

Stories of Mission

LIVING FAITH



Mission Around the World

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ's love in 25 countries.

Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development, evangelism, outreach and Christian service.

PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world.





Hope in the Midst of a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has left millions of people worldwide in need of assistance. Presbyterian World Service & Development is helping people access food, clean water, sanitation facilities and livelihood and psychosocial support.



In Kenya, a sign on a water barrel says, “Please wash your hands with soap and water before visiting our offices.” In Malawi, socially distanced cooking demonstrations are conducted. In a refugee camp in Bangladesh, food and hygiene kits are distributed.

These are just a few of the actions that PWS&D international partners are taking to help fight the pandemic and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their communities. COVID-19 has been devastating to many people in developing countries where health, social and economic effects are severe.

Many developing countries lack the resources needed to fight the disease. Health care systems are fragile, or in some cases, almost nonexistent. These systems are already overburdened trying to help those seeking maternal and child health care or HIV and AIDS treatment. COVID-19 could completely overwhelm their ability to provide even basic care.

People struggle to wash their hands as often as needed where there is little access to proper

sanitation and hygiene facilities. Social distancing can be very difficult when living space is restricted in communities where large, extended families share one small home.

Lockdowns mean countless families have lost their livelihoods. Women are at greater risk of gender-based violence as they may isolate with their abusers, without access to help or support. Children have been out of school for months. The longer they are unable to attend school, girls are at risk of leaving school permanently due to early and forced marriage or unintended pregnancy.

PWS&D is working with partners overseas to help minimize these repercussions. By adapting program methodologies and providing funds to help with COVID-19 concerns, important development work is able to continue. Vital services such as mobile nutrition clinics, hospital facilities and trainings are able to operate by introducing precautionary measures. Teachers are being supported so they



can conduct distance education, learning kits are being provided for students, and families are receiving food assistance and hygiene kits.

PWS&D is also responding in Bangladesh, Somalia, South Sudan and Palestine through the ACT Alliance. In these countries, conflict and economic disruption have created large numbers of refugees, displaced people, and people living in extreme poverty. Longer-term relief projects are ensuring families have access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, as well as providing livelihoods support and psychosocial care to people struggling to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

The United Nations World Food Programme estimates 265 million people could face food insecurity due to COVID-19, and the World Bank estimates that the consequences of COVID-19 will push at least 49 million more people into extreme poverty—undoing many of the advances made in recent years. Through PWS&D, our church is providing vital support to alleviate some of the damaging effects and help families and communities recover.

Read: Jeremiah 32:1-23

Reflect

Jeremiah does a very strange thing. He invests in property in the midst of a siege while under house arrest. It is not a good time to buy a field but that is exactly what Jeremiah does, because he believes in God's future. He believes that even though the current situation is barren and precarious, things are going to change. Jeremiah understands that God has a plan that transcends the present moment.

COVID-19 has left no place untouched. People all around the world have lost their jobs and livelihoods, face food insecurity and are anxious about their future. When catastrophic events like a pandemic occur, many people in developing countries don't have access to government support to help mitigate the effects and provide the resources needed to recover.

With the generous support of Presbyterians across Canada, PWS&D is responding through ACT Alliance and Canadian Foodgrains Bank. We are helping families receive food assistance, access water and sanitation services, and receive counselling to ease anxiety caused by the pandemic. Like Jeremiah, we are investing in the future, based on a belief that God has new things in store for God's people.

Discuss

- 1) What are some ways you and your congregation are supporting people in your community impacted by COVID-19?

- 2) In some ways, we are in a situation like Jeremiah. Everything feels uncertain and precarious. How does our support of church initiatives indicate an investment in God's future?
- 3) Many people around the world are very concerned about their future due to the pandemic. How have you coped with increased anxiety? What strategies did you use to lessen your anxiety?

Sing

635 – Brother, sister let me serve you

723 – Lord, in this broken world

736 – For the healing of the nations

Pray

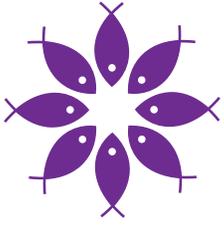
God of mercy,

We ask for your calming presence to surround us as we manoeuvre through anxiety and uncertainty. We pray for strength and reassurance for those who have lost their jobs and face food insecurity due to COVID-19. We pray for those whom COVID-19 has touched. As they slowly recover, we pray that they may find tranquillity and comfort in your presence. Our work is an investment in your future, Lord, believing that you have a different plan for us.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Respond to COVID-19 through Gifts of Change:
presbyterian.ca/covid-donate





A Ray of Hope

Presbyterians Sharing supports Blantyre Synod's prison ministry in many ways. It is one of the programs supported by the Rev. Joel Sherbino in his role as the PCC's mission liaison to Malawi. In late 2019 Steve McInnis and Nora Martin were appointed to teach English, chemistry and mathematics at Chichiri Prison. As the first international volunteers to teach in the prison, they provided encouragement to the prisoners, ministry staff and volunteers, before returning to Canada at the start of the pandemic.



Samuel is an elderly man, perhaps seventy years old. He is an inmate in Chichiri Prison in Blantyre, a southern city of Malawi, and a Form 1 (roughly equivalent to Grade 9) student of English, mathematics and chemistry. We don't know what Samuel's offense was, but it could have been something as minor as stealing a bicycle or a \$25 cell phone—both crimes that can result in two years in prison.

Samuel typically sits at the back of the classroom, listening attentively, taking notes and doing the exercises we assign him. He seldom says anything, but it is clear that he is engaged. One day at the end of a math class he said in tones of wonder, "I have never seen that before!" Another time, after struggling with several examples in English class, he said, with great satisfaction, "I get it now!" His delight in learning something new is one of the reasons we found teaching at Chichiri prison so rewarding.

We are retired. Steve is a chemical engineer by training, and I am a professional high school English teacher of thirty years. Together we decided that we wanted to volunteer overseas. So, when an opportunity to teach at Chichiri prison in Malawi became available through International Ministries, we jumped at the chance.

Like many prisons in Malawi, Chichiri is overcrowded and unsanitary. Inmates suffer from a poor diet. Prisoners are generally shunned by society, families and friends, both while in prison and once released. However, there are glimmers of hope in this dark and hopeless place.

