



2026-03-03 Newsletter

“Let the Records Speak for Themselves”: Celebrating our Community Heroines

By Rev. Tami Spires, United Eaton Valley Pastoral Charge

When I was growing up, CBC started running the Heritage minutes on tv.

Of all the ones I've seen there are 3 that stand out to me – Agnes MacPhail's minute, the Rural Teacher minute, and the Midwife minute. If you haven't seen any of the Heritage Minutes or want to peruse them for fun, I encourage you to do so.

The reason each of these stands out for me is because these are just a few of the women in our country who broke the glass ceilings of their times.

I could spend this whole article naming many women, and those who identify as female, who have made an impact in our Canadian and western society. They are beautiful spirits who's words and actions concerning the various systems in our country that needed re-formation, and reformation, have changed behaviours, patterns, and norms, because they challenged the status quo.

Many of us who are women in ministry in the United Church of Canada would not be in our leadership positions without the pioneering strength, grace, and tenacity of Rev Lydia Gruchy.

Women, and those who identify as women today, stand on the shoulders of the many who have gone on before us, and we are able to do what we are doing today because of them. During this week we celebrate them.

In This Issue

Let the Records Speak for Themselves	p.1
Women's work is never done	p.2
The History of the United Church Women	p.5
She Flies On	p.8
Ressources for International Women's Day	p.8
Prayer for Thursdays in Black	p.9
Resources for Thursdays in Black	p.9

Common Good

UCW Funds and Bursaries	p.10
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Community Events

Upcoming Events	p.12
Save the dates	p.12

Not only do we celebrate the women who have made a visible impact in our communities through their tireless work and effort, but we also remember the women who never make the news; whose names will never be recorded in the history books educators use in schools, but who quietly move through our communities endlessly volunteering and living as the light of Christ in the world.

Their names are recorded in books though.

Their names are recorded in the minute books on church office shelves, or that are now in archives, like our UCW members, meetings books kept by those who organized the Sunday Schools, the Vacation Bible Schools, the Church choirs, and other ladies groups in our congregations. Their names are in record books kept by community organizations like the Women's Institute, the Rebekahs, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Kiwanis Club, the Lionettes, the Red Cross, and the Women's Auxiliary groups – all whose hours of making phone calls, knitting, sewing, sandwich making and squares baking, organizing fundraising suppers, mobilizing committee work, cleaning, and sharing their love, wisdom, and spirit have made an impact in our lives, often not getting the recognition they deserve.

So, on this International Women's Day, I want to thank all women, and those who identify as women, whose names will never go down in history for big changes, or be recognized for great things, but whose presence and work is recognized, valued, and held in gratitude each day for the ways you put your light and love out into the world just by being the people you are.

And if people are interested in knowing who our community heroes are, ask if you can read the minute books and record books to learn all about the good work their hands have accomplished, and are still doing.

Because of each of you, being a blessing in this world, our world is a better place to exist in.



Women's Work is Never Done

By Rev. Patricia Lisson

Before the sun cleared the mountains over Lake Atitlán, the dock in Panajachel was already awake. I had come from Montreal's minus-20 winter into a warmth that felt almost like grace. But it was not only the climate that lingered with me. It was the people.

Panajachel is lively yet unassuming, a lakeside town where small motorboats cut across the water, stitching together Mayan communities along the shore. If you wanted a seat at dawn, you arrived early. I often did. In the half-light, I watched the lake shift from charcoal to silver as boats emerged slowly from the mist. Hulls knocked softly against the dock. Somewhere behind me, coffee was brewing.

And then the women stepped off the boats. They climbed onto the dock balancing baskets of vegetables or woven textiles on their heads, babies wrapped tightly against their backs, toddlers secured in each hand. No hesitation. No performance. Just movement: purposeful, steady, practiced.

They were not pausing for the sunrise. They were heading first to school drop-offs, then to market stalls, laying out goods in hope that the day's labour would sustain their families. The rhythm was relentless. Strength, endurance, devotion, all woven into the ordinary hours before most of us are fully awake.

I remembered the phrase many of us heard growing up: a woman's work is never done.

In Panajachel, it was not metaphor. It was visible reality.

Dressed in brilliantly woven huipiles and skirts, these women carried generations of culture quite literally on their backs. Their labour was economic, maternal, communal, cultural, indivisible. It sustained households. It sustained memory. It sustained the future.

