

It's a Lot More Than a Building We're Building

Everywhere you look in the Downtown Eastside, a story is being told, whether through murals, wall art or graffiti. Often, artists in the neighbourhood tell these stories through small installations and street art, because when it comes to larger displays of public art, the DTES is often overlooked.

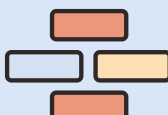
The City of Vancouver requires all new developments to include public art, but social projects like our redevelopment are exempt. This, combined with less overall investment in public art for lower income neighbourhoods, perpetuates inequities in our urban environment. This results in the exclusion of stories and expressions of identity from people in the DTES. And because 30-40 per cent of the neighbourhood identifies as Indigenous, it's crucially important that we hold space for, and make welcome, stories of perseverance and survival, and honour the histories of the land on which our building stands.

As part of our commitment to putting reconciliation into action, we are working with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh artists and consultants to respectfully incorporate Indigenous design and cultural elements into the building.

"Including art was never a question for us," said Amanda Burrows, Executive Director. "In the DTES, where histories of colonialism and oppression are tied directly to the suppression and erasure of culture, particularly Indigenous culture, we believe that access to and inclusion in public art is inextricably linked to reconciliation and healing in this community."

We've thoughtfully integrated the arts and culture features of our building into the exterior façade and interior design of our building. The external features will be created by Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh artists, and internal design elements will be created by Urban Indigenous and local DTES artists.

"There is an important need for safer spaces in the Downtown Eastside," said Rev. Lauren Sanders, Artist and Indigenous Spiritual Care Chaplain. "An empathetic, dignity-filled, respectful, brave space is what we're trying to nurture."

 You can help us blanket the building with Debra Sparrow's beautifully designed brickwork by buying a symbolic brick at buyabrick.firstunited.ca.

Features

Brickwork pattern blanketing the outdoor deck and lightwell, designed by Master Weaver **Debra Sparrow** (ΘƏLIXWƏLWƏT), Xʷməθkʷəyəm/Musqueam.

Three house posts at the main entrance by:

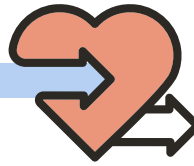
- **Brent Sparrow**, Master Carver from Xʷməθkʷəyəm/Musqueam,
- **Floyd Joseph**, Junior Elder and Hereditary Chief of the Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw/Squamish Nation,
- **Jonas Jones**, Carver and Emerging Artist from səilwətəł/Tsleil-Waututh with strong bloodlines running from Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw/Squamish Nation.



Art panel designs by Visual Artist **Mack Paul**, Xʷməθkʷəyəm/Musqueam, will feature on the Hastings Street façade and entrance to residential tower on Gore Avenue.

Vertical sunscreens on the western elevation will have custom fabricated panels with laser-cut images by **Ocean Hyland** (ts;simtelot), səilwətəł/Tsleil-Waututh, Carver, Weaver and Visual Artist.

A Milestone Year



Dear Friends,

It's an exciting time for FIRST UNITED.

This fiscal year, we're celebrating 140 years of our impact in the Downtown Eastside community. When I reflect on what this means, I think about the countless number of people that FIRST had the honour of helping over the last century and a half. People who came to FIRST for help and received what they needed—a meal, safe shelter, legal assistance. A place where they finally felt they could belong.

I also think about the immeasurable impact that the leaders, staff, volunteers, ministers and donors have had over the past 140 years, and how each and every one of them contributed to the ongoing legacy of FIRST UNITED.

We've had an incredible story so far, but it's not over yet. Along with our 140th anniversary in 2025, we'll also be celebrating the completion of our new building—a transformative space with more square footage for

our programming, and below-market housing units for Indigenous folks. We've already started planning the future of our programs and how we will be able to help even more people experience dignity, belonging and justice for generations to come.

I feel immensely privileged to be part of the story of FIRST UNITED. And you should, too. Thank you for being part of this story. For championing our work, supporting our mission, and believing that our vision—neighbourhood where everyone's worth is celebrated and all people thrive—can be achieved.

We've made it to 140 years, and can only imagine what we can achieve together in the next 140.