The prison's reformatory school, which offers both primary and secondary classes to the inmates, is a ray of hope. Most of the 30 teachers, approximately a third of whom are qualified, are inmates. We, the only foreign teachers, taught math, science and English in the high school section. Every day, during our three hours at the prison, we were each given at least one class to teach. The classes were pretty informal, and attendance was spotty, but we were told that the students enjoyed our classes, and that they were happy we had come all the way from Canada to teach them.

Weekly visits from "Friends of Prison" volunteers, Rammy Zuwayo, Lyca Mhone and Hastings Phale, offered additional hope. Through weekly Bible studies, they brought the good news of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. They would also bring Bibles, soap, medicine, soya pieces for extra protein, mats, clothes and shoes purchased with donations from



Canadian Presbyterians. These dedicated volunteers regularly visit 13 prisons, travelling many hours on crowded minibuses, motorbikes, bike taxis, or on foot to stay connected and encourage the prisoners. To us, they embodied the concept of prison ministry.

When we had to return to Canada suddenly because of COVID-19, the students asked us to pray for them. This request reminds us how deep their faith is, even while in prison. We will surely pray for them. Prayer will keep us connected spiritually.

— Nora Martin

Read: Matthew 25:31–46

Reflect

Matthew writes about caring for one another, especially those who are vulnerable, poor or disadvantaged. We demonstrate the love of Christ by ministering to people who may have no one to care for them.

Jesus specifically mentions visiting people who are in prison. In his time, it was often the responsibility of loved ones to provide basic provisions to those who were imprisoned. The Friends of Prisons in Malawi is a ministry set up for exactly that. In addition to bringing soap, medicine and sleeping mats, when Rammy, Lyca and Hastings visit inmates and lead Bible studies, they are living out Jesus' words in Matthew 25:36.

The fact that many prisoners have not finished high school may have contributed to the circumstances that led to them being in prison in the first place. Giving them the opportunity to finish their studies is part of the effort to prevent them from ending up in prison again. We are glad that we could participate in this life-giving ministry, and that we had a chance to help the prisoners improve their lives. It is humbling to think that, when we were teaching those eager students, we were ministering to Christ.

Discuss

- 1) Have you ever visited a prison? If not, what do you think it would be like? How important might a visiting ministry be in such a setting?
- 2) What is your faith community currently doing to feed and clothe the hungry and visit the sick and imprisoned? Is there more you could be doing?
- 3) Think about the situation of prisoners around the world. Some have done wrong, some are innocent. What do you think this scripture says about the way that prisoners should be treated?

Sing

635 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

587 – Called as partners in Christ's service

474 – The Love of God comes close

Prayer Focus

Please pray for Rammy, Lyca and Hastings as they continue to visit the inmates in the prisons. Pray for Chichiri's chaplain, Samson Makoro, and other prison chaplains as they provide spiritual support to prisoners. Pray for the inmates as they try to better their lives against all odds. Pray for Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Pray

O God, you who have all power in heaven and earth, come and let the light of your divine presence illuminate the shadows of the prison-house, and fill the hearts of our brothers and sisters in bonds with hope and courage to endure patiently their individual burdens and trials. Support and comfort any who are cast down, forsaken by earthly friends, or who suffer physical or mental pain or sickness. Preserve us in our pilgrimage through this life, from hurt and danger, and grant that we may end our lives well-pleasing to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

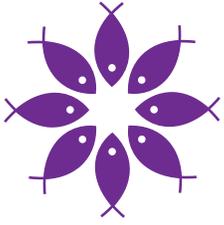
(Modified from prayers for May 2 and May 3 in *A Diary of Prayer*, compiled by Elizabeth Goudge, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1991.)

Read about Steve and Nora's experiences in Malawi: presbyterian.ca/steve-and-nora-blog

Find photos, videos and links to articles on Friends of Prison's Facebook page: facebook.com/Malawi-Friends-of-Prison-105378921246807

Support prison ministry in Malawi through Gifts of Change: presbyterian.ca/prison-ministry





Taking Risks

With support from Presbyterians Sharing, the Rev. Dr. Blair and Ms. Vivian Bertrand served in Malawi with the Blantyre Synod from 2017-2020. Vivian worked with Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD), which also received support from PWS&D after floods destroyed crops in 2019. Blair supported theological education and development through Zomba Theological College and Theological Education by Extension in Malawi, which he continues to do from Canada.



Malawians are willing to take risks. A frequent sight in Malawi—on highways, city streets and back roads—is a large open truck filled with people standing or sitting, squished as tightly as possible in the back. This is a common method of transportation for adults and children alike, and is often the only affordable way, besides walking, to go to large events such as weddings or funerals. It's a risk people take when they have limited means.

When my husband Blair and I accepted a mission appointment in Malawi, we sold our car, our house and most of our possessions, then moved to Africa with our three children. Friends and family in Canada felt that we were taking a huge risk. We agreed, but felt it was worth it to serve God. After moving to Malawi and seeing the risks Malawians take every day, we saw our own risk-taking in a new light.

Malawians are quick to take risks for family—loaning money when they have very little themselves or caring for orphaned family members even as they struggle to care for their own children. And they take risks for God—dedicating their lives to ministry or tithing when they have nothing to spare.

There are several examples of risk-takers in the Bible. Noah built an ark when everyone else thought he was crazy. Mary bore the Son of God. Peter walked on water. What is risk but the willingness to take a chance on losing?

Magret Tambala stands out in my memory as a risk-taker. Like millions of Malawians, Magret is a subsistence farmer who lost most of what she owned in 2019 during Cyclone Idai. I met Magret in February of 2020 when I visited her village in Mulanje District. She was given food and seeds by Churches Action in Relief and Development, the PCC Malawian mission partner I was working for at the time. Funded by Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Presbyterian World Service & Development, the project was designed to help people rebuild after the cyclone.

During our visit, Magret showed me the most beautiful crop of maize, and told me that she had saved her seeds for almost six months so that she could plant them during the rainy season. By doing this, she avoided the erratic climatic conditions that gave so many other farmers in the area a very poor



harvest during that growing season. Magret took a risk and it paid off.