As they stepped onto the dock bearing the weight of their households, my phone buzzed with a very different scene of labour. A Facebook announcement appeared from the Right Reverend Dr. Kimberly Heath, Moderator of The United Church of Canada. She was introducing a Lenten study titled Bless, Break, and Share: Recipes for Faithful Living, a reflection on food, hunger, and the way our daily choices shape the lives of others.

There she stood in her kitchen, apron on, cookbook in hand, speaking about gathering at tables, listening deeply, practicing radical hospitality. What struck me most was that she began this national Lenten reflection in conversation with her daughter. In all my years in the church, I had never seen a Moderator open such a journey across generations.

It was simple. It was relational. It was quietly profound. Two very different scenes, Mayan women disembarking at dawn and a Church leader speaking from her kitchen. Yet both revealed the same truth: women's labour sustains the world. Sometimes visibly. Often invisibly.

Recognized by the United Nations in 1977, the day traces back to early twentieth-century labour and suffrage movements. March 8 commemorates, among other milestones, the 1917 strike of Russian women demanding “bread and peace.”

The suffrage movement adopted purple, green, and white in 1903. Purple for justice and dignity. Green for hope. White for solidarity. Those colours reshaped political and social life.

Progress has been real. Women gained the federal vote in Canada in 1918; though not yet universally for all women. Married women could open bank accounts without a husband’s permission only in 1964. Access to credit in one’s own name became commonplace only in the 1970s.

These are not distant centuries. They are within living memory. And yet celebration coexists with unfinished work. The World Economic Forum estimates that at the current rate of change, full global gender parity remains more than a century away. That projection is sobering. It is also clarifying.

International Women’s Day is not about sentimentality. It is about recognition, and resolve. It asks us to see the labour that goes unnoticed and to confront the structures that still constrain possibility.

Having served within church structures for decades, I have witnessed genuine transformation. I have also witnessed regression. Like Joni Mitchell’s *Both Sides Now*, I have seen progress and illusion, clarity and cloud. Some struggles once thought settled reappear in subtler forms. The clouds lift, and return.

But I remain a person of faith. Faith does not deny the clouds. It insists on light beyond them. When I return to the suffragette colours, purple for justice, green for hope, white for solidarity, I find myself lingering on green. Hope is not naïve optimism. It is disciplined persistence. It is rising before dawn. It is boarding the boat again tomorrow. It is setting up the stall whether or not yesterday’s sales were enough.

Hope is gathering at the table. Hope is raising daughters to speak. Hope is continuing to stand for dignity in a world where women and children still bear disproportionate violence and poverty.

In Guatemala, at dawn, I witnessed resilience embodied. In my church, I witnessed leadership grounded in relationship. On March 8, we hold history and possibility together. Women’s work is never done. And hope rises with it.



The Story of the United Church Women

By Valerie Nickson, president of the UCW Regional Executive

The story of the United Church Women (UCW) within the United Church of Canada is one of quiet strength, determined faith, and generations of women who shaped both church and country from kitchens, church basements, and global mission fields.

When the United Church was formed in 1925 through the union of the Methodist, Congregational, and most Presbyterian churches in Canada, women were already deeply involved in church life. Long before they had the right to be ordained or hold formal power, they organized missionary societies, raised funds for hospitals and schools, stitched quilts for newcomers, and sent relief parcels overseas during wartime. These early women's groups—such as the Woman's Missionary Society and the Woman's Association—were the backbone of congregational life. They combined practical service with a global vision, supporting education for girls in Asia and Africa and advocating for social reform at home.

By the early 1960s, Canadian society was changing. Women were entering universities and professions in greater numbers. The church itself was wrestling with new questions about justice, ecumenism, and modernization. Within this context, leaders recognized that the various women's groups within the United Church needed a unified voice and structure. In 1962, the United Church Women (UCW) was officially formed, bringing together the Women's Association and the Women's Missionary Society into one national organization. The new name signaled both continuity and change: continuity in devotion and service, and change in organization and vision. The UCW adopted a simple but powerful purpose: "To unite women of the congregation for the total mission of the church." That phrase—"total mission"—was expansive. It meant local and global outreach, spiritual growth, education, and advocacy. It meant that women were not merely helpers; they were leaders in shaping the church's response to the world.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, UCW members organized study groups on theology and social justice, supported Indigenous ministries, and engaged with issues such as poverty, racism, and peace. They raised funds for theological education and for international partners, often through creative means: church teas, bake sales, rummage sales, and handcrafted goods. While these activities may have seemed modest, the cumulative effect was enormous. Millions of dollars were raised over decades to sustain congregations, camps, hospitals, and mission projects.

