work can continue next week, next month, and next year. And that is exactly where their support goes: to the frontlines. The ongoing support of our Frontline Monthly Donors allows us to meet the immediate needs of our community members and end the cycle of poverty.



Number of Frontline Monthly Donors

343



Donors average gift amount

\$43/month

▶ You can become a Frontline Monthly Donor too. [Sign up online at firstunited.ca/donate.](https://firstunited.ca/donate)



# Meal Sponsors

During 2020, we temporarily put our meal sponsorships on hold due to COVID-19. Our meal sponsors include groups of friends or family, community groups, and businesses that sponsor a breakfast or lunch for up to 200 community members and have the opportunity to serve their sponsored meal.

We are honoured to recognize Vancouver Oddfellows, Mahsa Momenzadeh, and three anonymous meal sponsors for their generosity to feed hundreds who rely on **FIRST UNITED** for a healthy and filling meal.

▶ Though we cannot arrange opportunities to serve lunch as part of meal sponsorships, we can offer other forms of recognition or delay serving opportunities until public health orders allow us to gather again.

Contact [meals@firstunited.ca](mailto:meals@firstunited.ca) to inquire.



# Friends of First

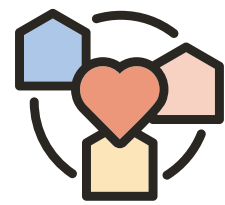
Our Friends of First are those who have chosen to make **FIRST UNITED** part of their legacy by leaving a gift to First in their will. Their commitment to the future of First inspires and humbles us. We are honoured to recognize their legacies:

- ▶ Florence & Robert Brownridge
- ▶ Bob Burrows
- ▶ Dr. Heather F. Clarke
- ▶ Jan & Joan Drabek
- ▶ Colleen Dunn
- ▶ Don Evans
- ▶ Ken & Joan Fowler
- ▶ Doreen Gardner Brown
- ▶ Ian & Billie Housego
- ▶ Tom Hutchinson & Bill Booth
- ▶ Nancy Jefferson

- ▶ Sharon Johnson
- ▶ Barry LePatourel
- ▶ Jean & Lawrence Matrick
- ▶ Bob Miller & Barbara Rendell
- ▶ Janet Reid
- ▶ Rae Rennie
- ▶ Brian & Heather Smith
- ▶ Daphne & Gordon Squire
- ▶ Gordon H. Tolman
- ▶ Floyd C. Wartnow
- ▶ & 27 anonymous Friends

To learn about how you can make **FIRST UNITED** part of your legacy, please contact: [fundraising@firstunited.ca](mailto:fundraising@firstunited.ca)





# Community Giving Programs

Join **FIRST UNITED**'s new Community Giving Program and join hundreds of others who are helping provide sanctuary in the heart of our city. Whether you're an individual, a business, or community of faith, we have a giving program for you to join, that we are proud to recognize you as part of.

Only about 50% of our revenue comes from our donors. To continue meeting the survival-needs of those who call the Downtown Eastside home, advocating for justice, and providing spiritual care to those who seek it, we need your help today.



To learn more about our Community Donors, Community Partners, and Communities of Faith and to join the group that's right for you, visit [firstunited.ca/community-giving-programs](https://firstunited.ca/community-giving-programs).

The following organizations are champions in our pursuit of justice, dignity, and equity in the Downtown Eastside:

- BC Housing
- City of Vancouver
- Connor, Clark and Lunn Foundation
- Government of Canada
- Greater Vancouver Food Bank
- Hockey Helps the Homeless
- The Law Foundation of British Columbia
- Lightburn Family Fund, held at the Vancouver Foundation
- Lotte and John Hecht Foundation
- Pacific Mountain Regional Council
- Second Harvest Food Harvest Canada with the support of The Sprott Foundation
- Seedlings Foundation
- United Church of Canada
- United Church of Canada Foundation
- The Vancouver Foundation

Organizations Contributing **\$10,000+**



Our donors and partners make our work possible and help us get one step closer to realizing our vision of a neighbourhood where all can thrive, and everyone's worth is celebrated.

Charitable donations fund our critical survival-supports, advocacy, and spiritual care. Please consider making a donation today at [firstunited.ca/donate](https://firstunited.ca/donate), or contact us at: [donations@firstunited.ca](mailto:donations@firstunited.ca) / 604.336.3047



If we have made an error in our donor recognition, please contact us at 604.336.3047. Please note these recognition dates are for gifts made from January 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020.





# 2020

## Annual Report

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