When we returned to Canada at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we were so aware that our Malawian friends faced much greater risks than us if they contracted COVID-19. And yet they prayed for our safe journey and our peace of mind.

In this time of fear, it has been humbling to learn from my Malawian friends. I have experienced their incredible faith in the goodness of God's provision. I have seen that they truly believe that knowing Christ and sharing in the power of Christ's suffering and resurrection are worth any risk.

— Vivian Bertrand

Read: Philippians 3:7–10

Reflect

We know that following Christ can be risky, and that it might include loss. By following Christ, we might risk stability or comfort in our lives. We might risk financial gain. Sometimes the risk is about becoming vulnerable enough to forgive or love someone. When we risk for Christ, we recognize that there is something to lose. But we also know that there is much to gain.

When we left Malawi very suddenly to return to Canada at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we had no place to call home. We could not stay with family because of the risk of spreading COVID-19. We were not returning to the community we had left. In some ways, we felt like we weren't returning to the same country we had left.

But God provided.

We were given accommodation at Crieff Hills Retreat Centre during our quarantine. We received support and encouragement from friends, family and the PCC. And then finally, we found a new home in Ontario to call our own. I am so keenly aware that these were all gifts from God.

When we risk losing something or give something up without knowing what will come, we are more aware that everything we have is God's and all good things are a gift from God.

Discuss

1. What risks has God asked you to take in your life? How did you feel afterwards? What did you gain?
2. What are you most afraid of losing? What is the worst that would happen if you lost it? Would you be willing to risk it for God? Why?
3. Do you ever struggle to trust God? How do you deal with these struggles?

Sing

634 – Will you come and follow me

777 – Send me, Lord/Thuma Mina

675 – Precious Lord, take my hand

Prayer Focus

Pray for the people of Malawi who take daily risks because they live in one of the poorest countries in the world. Pray for Churches Action in Relief and Development, one of the PCC's implementing partners in Malawi, that they will be able to continue their important work in helping the poorest of the poor. CARD is a small local organization (not a large international organization like many other relief and development organizations in Malawi) and therefore struggles financially. Pray that despite the economic impacts of the coronavirus in Malawi and around the world, CARD will have sufficient financial resources to continue its work.

Pray

God, giver of good gifts, we know that the risks we take for you are worth the cost, so help us to live a life of daring faith:

Help us to reflect your risk-taking love for us;

Help us to trust that you will provide;

Help us to recognize that all good gifts come from you.

Through living a life of taking risks for you, may we share in Christ's suffering and know the power of his resurrection. And in our risk-taking, may we become more like Christ as we give your risk-taking love to the world.

Amen.

Read about Vivian and Blair's experiences in Malawi: presbyterian.ca/bertrand-blog

Learn about PWS&D's response to Cyclone Idai: presbyterian.ca/idai





Veronica's Return

PWS&D and Presbyterians Sharing support a number of mission programs within the Livingstonia Synod in Northern Malawi. With the support of PWS&D, Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program supports village education committees that encourage students who have dropped out of school to complete their education.



Veronica, a bright 15-year-old girl who lives in Mangwani Village in Malawi, has always loved going to school. But when she learned she was pregnant, Veronica was scared of what it meant for her future. Worried about becoming a mother and being forced to drop out of school, her hopes of continuing her education were disappearing before her eyes.

Enala, Veronica's mom, was also worried. She felt the eyes of the community on her because of the stigma attached to teen pregnancy and considered throwing her daughter out of the family home. The whole family felt helpless and overwhelmed.

Many young girls around the world are forced to drop out of school if they become pregnant. Due to social and cultural customs, they might be encouraged to marry at an early age or just have to remain home to care for their babies. Without an education, their ability to earn a living, provide for

their families, make healthy decisions and contribute to the overall development of their communities is taken away from them.

Things started to feel more hopeful when Veronica's parents were approached by the local village education committee (VEC). The VEC is central to communicating the importance of education to parents and guardians.

Access to education is already harder for girls than boys. Globally, over 130 million girls are not attending primary or secondary schools. In rural areas, only 39% of girls attend secondary school. PWS&D's local partner, the Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program, supports village education committees that check on students who have dropped out of school and encourage them to return, with the support of their parents and guardians.

With encouragement from the VEC, Veronica was able to continue attending school after giving birth



to her daughter. Her mother was relieved to find support from the community and assisted Veronica's return by looking after her granddaughter.

Veronica knows that her education is opening the door to a better life for her and her daughter. According to the UN, for every additional year of school, girls' eventual wages rise by 10-20%. Veronica's education is helping her gain tools to help break cycles of poverty and contribute to the development of her family and community. While she is still figuring out how to adapt to her new role as a mother and a student, Veronica is excited about the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the inequality already faced by many girls in the developing world. Due to loss of income, lack of access to schooling, bearing the highest costs of domestic labour, and facing increased domestic violence, many girls are being forced into early marriages. These marriages in turn limit both their and their children's future opportunities.

The single biggest factor in reducing mortality rates for children under five is more education for women—a literate woman has a 50% higher chance of her child surviving past the age of five. More education helps women make better decisions about prenatal care, basic hygiene, nutrition and immunizations, contributing to better health for the family.

Read: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Reflect

We can only imagine what it would be like to live under the domination of an enemy, or be forced to go and live in a foreign land. That was the situation of Jeremiah's people. They were in dire straits, and it is to a desperate situation which Jeremiah speaks. He utters a word of hope, however, proclaiming that God has a plan for God's people, even when the present seems uncertain and dangerous. The best news of all is that God is present, and will bring the people back from captivity. God intends good things.

Many of us in North America take our schooling for granted. School is where we met up with friends, excelled at our favourite subjects and learned new things. It's where we gained life skills, developed our passions and built our confidence. For many students in developing countries, going to school and getting an education are key to breaking out of cycles of poverty.

When Veronica found out she was pregnant, she was heartbroken at the thought that she might not return to school. But God had other plans. With the encouragement of her village's education committee, Veronica's hopeless situation turned bright and now she is improving future prospects for herself and her daughter. God plans for abundant life for God's people. No matter how bleak the current circumstances, God is working to bring good.

