



EARTH DAY 2019

L I V I N G W I T H  
**RESPECT IN CREATION**

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA



**2019-2020**  
Sustainability Report



Woodcliff United (Calgary, AB) "Windows for Woodcliff" Earth Day recruitment effort. Credit: Woodcliff United Faithful Footprints report.

**Dear Friends,**

**We have been called by Christ to love our neighbour and by the Creator to live with respect in Creation, both of which are inextricably linked. We participate in God's work of healing and mending Creation in order to embody God's love for all.**

Guided by the Holy Spirit, our church strives to protect the ecosystem which sustains us, prioritizing the need to avoid catastrophic climate disruption. We are living out a moral response as people of hope; putting our own church houses in order; hosting forums for meaningful listening around common needs; and caring for all, including those whose lives and livelihoods are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

This first sustainability report celebrates a breadth of action across the United Church of Canada, while encouraging us to reduce our carbon emissions 80 % by 2050, in line with the Paris climate target.

The examples highlighted here represent just a fraction of creation-care actions across the church. Yet, the report also reveals that our work is just beginning. More effort is

urgently needed to build strong foundations of creation care across our ministries and increase church-wide participation to protect God's living world.

The current global pandemic has highlighted previously obscured unjust and unsustainable structures. For marginalized communities, the impact of climate destabilization is devastating. COVID-19 has exposed similar concentrated public health vulnerabilities. Responding to God's demanding calls for environmental justice will help us to build resilient communities for all.

The climate crisis is both a moral crisis and a crisis of faith. Leading to the 44th General Council in 2022, we hope that this report encourages us as a United Church, as communities of faith, and as individuals disciples of Jesus to advance in strong and tangible ways on our journey to live with respect in Creation.

