

# Call for Justice This Advent Season

This Christmas season, we invite you to participate in Advent through the theme of justice—specifically to begin the work of Call to Justice 18.17 from the **National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**.

Call 18.17 states: “We call upon all governments, service providers, and educators to fund and support the re-education of communities and individuals who have learned to reject 2SLGBTQQIA people, or who deny their important history and contemporary place within communities and in ceremony, and to address transphobia and homophobia in communities...to ensure cultural access for 2SLGBTQQIA people.”

To help us along the journey to fulfill Call 18.17, Spiritual Care has put together an Advent Calendar that will feature daily actions to participate in. This important work is part of our commitment to putting reconciliation into action and advocating for justice for the MMIWG and 2SLGBTQQIA community.

“The Advent Calendar walks us through the beginning steps of learning, unlearning, and relearning about Two-

Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse Indigenous folx’s experiences, systemic oppression, colonization, and radical change,” says Indigenous Spiritual Care Chaplain Lauren Sanders (Prairie Band Potawatomi and Kickapoo), who created the calendar.

The calendar includes resources to help unpack how our societal understanding of gender and sexuality is impacted by colonialism.

“An important part of the call is learning how colonization fractured our ideas of gender and community,” shares Lauren, who has also had to deconstruct colonial ideologies that have purposely excluded cultural Indigenous practices and beliefs. “I’ve had to relearn, in my own Indigenous community, what being gender-diverse, trans, Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer means. We were colonized and told that if you were following Indigenous traditions, you were ‘of the devil.’ It’s also a journey for me and my family. I’m learning and relearning with my children, and even talking with my mom, who went through Residential School in the United States. It’s about reframing and understanding what it means to be Indigenous and that you’re a beautiful creation of the Creator.”

Lauren stresses the importance of learning from those who identify as gender-diverse, Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and queer—and features resources in the calendar that center those experiences. “These are voices we aren’t used to hearing. It’s so important to hear from them and how they want to tell their experiences.”

Lauren encourages us to do this work together as a community, and will be hosting weekly Zoom sessions to provide a space for deeper discussions.

Go to [firstunited.ca/resources/category/ministry](https://firstunited.ca/resources/category/ministry) for links to the Advent Calendar and Zoom meeting.



*Lauren Sanders, Indigenous Spiritual Care Chaplain, created a justice-themed Advent Calendar for this Christmas season.*

# Saying Farewell to Carmen

Dear Friends,

What a treat to be addressing you together. We thought it important to write to you jointly in this edition of First Things First because of the—perhaps atypical—way that our leadership changes came about. We realized that over a year ago Carmen went on sabbatical and Amanda became Acting Executive Director, which then went straight into Carmen becoming Moderator and Amanda Interim ED, and now that change has been permanently made with Carmen's acceptance of becoming an Assistant Professor at Emmanuel College and Amanda becoming permanent ED.

We realized that it felt like a thread was hanging. Carmen never got to say goodbye and FIRST UNITED never got to say goodbye to her.

So, this is my (Carmen, here) farewell, but know that I will always be in the FIRST UNITED ether and that this place will always be immensely close to my heart. Serving as Executive Director has been the joy of a lifetime and I'm really proud of what we've accomplished together. In 2025 I'll be moving to Ontario, but those of you who know me well know that I'm not averse to travelling and will be back in BC from time to time. Thank you for your strength and encouragement over the past six years...it's been joyous and meaningful.

And I (Amanda here, my turn!) invite you to join me in wishing Carmen all the best and thanking her for building a strong and robust organization for me—us—to build upon. You've so graciously welcomed me into this permanent role, and I feel supported by Carmen's legacy and by each of you.

Thank you for standing with us through this transition as we continue to serve the Downtown Eastside. We know that the common thread that binds us all together is a shared vision of a neighbourhood where everyone's worth is celebrated, and all people thrive.



**Amanda Burrows,**  
Executive Director



**The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne,** Moderator of the United Church of Canada and former FIRST UNITED Executive Director

## A New Foundation



Demolition work at 320 East Hastings was completed this summer. Excavation began in August and has proceeded on schedule, putting us on track to begin pouring the foundation in November. **Thank you** to all of the donors who've joined us to Move First Forward. We couldn't have gotten this far without you!





# A Year of the FIRST Food Truck



“We’ve had community members tell us, ‘It’s amazing that you’re still able to provide food while your building is being redeveloped,’” shared Cristien Donhuysen, Program Manager.

It’s been over a year since we’ve launched our FIRST Food Truck, which provides free meals to Downtown Eastside community members every weekday at lunchtime. Through the food truck, we serve an average of 1,000 meals each week—which is more than we were able to serve from our take-out window during the pandemic.

“We’re providing a unique service that no one else is doing,” says Cristien.

The food truck started as an innovative way for us to continue serving community meals during the redevelopment of 320 East Hastings.

Cristien has seen the benefits of serving meals from a mobile truck. Its visibility and accessibility mean that more people can get much-needed nutritious meals.

She explains: “A lot of people who are on the street are afraid to leave their stuff unattended. Before the food truck, community members had to go into the building to line up and sit down to eat. But with the food truck, they can stand in line and keep an eye on their stuff. Or if they’re on a bike, they can grab their food and go.”

In August 2022, we started hosting Food Truck Sponsorships for corporate, community, or faith groups to sponsor a meal and volunteer to serve lunch.

“The primary purpose of this program is to use group engagements to break down barriers and change



hearts and minds,” explains Will Goldbeck, Assistant Development Manager. “There is a lot of harmful stigma about people who live in the DTES and the people we serve, and by getting people on the ground in the neighbourhood, we find we can very quickly change those mindsets. When folks can take the time to come down as a group and engage with the community, it has the potential to change their view of the neighbourhood and the people we serve.”

This past summer, we hosted a food truck sponsorship for a group from Sandstorm Gold Royalties. They shared their gratitude for the opportunity: “The food truck was an eye-opening experience for how much we let socialized stigma impact our view of others struggling to survive, and enabled the people in our group to reset a bit and change their perception of the people we were serving. Many were impressed by the gratitude of those we were serving.”

To learn more about the Food Truck Sponsorships, visit [firstunited.ca/how-you-help/sponsor-a-meal](https://firstunited.ca/how-you-help/sponsor-a-meal).





# FIRST UNITED

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*Located on unceded Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm  
(Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish),  
& Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) lands.*



## Annual Giving Tuesday Shelter Gala

Our annual Giving Tuesday Shelter Gala will take place again on Giving Tuesday, November 28. We'll be treating shelter residents to a special five-star meal, and serving gourmet lunches to Downtown Eastside community members from our food truck. Go to [firstunited.ca/events](https://firstunited.ca/events) to learn more about how you can get involved.



## Gifts In-Kind

Temperatures are dropping and community members are in need of winter clothes and other essential items. Our Community Help Desk is taking donations in preparation for the upcoming winter season. Visit the "Gifts In-Kind" page under the "How You Help" section of [firstunited.ca](https://firstunited.ca) for a list of needed items and drop-off instructions.



## Volunteer Opportunities

Are you looking for ways to give back to the DTES community? Your skills might be a good fit for some of our program's needs. Email [volunteers@firstunited.ca](mailto:volunteers@firstunited.ca) or call 604.681.8365 for opportunities.