Discuss

- 1) What are some other reasons students in Malawi or in other countries might not attend school? What are the implications of not attending school?
- 2) How does Veronica's experience of teen pregnancy parallel the experience of a teen in Canada? How does it differ?
- 3) In the scripture passage, Jeremiah states that God has a plan for our future. How will you discern what God is planning for your future? How can we as a community begin to discern what God has planned for us?

Sing

574 – With the Lord as my guide

462 – All my hope on God is founded

726 – May the God of hope go with us every day

Pray

Wonderful God,

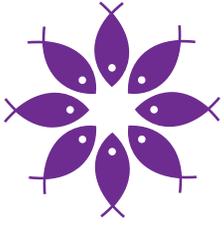
Before we were formed, you knew us. You knew all the plans you had for us — plans to prosper and not to harm us. We pray that though obstacles may cross our paths, we will continue to put our faith and trust in you, and that your presence will bring us peace. We ask your special blessing on Veronica and other girls who struggle to get access to education.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

Help children stay in school through Gifts of Change:
presbyterian.ca/village-education





The Prison Experience

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) began in 2002 after local church leaders asked the World Council of Churches to create an international presence in the country. Ecumenical Accompaniers provide protective presence to Palestinians as they witness life under occupation. Upon returning home they share their experiences and advocate for a just peace in Palestine and Israel. With support from Presbyterians Sharing, Shaun MacDonald served as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Hebron from late 2019 to early 2020.



“Empty everything out of your pockets,” our host, Salwa, advised us. “No cell phones, keys, anything metal, even leave your wallets and money in the car, I will lock it while we’re in there.” Salwa is a member of a group called Military Court Watch, a small team of Palestinian, Israeli and international lawyers who monitor the court cases of detained Palestinian children. She escorted me and two colleagues to the notorious Ofer Prison, near the Palestinian capital of Ramallah. This is an Israeli military prison—with the military courts on the premises—and we were there to witness the judicial proceedings in action.

After a thorough screening at the entrance, we were allowed into an outdoor waiting area where family members of those on trial anxiously waited for

word on the status of their loved ones. We chatted and tried to be supportive. Salwa pointed out the “court rooms” where we would view the proceedings: seven cramped shipping containers converted into expedited sentencing rooms. Salwa informed us that up to 40 cases per day are conducted in these rooms, with a conviction rate of over 95%. Palestinian detainees are generally advised to plead guilty. The judges are often military men from the settlements, the Israeli towns and villages established in Palestinian territory.¹

We entered one of the containers and sat in the gallery. There were two people on trial, one adult and one teenager, no more than 14 years old. We were there specifically to see the children. The minimum age for criminal responsibility for Palestinians under



Israeli military law is 12 years old (although the maximum sentence they can receive is six months) but over the age of 14 they can be sentenced as adults. What complicates this matter is that ID cards are only issued at age 16, so arresting soldiers often detain even younger children.

We sat with the family of the young boy on trial. His father was stoic, but his mother's body was wracked with convulsions as she wrung her hands and cried quietly. The boy stood, shackled, staring at the floor the entire time. I noticed the prosecuting attorneys scrolling through their phones, while the court reporter was literally sound asleep, head on his desk. The judge banged his gavel and as the prisoners were escorted out, the boy's father rushed up to him and grabbed him by the shoulders, speaking quickly in Arabic. I imagine he was telling him to be strong. The boy gave his father a look of resolution, but then turned to face his mother and we saw tears streaming down his face as he was led away.

In the 45 minutes I spent at Ofer Prison, I witnessed seven convictions, three of them children. The details of the cases aren't important. What is important is that they were children on trial, as adults, in military

courts, which lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections. Israel is the only country in the world that automatically and systematically prosecutes children in military courts.

Currently there are 185 Palestinian children in detention, but the number has been as high as 400 recently. Nearly half of these children are transferred to prisons outside of Palestinian territory—a war crime. They may not see their family members for months. Upon release they are often branded as collaborators, rejected by their home communities and traumatized from the experience of incarceration.

On the drive back to Jerusalem, I asked Salwa, "How do you do it? How do you keep coming here, fighting day after day and often seeing the situation get worse?" She paused, pensively, for a moment before replying: "No one predicted the Berlin wall would come down. No one predicted the Arab Spring uprisings. Often these large shifts in the tide of history are at work without us even realizing it. You just have to keep putting your little cracks in the wall. You have to have faith."

— *Shaun MacDonald*

1 Settlements refer to Israeli towns and villages established in Palestinian territory after the 1967 War. To move one's own citizens onto occupied territory is illegal under international law as per the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In 2019, The Presbyterian Church in Canada voted to endorse the No Way to Treat a Child campaign, which is committed to securing a just and viable future for Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and envisions a world where all children attain rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since 1967, Israel has operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlers are subject to the civilian and criminal legal system whereas Palestinians live under military law. Israel applies civilian criminal law to Palestinian children in East Jerusalem. No Israeli child comes into contact with the military courts.

According to affidavits collected from 739 West Bank children detained between 2013 and 2018, 73% of Palestinian children experienced physical violence following arrest. Many also faced verbal abuse. In 96% of the cases, children had no parent present during the interrogation. Israeli police also did not properly inform them of their rights in 74% of the cases.

Despite sustained engagement by UNICEF, Israeli authorities have persistently failed to implement practical changes to stop violence against child detainees. The No Way to Treat a Child campaign draws attention to these human rights abuses. Find out more at www.nwttac.canada.dci-palestine.org.



Read: Matthew 18: 1-10

Reflect

Being an Ecumenical Accompanier has two main objectives: witnessing life under occupation and providing protective presence. My team provided protective presence for vulnerable school children in the heart of Hebron daily and we felt good about this; the children responded well to us. But then we would hear about the night raids, and even witness the detention of youths. Seeing young boys being led away in shackles made me feel furious and helpless.

Even so, I was reminded of Christ's words to his disciples: there is but one ultimate authority. Christ is clear: "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We need to stop jockeying for wealth, power and status, and serve God by serving the most vulnerable of his children. The Lord's warning is also stark: to be the vehicle that causes an innocent child to have their faith corrupted is a sin of the highest magnitude.

Discuss

1. Why is it important for us, as members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, to work to oppose injustice and protect children wherever in the world they are threatened?
2. Where do we see children hurting in our own country? What can we do as a faith community to help alleviate that suffering?
3. What do you think can drive the actions of an oppressor? How can we work to find understanding and forgiveness?