Christ's peace,



*Richard Bott*

THE RIGHT REVEREND  
**DR. RICHARD BOTT**  
MODERATOR  
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA



PUTTING **OUR HOUSE** IN ORDER



RAISING OUR **SPIRITED VOICES**

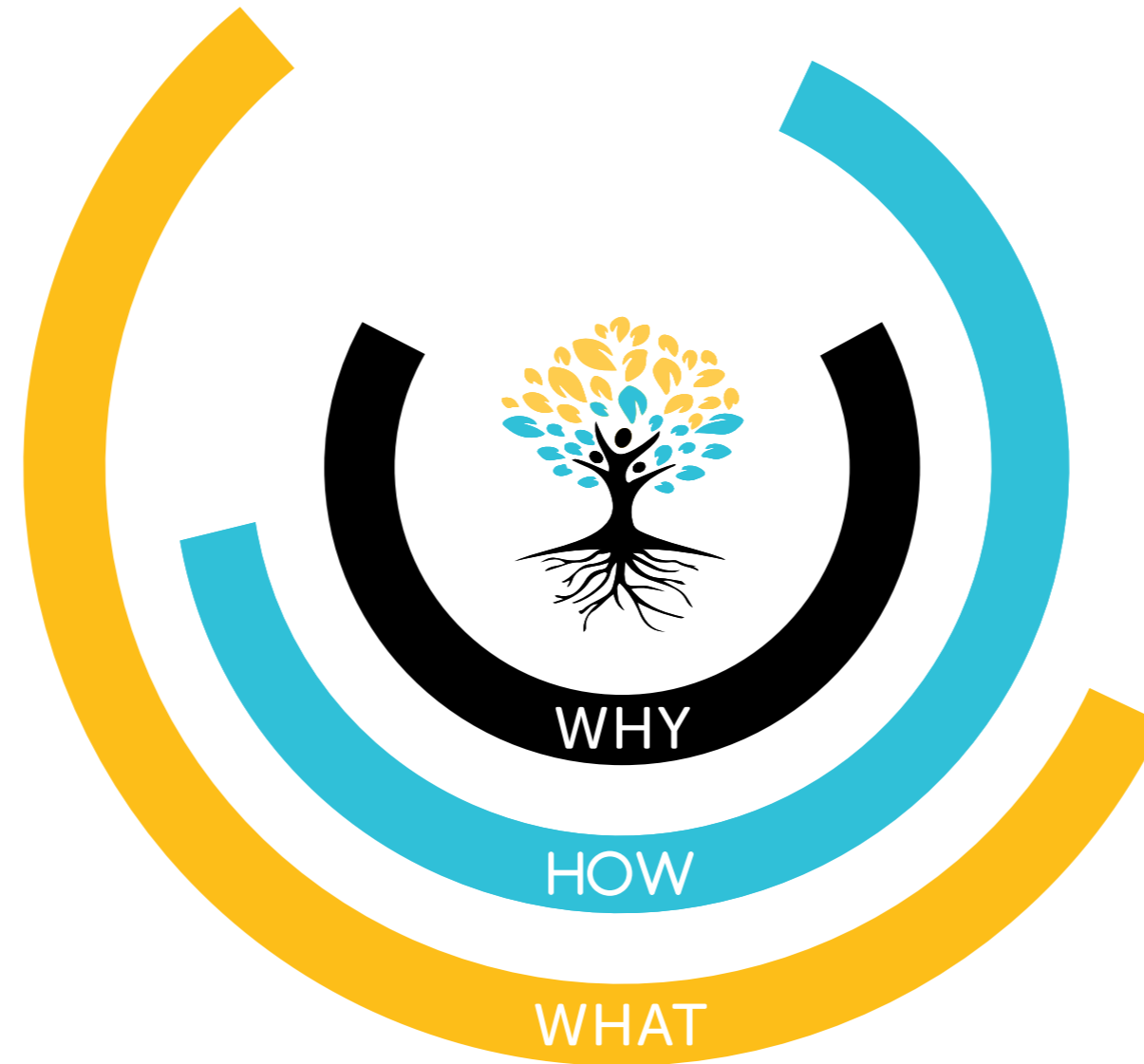


RECONNECTING WITH **THE EARTH**

# THE JOURNEY

## WHY

- Urgent climate action is critical to avoid catastrophic impacts on the essential conditions for life.
- Climate and ecological degradation has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable.
- Safeguarding our living world and responding to these injustices is central to our mission as a United Church.



## WHAT

- Reduce our own carbon, energy, transportation and operational footprint.
- Help change the underlying structures at the heart of our ecological crisis.
- Reawaken and strengthen our love for all of God's creation.

## HOW

- Provide tools to support congregations (grants, resources, inspirational stories).
  - Work together with allies to support ecological justice and healing.
- Commit to measure & report progress, with special attention on carbon footprint reduction.

# WHAT WE'VE DONE: A SNAPSHOT

154

Estimated number of congregations and ministries using their green spaces for biodiversity protection, food production or spiritual reconnection\*



295

Estimated number of congregations engaged in education and action on environmental footprint reduction (including 148 taking part in the Faithful Footprints program)\*



57

Creation – themed resources available on the United Church website



Estimated number of congregations and ministries with active ecological justice programs (including 14 United Churches that hosted federal all-candidates environmental debates)\*

98



Amount redeployed to “fossil-free” investments, with over \$8 million invested in solutions to environmental challenges

\$3.5 MILLION



\* Based on 2019 church websites

# PUTTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER

**The United Church of Canada must put its own house in order.** By greening our buildings, sharing our spaces, and increasing operational sustainability, we will lower operational costs, strengthen communities, and protect our fragile planet.

## GREENING OUR BUILDINGS

The majority of United Church carbon emissions come for the heating our buildings. Maintaining our buildings also make up for the largest component of our churches' fixed costs.

**Faithful Footprints** is a United Church program, administered by Faith & the Common Good, to help congregations improve their building's energy and carbon performance. As of 2019, 148 congregations across the country have applied to this program and, will make tangible differences in helping the United Church meet its 80% emissions reduction goal by 2050.