Amanda Burrows,
Executive Director



Called to This Work



On August 16, FIRST UNITED staff and volunteers had the honour of attending the ordination of Reverend Lauren Sanders, Indigenous Spiritual Care Chaplain. Rev. Sanders was ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) with the blessing of Central Presbyterian Church.

"I have long felt that God has ordained that I am called to do the work that I do," shared Rev. Sanders, who has been on the journey to ordination since 1998.

Although the ordination took place in Vancouver's Downtown



Eastside, Lauren's friends, family members, mentors, and associates were able to take part in the ceremony from all over the continent, thanks to Zoom.


The ceremony included a special offering, which involved art by

Rev. Sanders, who specializes in expressive art practices.

"One part of the ordination service was me painting two canvases. I painted one as a gift for myself, a symbol of my journey that only I know. I painted a second one with the same colors. This second painting, I invited all who attended to make 'one small change' to it as a reminder of how loving and healthy communities shape my journey."

Join us in congratulating Rev. Sanders!



 A line of people waiting outside the original First United Church building, on Gore and Hastings, to receive food in 1931.

(Photo: Major J.S. Matthews from the City of Vancouver Archives)

Dignity, Belonging and Justice for 140 Years

From our beginning as a congregation that precedes the establishment of the City of Vancouver, to cementing our place as a well-known and trusted service provider in the Downtown Eastside, FIRST UNITED's history is vast and remarkable. And this is the time to celebrate it.

2025 marks two significant milestones for FIRST UNITED: our 140th anniversary as an organization, and our 100th anniversary under the name "FIRST UNITED" (and of the United Church of Canada).

Our incredible story started in 1885, when the Presbyterian Church in Canada established a congregation in the township of Granville, near Burrard Inlet. The first church service was held in May 1885, and the church building was opened and dedicated on May 16, the following year. The congregation would later move to 320 East Hastings, where we still reside today. It's currently the site

where our new building is being constructed—and will finish in our 140th year!

On June 10, we'll be marking another day of significance: a century of being First United Church. The change came in 1925, when the Methodist Church, Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of Presbyterian churches joined together to form the United Church of Canada.

Today, we are honoured to be one of the oldest service providers in the DTES. To reach this milestone, we had to listen and adapt to the needs of the community throughout the years, and we'll continue to do that.

From serving meals out of the church's backdoor during the Great Depression, to now providing meals every weekday from our food truck; or championing harm reduction during the HIV-AIDS crisis to hosting a pilot site 21 years ago for the first legalized safe injection

facility in North America; we've undergone many transitions over the almost century and a half, but what's remained the same is our drive to bring dignity, belonging and justice to our neighbours.

As we turn 140, we're not just taking this time to look back, we're also looking forward. With the new building being one exciting marker of the future of FIRST, we've been planning the expansion of our programs and how we can serve even more people in our new space.

There is still a lot of work to be done, and we will continue to bring dignity, belonging, and justice through our services. We want to find permanent solutions to poverty and homelessness. We will continue our work to achieve our vision of a neighbourhood where everyone's worth is celebrated and all people thrive.

We've already kicked off our milestone celebration with a new anniversary logo and will continue to mark it in various ways until the end of 2025. Stay tuned for news on exciting events and happenings in the coming months!



FIRST UNITED

320 E Hastings St.
Vancouver BC Canada V6A 1P4

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



Gifts In-Kind: Call for Winter Items

In preparation for the upcoming winter, we're in need of winter essentials to help keep DTES community members safe and warm. We're accepting in-kind donations of jackets, sweaters, scarves, toques, socks, and more. Visit the "Gifts In-Kind" page under the "How You Help" section of firstunited.ca for a list of needed items and drop-off instructions.



Fifth Annual Shelter Gala

We're hosting our fifth annual GivingTuesday Shelter Gala on December 3. We'll continue with our tradition of providing FIRST UNITED shelter residents with a luxurious dinner, and providing over 200 gourmet meals to DTES community members from our food truck. Go to firstunited.ca/events to learn more on how you can support.



Advent Season

The Advent season starts on December 1 this year! Keep an eye on our social media platforms and email newsletters for video content from the Spiritual Care team.



firstunited.ca