Sing

743 – You walk along the shoreline

373 – Jesus loves me

624 – Blest are they

Prayer Focus

Pray for the peacemakers: internationals, Palestinians and Israelis who share a common thread of love, compassion and hope. Pray for the youth who are led astray and must suffer challenges to their faith and to their very identities. May they find their way back to God. And pray for their persecutors, that they, like many of their fellow citizens, will find the light of a just peace in their hearts.

Pray

We pray to you O Lord, to strengthen and guide those who work for peace and justice wherever fear and pain occur. We know that you love all people equally, Lord. Open our minds and hearts to your love. Guide our beliefs and actions with everyone we meet each day. Strengthen our will to reach out to all, seeking to forgive as we are forgiven, and love as we are loved. We pray that those who are in conflict may seek a new way forward, that common respect and care may replace hatred and trauma, and that children will be cherished and supported to a life of purpose and love.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Learn more about EAPPI:
eappi.org/en

Find out more about the No Way to Treat a Child campaign:
www.nwttac.canada.dci-palestine.org

Read about the PCC and Palestine/Israel:
presbyterian.ca/justice/israel-palestine

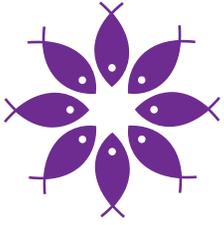
Plant an olive tree in Palestine through Gifts of Change:
presbyterian.ca/olive-tree



Mission in Canada

Through Presbyterians Sharing we support mission in Canada in many ways. Together we help congregations meet local needs in their communities and work to make the Gospel relatable and relevant to people of all ages. We support ministries that help meet the needs of people living in at-risk urban communities. We walk with staff and volunteers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as they work together to meet people's physical and spiritual needs through ministries that operate in and with Indigenous communities in Canada. Together we live out our faith, sharing God's love and igniting transformation.





The Spirit is With Us

Boarding Homes Ministry provides comfort and companionship to people living in low-rent, inner-city housing—many of whom live under a crushing combination of mental illness, addiction and poverty. The ministry also works to increase the inclusion of people living with mental illnesses and to reduce social isolation wrought by stigma.



A few years ago, I met George, wild-haired and wild-eyed, at the door of his Parkdale boarding house. It was a typical Parkdale moment: I was arriving for a pastoral visit just as the firefighters were on their way out. It had been a false alarm.

We proceeded to the startling turquoise and yellow sitting room where George trained a skeptical eye on me and said, “What are you? Some kind of worker?”

“I’m a chaplain,” I offered, prepared to explain.

Unexpectedly, George lit right up. “A *chaplain*? I LOVE chaplains! We had those in prison!”

And so, a great friendship was born.

Over the better part of a year, we got to know George at our weekly visits. He was devastatingly funny, tossing a deadpan comment into a conversation that would make the whole room crack up. He had limitless enthusiasm and childlike glee. He loved to read the Bible with our team member Jim and listen to him play the banjo. As George came to trust us, we learned how hard his past was and how deeply he’d been hurt by people who were, in his words, “NOT kind and gentle.” It is a miracle that George stayed so tender-hearted despite the cruelty he had faced.

Over the summer, George looked increasingly unwell and distraught. Before we knew it, he was back in prison.

It took us months to find him, but he was so

delighted when we showed up on the video screen one day (new high-tech prisons no longer let visitors see their loved ones through Plexiglas). He asked us about the banjo and proudly told us about his Bible class. Darker things emerged over time, too, like the fact that inmates in mental health crisis are placed in solitary confinement until they get better.

COVID-19 has made things hard for our ministry, as we’ve been forced to substitute letters and phone calls for those crucial in-person house visits. We really miss seeing the residents.

One great cause for celebration came from the unlikeliest place: those video screens. One thing we can say for them is that they are certainly germ-free. We get to see George again next week and we can hardly wait.

Working in this ministry is a lesson in finding small joys amid great pain. Sometimes problems are too big for a quick fix. The forces at work are too great, and systemic change takes time. Our little ministry is unlikely to end poverty or cure schizophrenia. But loneliness and isolation make both of those afflictions so much worse. And we can fight those by choosing to connect in the moment we’re given. We can feel the Spirit right there with us, delighting in us as we delight in each other.

— Kate McGee, Executive Director and Chaplain,
Boarding Homes Ministry



Read: Psalm 88

Reflect

If you read Psalm 88 and felt your heart hit the floor with a thud, you're not alone. This psalm doesn't get a lot of airtime. On the face of it, the psalmist is crying out to God for having abandoned them. It doesn't have a tidy resolution: it's the only psalm of lament that does not end in a vow to praise.

It's not rosy, but it's real. The psalmist refuses to give us hope—maybe because they don't feel any.

Even so, this psalm is a balm, a gem, and can be a source of healing for the many people who still experience the feelings expressed here.

One of the most insidious things about mental illness is that it can cut people off from one of the greatest gifts of human existence: the capacity to be in relationship. A person experiencing mental illness can feel like a barrier has descended around them until they can no longer feel the love of friends and family. Ironically, it descends when people need the love of friends and family the most.

There's a double effect at work, too. When the psalmist writes "all my companions are in darkness," it may not be just because they can't see their companions. The companions may well have turned their backs. We do that sometimes. We turn our backs on a person who is suffering with mental illness for a lot of reasons, but one is that it is terrifying to see someone swallowed up by "the pit" the psalmist so aptly describes. We can't help but fear being sucked down to the bottom ourselves.

On the surface, Psalm 88 is one of total despair. But did you notice that the psalmist is still talking to God the whole way through? This person feels totally and utterly alone, but voicing their cry gives them away: they are still in relationship. They may not be able to feel it, but the God who created their heart to love, relate and cry out has not abandoned them. The psalmist writes, "in the morning my prayer comes before you." Their prayer continues unabated even when they feel most alone.

If we want to be the friend or neighbour who doesn't shun the suffering person, if we want to love despite futility and fear, we have to look the darkness right in the face. We can't be looking for a quick fix.

For our model we need look no further than the silent partner in this psalm. Our God says: I will be here for you even when you can't feel my presence. I will love you even when you don't know I love you.