The UCW also became a training ground for leadership. Many women who would later serve on church boards, presbyteries, and even in ordained ministry first learned to chair meetings, manage budgets, and speak publicly through UCW gatherings. When the United Church began ordaining women in 1936, it marked a significant step; but it was in part the long-standing commitment and competence of women's organizations that made such change imaginable. The UCW helped normalize the idea that women's voices belonged at every table.

At the congregational level, the UCW shaped the rhythm of church life. In small towns and big cities alike, UCW meetings were places of friendship and faith. Members shared devotions, studied scripture, discussed current events, and supported one another through births, illnesses, and losses. They prepared meals after funerals, assembled Christmas hampers, and ensured that no one in their community was forgotten. For many women—especially in rural Canada—the UCW was a vital social and spiritual network.

As decades passed, the UCW faced challenges familiar to many volunteer organizations: aging membership, changing patterns of work and family life, and declining church attendance. Yet even as numbers shifted, the spirit of the UCW endured. Groups adapted by meeting at different times, partnering with other community organizations, and focusing on issues such as climate justice, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and gender equity.

Today, the legacy of the UCW within the United Church of Canada is woven into the fabric of the denomination. It lives in scholarships established for students, in mission partnerships sustained over generations, and in the countless congregations that survived lean years because UCW members quietly balanced budgets and paid the heating bills. It lives in the confidence of women who discovered their gifts in a circle of folding chairs and coffee cups.

The history of the UCW is not only about programs or fundraising totals. It is about faith expressed through action. It is about women who believed that the gospel called them to serve both church and world, and who organized themselves to do exactly that. In church halls across the country, amid hymn-singing and the clatter of teacups, they built a movement that strengthened the United Church from the inside out.

If the United Church of Canada tells the story of union and bold experiment in Canadian Protestantism, the UCW tells the story of persistence and community. Together, they reveal how transformation often begins not with grand gestures, but with committed people—gathered in fellowship—answering a call to serve.

The UCW continues its call to serve with the **current national project** of supporting a focused partnership with **The Healing Fund**, a program of the United Church of Canada that provides grants for Indigenous-led healing initiatives. From **2023 through to 2027**, the UCW has committed to supporting a special bursary under the Healing Fund that is specifically designated for **healing initiatives for Indigenous women, children, and families**. This project is part of the UCW's 65th anniversary celebration and reflects a long-term partnership between UCW members and the Healing Fund team. The five-year initiative (from September 2022 through May 31, 2025) focused on healing programs for Indigenous women, children, and families and has so far raised **\$68,741.39** from UCW women across Canada (from September 2022 through May 31, 2025).

And so the story of the UCW is still being written.

Though meeting formats may change and membership numbers may shift, the heart of the United Church Women remains steady. In church halls and community centres, around kitchen tables and Zoom screens, women continue to gather with purpose. They pray, they learn, they raise funds, they advocate, and they listen for where God is calling them next.

The partnership with the Healing Fund is one more chapter in a long tradition of courage and compassion. It shows that the UCW is not only honouring its past but leaning into the future—walking the path of reconciliation, justice, and healing alongside Indigenous communities.

The same spirit that once stitched quilts and packed mission barrels now supports language revitalization, cultural renewal, and spaces where families can heal together.

The future of the UCW may look different from its beginnings in 1962, but its foundation is strong. New generations of women are discovering that faith is not passive; it is active, organized, and bold. They are finding that even small acts—one meeting, one fundraiser, one conversation—can ripple outward in ways they may never fully see.