## SHARING OUR SPACES IN SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

By helping to decrease costs and increase building comfort, green actions help congregations maintain their buildings in service to community. This is vital because we know that our faith buildings provide critical, affordable spaces for local community organizations. **Bracebridge United in Bracebridge, ON**, for example hosts over 30 community groups, from a grief support group to a material arts academy. **Visions United in Moncton, NB**, and the John Howard Society are building a community hub space to provide 20 affordable housing units. Green actions, such as space sharing, are about more than carbon footprint reduction.

## CHANGING HOW WE OPERATE

Reducing excessive resource use is critical for shrinking our environmental footprint. The General Council Office has reduced its office space by 60%, lowered its photocopying usage by 40%, switched to online payment, and made a large commitment to online learning. Examples abound of congregations also doing their part. To reduce their transport footprint (the second largest component of our church's carbon emissions), **Peninsula United in Surrey, BC**, and **St. Paul's United in Edmonton, AB**, encourage Sunday carpooling. More than a means of transportation, cycling, walking, or ride sharing to church can provide a meditative beginning to worship.



PUTTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER



RAISING OUR SPIRITED VOICES



RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH





# PUTTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER



## CONTRIBUTING TO A MORE JUST ECONOMY

Faith Building energy-efficiency work can support local social enterprises. To deliver its energy retrofit program to United Churches in the Prairies, **Faithful Footprints** contracts with Winnipeg-based Purpose Construction- a construction social enterprise that provides trades training and work to people with barriers to traditional employment.

## WALKING MORE GENTLY

**McKillop United** in **Lethbridge, AB**, used a **Faithful Footprints** grant to help them replace their antiquated boilers. As a result, the church saw a 23% reduction in their energy use and a 13% reduction in their greenhouse gas emissions. This significant reduction in their utility costs means they have more money for community outreach.

## GREEN RENEWAL

For **Beacon United** in **Yarmouth, NS**, energy-efficient actions began as a way to reduce operating expenses. Happily, these actions also started them on a path of renewal - decreased operational costs (reduced fuel usage by 50%), increased community use (community garden capacity is now 180 plots), and increased rental income (\$50,000/yr).



Purpose Construction (Winnipeg, MB) supports United Church energy efficiency work. Credit: Purpose Construction.

# RAISING OUR SPIRITED VOICES

We cannot remain silent nor isolated in our actions when so much of the world is broken. Public advocacy, working with allies, and channelling financial resources to support ecological healing are critical to our response.

## PUBLICLY WITNESSING

Ecological healing requires working for justice for all. The church's public backing of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation is one such priority. In 2019, for example, this entailed defending the Wet'suwet'en people's right to free, prior and informed consent regarding land development. Likewise, churches have offered a range of participatory pathways, including **McDougal United's** "Ethical Dilemma Series" in **Calgary, AB**, and the Shining Waters Regional Council's promotion of the youth-led Global Climate Strikes. Connecting our social and ecological justice work is a vital task.

## WORKING TOGETHER

Wide-spread collaboration is critical to effective environmental action. In its global service work, the church partners with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to increase sustainable food production. The church also actively participates in the Canadian Climate Action Network on issues of climate justice. Churches in **Delta, BC**, and **Brampton, ON**, are collaborating with municipalities to act as extreme weather emergency hubs. In **Magog, QC**, **St. Paul's United** is strengthening its local green economy by hiring Ecorad (an innovative green business) to refurbish its outdated heating system. Working with allies amplifies the impact of our work.

## INVESTING RESPONSIBLY

The church strives to use its investments to serve Creation-care goals — from divesting \$3.5 million from the largest fossil-fuel companies to signing the UN Principles for Responsible Investment. **Trinity-St. Paul's United** in **Toronto, ON**, has created a guide to low-carbon investment opportunities. More recently, the church pension board sponsored and won an oil and gas company shareholder vote that asked for specific climate-related targets aligned with the Paris Agreement. The work continues across the church to ensure deeper alignment of our investments with our values.



PUTTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER



RAISING OUR SPIRITED VOICES



RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH





## ALL-CANDIDATES ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATES

During the 2019 elections, United Churches across the country helped voters evaluate the ecological platform of their political candidates. Eleven United Churches, including **First Metropolitan United** in **Victoria, BC**, hosted federal all-candidates debates on environmental and climate issues as part of the “100 Debates on the Environment” initiative.

## FRIDAYS FOR THE FUTURE

United Church young people, such as Aidan Legault from **St. Peter’s United** in **Sudbury, ON**, have been leading the calls for climate action. Inspired by these young adults, the church invited members to support Fridays for the Future, a youth-led movement that gathers in Friday demonstrations to call for all generations to confront the climate crisis.

## FOR THE LOVE OF CREATION

For Earth Day 2019, United Church leaders partnered with Christian leaders across Canada to issue a “**For the Love of Creation**” call for climate action. Recognizing that the global climate crisis has reached a critical stage, the initiative aims to strengthen policy advocacy, outreach and theological reflection tools for parish-level engagement.



First Met United (Victoria, BC) hosts an “All Candidates” environmental debate. *Credit: GreenPac*



Knox United (Brandon, MB) heading out to the Fridays for Future climate demonstrations. *Credit: Brandon Sun*



# RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH

By renewing our relationship with nature, we enrich our experience of the Sacred. Nurturing our green spaces, sharing Creation care liturgical resources, and exploring new environmental ministries help us forge new connections with Creation.

## CARING FOR OUR SACRED GREEN SPACES

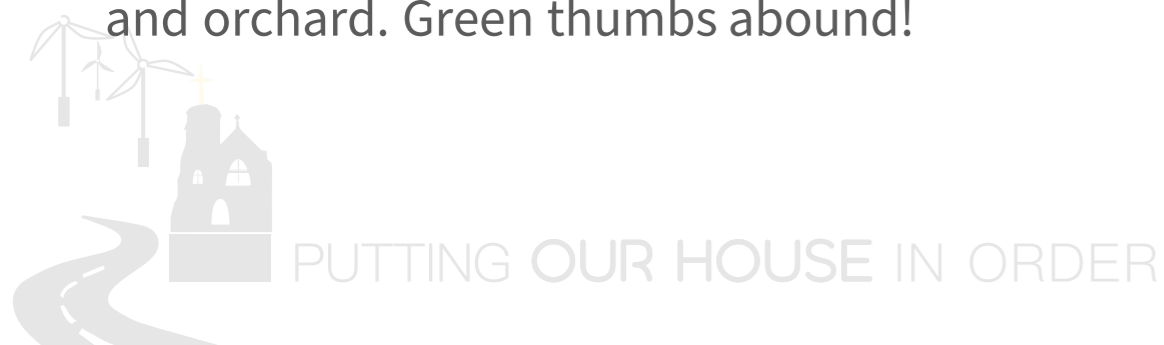
Many United Churches reconnect with nature through tending their gardens. The congregations members at **First -St. Andrew's United** in **London, ON**, have created an Eco-meditative garden that features a labyrinth and an array of native plants. **Spring Park United** in **Charlottetown, PE** features a "grow to give garden" and donates the produce to the Upper Room Food Bank. **Camp Fircom** on **Gambier Island, BC**, is completely off-grid, uses fresh produce grown on-site for 80% of its meals and promotes "Hands in the Dirt" experiential workshops at the camp's 1.5 acre organic farm and orchard. Green thumbs abound!