Our hearts were made for this: to love God and one another.

Discuss

- 1) Describe a time in your life when you felt cut off from the love of God and others. How did you reconnect?
- 2) Think of a time when you felt lonely or overwhelmed. How did you get through that time? Did you have help from someone?
- 3) Have you ever felt powerless to help someone who was suffering? What could you have done to help?
- 4) Is there a problem you care about that feels too big to manage on your own? Can you connect with a person or show your care in a way other than trying to "fix" the problem? Make a commitment to take a small step this week.

Sing

698 – Saviour, teach me day by day

730 – Oh for a world where everyone respects each other's ways

792 – Let us hope when hope seems hopeless

Prayer Focus

Pray for Boarding Homes Ministry as they find new ways to minister to people who are isolated and abandoned, especially during this time of higher isolation for many people. Pray for people living with mental illness who feel deeply alone. Pray for charities across Canada who are facing the effects of the economic downturn, that they may be able to continue their important work. Pray for the church and for our communities, that we learn from this crisis the importance of interconnection and mutual care.

Pray

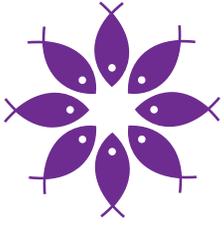
Loving God, we praise you for your loving faithfulness, and we thank you because you will never leave us or forsake us. You said, "It is not good for humankind to be alone." We thank you for the shelter of your mercy in vulnerable times. In the times of our loneliness, give us the grace to sense your presence. In times when we are caring for someone who is ill and cannot feel our own love or care, grant us patience and forbearance. Give us the great expansiveness of love through your Holy Spirit, so that we may always welcome strangers. Light up our paths, so we can see that every loving connection is a way home to You.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Read: A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto (1972-1994):

presbyterian.ca/utoronto-rooming-houses-history





Shining God's Light in Saskatoon

Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry provides prayer, crisis counselling, nourishment, clothing and a weekly worship circle to people living on the margins of society. The ministry gives people of all nations a sense of belonging, care and inclusion through activities that uphold Indigenous cultural practices.

God's unfailing love never gives up, even when things seem hopeless. The staff and volunteers at Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry (SNCM) always strive to display this kind of love to the community they serve. People who come to the centre, many living in extreme poverty or experiencing homelessness, find a welcoming space where they can enjoy a hot meal with friends, discover their artistic gifts and receive spiritual care. SNCM is a constant in the lives of the people it serves, who know that they can come as they are and be cared for.

When COVID hit, people who rely on the services of SNCM suddenly faced even more challenges. So, as the city of Saskatoon closed down, SNCM moved to the streets. Staff and volunteers prepared food, then put on masks and gloves and delivered it to people who were hungry. They also offered friendly words, prayers and messages of hope.



Executive Director Dylan Nippi is grateful that SNCM was able to continue to be a helpful and loving presence during the pandemic. When he thinks about the work SNCM has done over the last few months, the scripture that comes to mind is Matthew 5:14-16, about being a light on a hill. In difficult times, fear and uncertainty can drive us to retreat when God is calling us to move forward. We are tempted to hide our light. But this verse reminds us that God's light cannot be hidden.

The experience of embodying God's everlasting love on the streets of Saskatoon has given SNCM a renewed sense of courage and strength in the Holy Spirit that they carry with them as they move back to ministering at the centre.

Read: Matthew 5:14–16

Reflect

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” We are called to shine the light of the gospel in a world that is steeped in darkness, and to radiate God’s love and truth into the lives of people around us.

During the pandemic, Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry was committed to letting God’s light shine, even though it meant changing the way they usually serve in a drastic way. In a time of uncertainty and darkness, God’s light was revealed as staff and volunteers went out into the community and attended to the physical and spiritual needs of the people they encountered.

SNCM’s faithful and courageous ministry in this difficult time can be an inspiration to us. God’s light is constantly shining, making itself known, ray by ray, through everyday acts of service.

Discuss

- 1) God’s light, which cannot be hidden, is constant. Who or what has been consistently revealing this light to you over the last year? How has it helped during the pandemic or another time of struggle?
- 2) We’ve been living through a challenging and fearful time, yet God’s light continues to shine through us. How have you and your congregation been a ray of light in your community?
- 3) God always calls the Christian community to be visible and present. What opportunities are there for your church community to be Christ’s presence in your neighbourhood?

Sing

177 – Christ whose glory fills the skies

376 – Lord the light of your love is shining

671 – I heard the voice of Jesus say

Prayer Focus

Please pray for people in the SNCM community and all Indigenous ministries. May God open people’s eyes to the challenges Indigenous people face due to systemic racism and oppression and the disproportionate ways their communities have been affected by the pandemic. Pray that God’s justice will prevail, and that healing will be experienced by all who suffer unjustly. May the services provided by Indigenous ministries continue to bring Christ’s love and healing.

Pray

God of light, we thank you that you are always with us, you never grow weary and your love is unending. Make your everlasting presence known to the world so that all of creation may experience the healing power of your love. Give strength to those who are discouraged. Give renewal to those who are exhausted. Give power to those who are excluded. Help us to move forward in times of darkness so that we can shine your light as we are called.

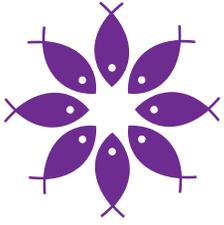
In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.

Learn more about Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry:
saskatoonnativecircleministry.webs.com

Learn about the PCC’s ministries with Indigenous people:
presbyterian.ca/canadian-ministries/indigenous-ministries

Support ministries with Indigenous people through Gifts of Change:
presbyterian.ca/sncm





Radical Acts of Kindness

Presbyterians Sharing helps Cariboo Presbyterian Church reach out with the love of Christ to people who live in the rural and remote areas of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia.

Two Rivers Church in Guelph, Ontario, is exploring new ways of being the church. A recipient of the PCC's Supporting Ministry Grant, the ministry is made up of "Living Rooms," where people gather together in homes for meals and conversations that draw them deeper into friendship and spiritual formation in Christ.