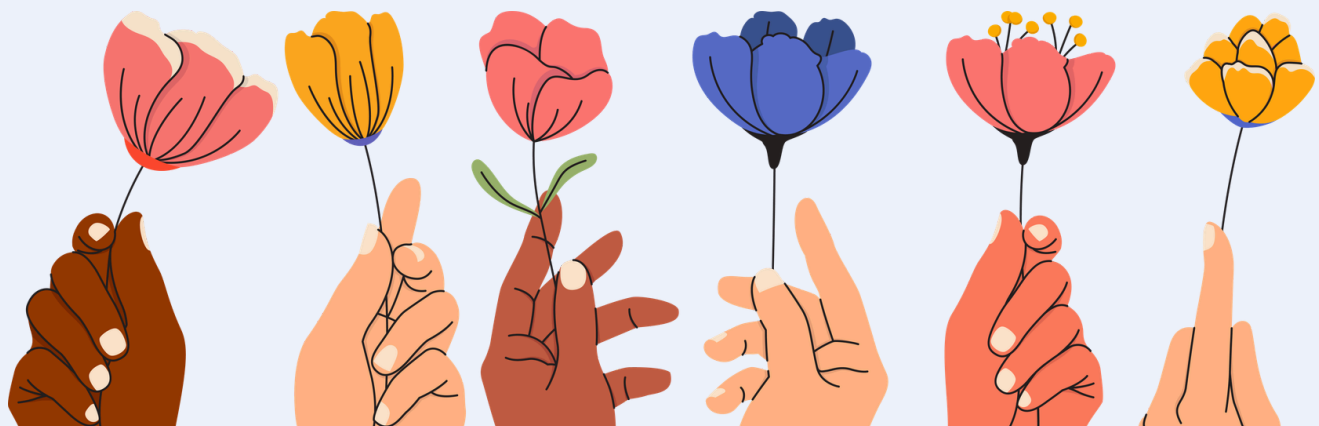
Hope for the future lies not in numbers alone, but in faithfulness. It lives in the quiet determination of women who believe that love can mend what has been broken, that community can overcome isolation, and that the church still has work to do in God’s world.

As long as women gather with open hearts and willing hands, the story of the UCW will continue—rooted in gratitude, reaching toward justice, and carried forward by hope.



You can find out more about UCW through [this link](#).

You can also visit the UCW page on the [Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council website](#).



She Flies On

Sophia Christ,
Like, Eve, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther,
send us out to witness to your on-going revelation.

Like Sarah, Elizabeth, Martha, and Lydia,
send us out to extend your love and hospitality to all.

Like Rachel, Ruth, Mary, and Mary Magdalene,
send us out to be god-bearers.

Like Hagar, Tamar, the Samaritan Woman, and Lois,
send us out to be builders of your great kin-dom.
Amen.

(adapted for International Women's Day from the liturgy for She Flies On, a conference celebrating Women in Ministry)

Ressources for International Women's Day

- Worship Ideas: A liturgy inspired by Lydia Gruchy, celebrating women in ministry, from Gathering Pentecost 2, 2016.
- Prayer for Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, calls to action, survivor testimonies, accompaniment of survivors of rape and war orphans in North Kivu. Église du Christ du Congo (ECC) is appealing to the church in solidarity. TW: testimonies describe violence against women.
- Me Too blogpost by Christie Neufeldt, Program Coordinator, Public Witness – Advocacy & Campaigns
- MMIWG Final Report and Calls for Justice
- History, information and calls to action on the United Nation's International Women's Day page
- Information on Journée des droits des femmes on the Conseil du statut de la femme website.
- International Women's Rights Day at the Fédération des femmes du Québec.

Prayer for Thursdays in Black



Creating God,
Mother of us all.
We are your beloved,
formed in your image and nurtured in the depth of your dark womb.
You breathed life into our flesh and sent us to do your work in the world,
to care for each other and for all of creation as we would care for you:
our life and our breath.
Wherever we are in your world there are survivors, victims, bystanders, and perpetrators of
gender-based violence.

This violence is destroying your sacred creation,
breaking and mutilating bodies,
crushing spirits,
stealing dignity,
abusing trust,
seizing power, and
violating your beloved.

As long as violence exists among your people, anywhere, we will not be whole.
Until your creation is healed, we will wear black in solidarity with people around the world to
honour the courage and resilience of the victims and survivors of gender-based violence while
committing to work toward an end to such violence.

May black remind us of the unimaginably deep love that you have for us and the cavernous well of
tears shed by communities broken by violence.

And may black remind us of the hope for transformation that you have planted within the dark
belly of the earth. A hope that grows stronger every time a cycle of violence is broken and
nurtured by each action against violence and rape.

Creating God,
as long as we have breath, may we work with perseverance toward restoring your creation.
Amen.



You can find resources and information about Thursdays in Black [here](#).



Common Good

United Church Women (UCW) Funds and Bursaries

The Healing Fund

Bursary to Support Indigenous Women, Children, and Families



The Healing Fund: Bursary to Support Indigenous Women, Children, and Families was selected for partnership with United Church Women for the Five-Year Special Project, beginning 2023 through to the UCW's 65th Anniversary in 2027. Joni Shawana, Healing Fund Program Coordinator with Indigenous Ministries, The United Church of Canada, is our key contact for the project. UCW are excited to join with Joni's team and to be a named partner in this unique program.

The bursary funds programming designed by our Healing Fund partners for Indigenous women and children, with a primary focus on healing the family through culture and language.

The Healing Fund acknowledges the UCW for their generous blessing and funding to ensure Indigenous women and children receive adequate support and encouragement through culture and language programming. For further inquiries and information on this new priority group, please reach out to our Healing Fund Coordinator at healing@united-church.ca.

The Healing Fund is a grant that supports healing initiatives in Indigenous communities to address the ongoing impacts of the residential school system. Many survivors name a need for mending, restoring, and celebrating—acknowledging a sense of loss, along with hope for rebuilding identity. Programs that have been supported throughout the years include healing and sharing circles, reunions and commemorations, traditional and cultural programs, language revitalization, workshops for residential school survivors and families, spiritual gatherings, creating digital resources, and more. Learn more about the [Healing Fund projects and criteria](#).

UCW Endowment Fund

The United Church of Canada Foundation set up an [endowment fund](#) in 2012 to honour all the work done by the UCW members. Yearly interest on this fund is granted to Mission and Service. What better way to say thank you than to make a gift in memory of or in honour of a UCW member? Your gift will become part of a lasting gift to Mission and Service every year.

Make your cheque payable to The United Church of Canada Foundation and note "UCW Endowment Fund" on the memo line of the cheque. You can also send a note with the name of the woman you want remembered or honoured. A tax receipt will be issued.

Send your donation to:

The United Church of Canada Foundation
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

You can also donate online at [The United Church of Canada Foundation](#) website.

Agatha Kaasa Bursary Fund

This bursary is eligible to any woman who is part of the United Church and not in paid accountable ministry and supports leadership training and education, continuing education, and projects or events that promote education, mission, outreach, spiritual nurture, and ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, locally or abroad.

Application deadlines are April 15 (for June 15 decision) and October 15 (for December 15 decision) with a maximum bursary amount of \$1,500.

- Eligibility: Any woman who is part of the United Church and not in paid accountable ministry.
- Supports leadership training and education, continuing education, and projects or events that promote education, mission, outreach, spiritual nurture, and ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, locally or abroad.
- Up to one third of the total expenses related to a request can be received, with a maximum bursary of \$1,500.
- Application deadlines: April 15 (for June 15 decision); October 15 (for December 15 decision)
- [Application form](#)

Dorothy Amos Fund

This is available to any woman who is a UCW member and supports greater connection of members of the UCW with church women in Canada and around the world. These connections may be fostered by visits, exchanges, or support of UCW members attending special events.


The application deadline is July 2 (for September 1 decision).

- Eligibility: Any woman who is a UCW member.
- Supports greater connection of members of the UCW with church women in Canada and around the world. These connections may be fostered by visits, exchanges, or support of UCW members attending special events.
- Application deadline: July 2
- [Application form](#)

More information on UCW bursaries and funds available [here](#).



Community Events and Announcements



Celebrate International Women's Day at Library and Archives Canada
 Sunday, March 8, 2026
 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (ET)
 Free admission; no registration required
 Library and Archives Canada
 625 du Carrefour Boulevard, Gatineau, Quebec



Activities, books and podcasts to celebrate International Women's Day (in French)

MARCH 11 MARS 2026

5 à 7
5 to 7

ENRACINER
 Prise entre les lierres migratoires
 Trapped in Migratory Vines

Carrefour de solidarité internationale

Québec Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada Women and Gender Equality Canada



REGIONAL COUNCIL MEETINGS - 2026

- March 20th – 21st, 2026 – Online AGM
- June 5th, 2026 – Celebration of Ministries, Cedar Park United Church, Montreal, QC
- June 6th, 2026 – In-person Regional Gathering, Cedar Park United Church, Montreal, QC
- November 20th-21st, 2026 – Online Fall Meeting

If you have ideas for presentations or would like to help plan future meetings, please contact Virginia Wallace:
virlynwal@hotmail.ca

Newsletter Schedule

Submission Deadline **Publication Date**

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| March 4 | March 11 |
| March 18 | March 25 |

Submit your news and events to:
aabrams@united-church.ca

Community Calendar:

<https://nakonhakaucc.ca/events/>