Nestled between the Coast Mountains and the Rocky Mountains is a region of British Columbia called the Interior Plateau—a breathtaking wilderness consisting of grass-filled valleys and rocky ridges with forests and deep blue lakes scattered throughout. The communities in the northern part of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region are small and spread out with many miles between them. Most of these towns and villages are accessible only by driving countless hours through winding back roads. Despite the distance, Christians living in these communities are connected through a house church ministry called Cariboo Presbyterian Church.

Halfway across the country is Two Rivers Church in Guelph, a vibrant community of over 120,000 people, located in the heart of southern Ontario. It is a city rich in music, arts and culture. The magnificent limestone Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate stands watch over the downtown area, and there are many places of worship, including four traditional Presbyterian churches. But some people are more comfortable in

a less-traditional setting. So, Two Rivers Church offers a house-church model of "living rooms" where people gather together for meals and conversations that draw them deeper into friendship and spiritual growth.

These two congregations, meeting in very different settings for different reasons, have something in common besides their house church ministries: each has made the intention to serve their neighbours through small acts of service and hospitality. The vision is simple, but the impact is great.

"We seek to follow Jesus' example by providing care and support to those who are in need, and by serving them in practical ways," said the Rev. Mark Carter, minister at Cariboo Presbyterian Church. Acts of hospitality have included yard work for elderly people, meals for families grieving the loss of a loved one, and community bike tune-up and repair days.

Two Rivers is also seeking to be a blessing in their community by responding to the needs of their neighbours. Something as simple as walking a neighbour's dog during work hours can create a



relationship of trust. With each act of kindness, members of Two Rivers are making an impact in their neighbourhood and providing an example of what it looks like to be part of God's church. If you ask them what God is up to, they will respond, "God is making all things new."

While baking a pie, shovelling snow or driving a neighbour to the doctor may not appear to be radical acts at first glance, reaching out in kindness is in fact counter-cultural behavior in a world that too often has valued individualism and consumerism over conversation and connection.

For many of us, outreach is part of our collective church experience. It is easy to forget that we are called, not just as a church, but as individuals, to go out into our communities and share the good news of the gospel message. Sharing the love of Christ with a neighbour can seem as daunting as scaling one of the Rocky Mountains or ascending the spire of the Basilica in Guelph. But as we open ourselves to God's love, and share that love through acts of generosity, friendship and kindness, God's healing and transformation can be experienced. And people's lives can be made new.

Read: John 13:34-35

Reflect

In John 13: 34, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment—to love one another as he loved them. This is not a passive love, but a call to action: a call to care for others and put love into everyday activities. And by doing so, to be recognized as a follower of Christ.

How many times do we hurry past someone on the street or in the hallway of our apartment building or workplace without acknowledgment? How many times do we leave church without greeting a newcomer? How often are we too busy to check in with our own friends and family, let alone people we don't know? Without reaching out, we have no way of knowing the context in which others are living or the joys and challenges that they experience. We have no way of knowing how we might offer care or hospitality.

Hospitality is a notion that is deeply rooted in the Bible. It allows people to experience a taste of God's love and grace through their interactions with one another. Jesus loved others by providing for them in practical ways, ministering to their physical and emotional needs as well as spiritual. When we pay attention to the people around us and seek to understand their needs, we can form relationships and offer hospitality through simple acts of kindness and service. And they'll know that we are Christians by our love.

Discuss

1. Think about the community where you live.
Who are your neighbours? Who do you know well?
Who is a stranger?
2. It can be difficult to go outside of our safety zones and extend God's love to strangers. How could you

get to know people in your community? How can you listen to people who live on the margins or across boundaries?

3. What defines Christian hospitality today and how can we embody it? What challenges might we face?
4. What could you do as a congregation to share Christ's hospitality in your community with the people you have identified? What can you do as an individual?

Sing

471 – We are one in the Spirit

475 – I am the church! You are the church!

637 – Take my life and let it be consecrated

Prayer Focus

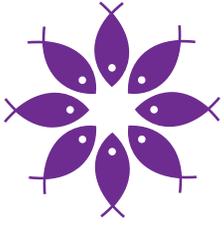
Please pray that all Christians will be deeply rooted in the love of Jesus Christ and will be inspired to share that love with others. Pray for Cariboo Presbyterian Church and Two Rivers Church as they bless their communities through loving service. Pray that each act sends out ripples of change, allowing new life to emerge in hopeless places.

Pray

Loving God, we praise you for being a God whose love stretches across all borders and boundaries. No location and no situation is too remote for your love to reach. Thank you for modeling for us your generous love in the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for when we erect borders in our minds that block us from sharing that love with others. Remake our hearts so that we may reflect your love, and help us to find ways to gladly share our gifts, service, food and lives with our neighbours.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.





Connecting with Community

Erskine Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ontario, has been sharing God's love for 150 years. With support from Presbyterians Sharing, through the Presbytery of Hamilton's Replanting Ministry, Erskine went through a discerning process in 2018 and is working to create a wellness hub for the wellbeing of their community.



While God's message of love, hope, faith and peace stays the same, the way we do ministry may change. Change isn't easy, especially for a congregation with 150 years of history. But recognizing that God was calling them to do something new in their neighbourhood, the congregation at Erskine Presbyterian Church spent 2018 engaged in an intentional process of discernment. They worked and prayed diligently through monthly workshops, discernment meetings and consultations with neighbours until they had a firm vision of who they were called to be: "A healthy, loving family for each and every neighbour."

In 2019, Erskine called the Rev. Mike Aldred as their new minister. Seeing how the community around them had changed, and asking how they could best serve that community, they decided they wanted to become a wellness hub: a safe and welcoming space where people from the community could gather and local organizations could offer services and support to promote wellbeing.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and the plan of creating the hub had to be put on hold, Erskine held fast to their vision. They still wanted to connect with their community.

When it became evident that many people in the area were in extra need of help because of the pandemic, the leaders at Erskine decided to contact their local city councillor. They asked her, "What would you do if you had volunteers, money and a strong desire to help others at this time?" She put them in touch with the Strathcona Community Care Response—

a grassroots group of people in the neighbourhood who were rallying together to offer care and support to their community in response to COVID-19.

Erskine discovered that the Strathcona group had already been fundraising, bringing groceries and supplies to those struggling financially, and engaging in friendly phone calls with people who were isolated for several weeks. Their volunteers were tired, but it was obvious that the needs were still great, and the pandemic was not going to be over anytime soon. The leaders at Erskine told the hardworking group of volunteers that they were there to help in any way they could.

More funds were needed, so Erskine spent a month fundraising. More volunteers were needed, so people from Erskine started helping with grocery pickup and delivery. More food was needed, so congregation members helped to restock the community pantry. More phone calls were needed, so Erskine participated in calling people who were lonely in their neighbourhood.

"The timing of when we joined the Strathcona Community Care Response seemed God-ordained," said the Rev. Aldred. "When they were getting to the end of their rope, Erskine was able to inject generosity, time and energy into the project so that it could continue for a month longer than expected." The experience of serving alongside their neighbours confirmed for Erskine what God had been leading them to in their visioning process: that being a faithful member of a neighbourhood family means looking to see where God is already at work and being willing to join in.



Read: Acts 16: 11–15

Reflect

One of the major themes of the Book of Acts is the Holy Spirit sending people out to share the gospel. In Acts 16, Paul and Barnabas have been joined by Timothy on their second missionary journey. Their plan was to enter Asia, but “the Holy Spirit blocked that route” (16:6). Instead, the Holy Spirit sent them to Macedonia (modern day Greece) by giving Paul a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come.

When the three missionaries arrived in Greece, they made their way to Philippi. Just outside the city gates, down by the river, they met a woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God and dealer of purple cloth. Although not much is known about Lydia, Acts clearly demonstrates that the relationship she developed with the missionaries was mutually beneficial. God opened Lydia’s heart to hear Paul’s message, and she and her household were soon baptized. In turn, she invited the traveling missionaries to come and stay at her home, which became the site of the church in Philippi.

Like the travelling missionaries in Acts, the leaders at Erskine listened when the Holy Spirit took them in a new direction. They held fast to their vision but adapted to the circumstances in which they found themselves. Like Paul, Barnabas and Timothy, who went down to the river on the sabbath to find worshippers of God because there wasn’t an official synagogue in Philippi, the leaders of Erskine went out into their neighbourhood when their official place of worship was no longer open for gathering. The Spirit sent them out to meet the people running the Strathcona Community Care Response—the “Lydias” through whom God was already working in their neighbourhood. The partnership that Erskine developed with Strathcona Community Care Response can best be described as a gift from the Holy Spirit meant to bless the community during a difficult time.

Discuss

- 1) Paul, Barnabas and Timothy were prevented by the Holy Spirit from going in a certain direction and then sent in another. Have you ever experienced God closing one path and opening another one? What was that like? What did that teach you about how God moves in our lives?

- 2) The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians today as powerfully as the Spirit was during the missionary journeys described in Acts. Reflecting on your past, can you name a time when it felt like the Holy Spirit was guiding you? What helped you discern the Spirit’s presence? How might the Spirit be speaking to you in your life today?
- 3) Where might God be calling your congregation to connect with your community?
- 4) Look for people and organizations in your neighbourhood who are working for the community and might align with your goals. How might God be calling you or your church to contribute to their efforts? What does it mean when we work with others on a common goal—even if they aren’t Christian?

Sing

404 – O Spirit come, our hearts inspire

489 – Help us to help each other, Lord

755 – Go ye, go ye into the world

Prayer Focus

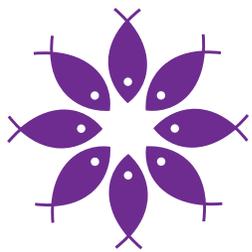
Please pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide Erskine as they pursue the vision they’ve been given, and that their relationships with community members will continue to grow as they transform their space into a wellness hub. Pray that the eyes and hearts of all congregations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be opened so that they might discern where God is calling them in their communities.

Pray

May your wisdom and power, O Holy Spirit of God, descend on all congregations discerning and moving forward with new visions. Help them to trust you as their guide. Draw them nearer to their neighbours, so that your love will be made known in every neighbourhood. Ready their ears to hear the good news of Christ so that they will come to see their work as part of your kingdom building. Trusting in you, we place all future plans in your hands and give ourselves over to your guidance.

In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.





Get Involved!



Raise support for Presbyterians Sharing

Every gift matters! Gifts can be given online, by mail or through your congregation. Use Mission Moments, posters, videos, PowerPoint and worship resources to promote Presbyterians Sharing in your congregation. Learn more at presbyterian.ca/sharing.



Join a Mission Society

The Women's Missionary Society and Atlantic Mission Society encourage involvement in local and world mission through prayer, study and service.

WMS groups can be found in congregations from Quebec to British Columbia. wmsppc.ca

AMS groups are located in the Atlantic provinces. pccweb.ca/ams

Respond with Presbyterian World Service & Development

Respond to emergencies and help build sustainable communities through PWS&D. Become a PWS&D Champion and you will receive resources with the latest news and information in order to spread the word in your congregation about this important work. Find out more at WeRespond.ca.





Connect with mission partners

Write a letter to encourage our Canadian and international mission partners. Invite a virtual visit from PCC national staff, international mission staff, or representatives of PCC mission and ministry in Canada. Pray for PCC ministries each week using the daily prayer and mission calendar, which highlights mission moments and justice actions.

Develop a new skill and grow your ministry

Learn from PCC staff how to develop leadership skills, grow ministries with children and youth, enhance worship and evangelism programs, or expand stewardship efforts. Check out conference opportunities like Transform or the annual Association of Presbyterian Church Educators. Connect with regional staff in your Synod to see how they can help. A wide variety of resources can be found at presbyterian.ca.

Use your voice to call for justice

Respond to the biblical call to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. Advocate for climate justice. Care for creation. Build relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Walk with low-income neighbours seeking dignity and basic needs. Advocate for peace and human rights. Invite a Justice Ministries speaker to preach or lead workshops on climate change, healing and reconciliation, the Israel-Palestine conflict, migrant workers and poverty. More details can be found at presbyterian.ca/justice.



Simon Chambers/ACT



Help shape the future of the PCC

Be part of the decision-making process that shapes the future of our denomination. Join a committee in your congregation or presbytery, sign up for newsfeeds, read General Assembly reports, participate in consultations about important matters discussed in the church.