## PROVIDING RESOURCES

The United Church's 40+ years of work on ecological issues leave behind an abundant trail of creation-care resources. There are sample creation-care services, prayers, vigils, songs, and stories on the United Church Website. United Church camps across the country provide hands-on, experiential opportunities to reconnect with the earth. Partners -such as **KAIROS, Greening Sacred Spaces, Citizens for Public Justice, Green Church, Student Christian Movement** and **A Rocha**- have free resources for ecological advocacy and actions. Finally, we have each other and our local Creation-care alliances from which to learn.

## ENCOUNTERING THE DIVINE IN NATURE

Over 21 congregations have received United Church grant funding for diverse environmental ministries. **St. Andrew's United** in **Edmonton, AB**, is changing its garden program into an urban farming social enterprise ministry, cultivating a specialty cash crop of garlic. **Middleton United** in **Middle Musquodoboit, NS**, is strengthening its intergenerational ministry by building wheelchair-accessible raised garden beds for seniors to work with youth. **Richmond Hill United** in **Richmond Hill, ON**, is part of the Wild Church Network to help foster spiritual growth via nature. Reconnecting with nature helps rekindle our love for all living beings.





# RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH

## ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

An Embracing the Spirit innovation grant has supported a new ministry focused on ecological grief. Hosted by **First United** in **Ottawa, ON**, the program will offer participants a process to connect with the web of life, while helping transform feelings of ecological despair into inspired, collaborative action.

## THE GIVING GARDEN

**Islington United** in **Toronto, ON**, lives alongside one of the city's "food deserts." In response, the church expanded its garden to give neighbours and food banks access to fresh produce. The Giving Garden has grown from 6-square meter carrot patch to a 44-square-metre mixed garden, producing hundreds of kilos of vegetables each season.

## LUMSDEN BEACH CAMP

The United Churches' 55 camps are critical resources in helping people reconnect with the living world. The solar installation and pollinator gardens at **Lumsden Beach Camp** in **Lumsden Beach, SK**, provide campers, volunteers, and staff with tangible examples of how to live with respect in Creation.



Islington United (Toronto, ON) families gardening together. *Credit: Donna Lang*



Lumsden Beach Camp (Regina, SK) celebrating their solar panel installation. *Credit: Lumsden Beach Camp Faithful Footprints report*

# NEXT STEPS

How do we move from this report's snapshot of early actions to fulfilling our shared goal of an 80% reduction in church carbon pollution by 2050?

## REGULAR REPORTING

Create triennial sustainability reports.

- Report on the United Church's carbon footprint as measured against its 2016 baseline.
- Disclose the environmental impact of the church's investment portfolio, with special attention given to environmental justice concerns (e.g. the pollution of Indigenous land and water by Canadian extractive industries.)

## REDUCE TRANSPORT EMISSIONS

Explore new ways to reduce the UCC's emissions.

- Commit to a national initiative, like the "Faith Commuter Challenge," to estimate the churches' transportation footprint and inspire low-carbon alternatives.
- Implement a General Council policy around low-carbon transportation.

## CONDUCT GIG ANNUAL SURVEY

Measure local church engagement.

- How many sermons & direct actions per year addressed questions of ecological justice?
- How many congregations take part in responsible food-buying, garden cultivation, waste management, and water conservation initiatives?

Living our climate commitments is a journey, with individual churches at various starting points. Stumbling is inevitable, but paralysis is not an option. May our faith in the Creator give us the courage to face our ecological crisis with hope, action, and urgency.

*What are we missing? Are you involved in creation-care actions that we could share? Contact Lucy Cummings, [lcummings@faithcommongood.org](mailto:lcummings@faithcommongood.org)*

"Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related. All creation is good."

(Song of Faith 2006)

DIY energy audit team from

**ST GEORGE'S UNITED**

(Courtenay, BC)  
social distancing

*Credit: St. George's United, Faithful Footprints report*



Finishing up a window installation at  
**DUNDAS UNITED CHURCH**  
(Cadigan, PE)

*Credit: Dundas United, Faithful Footprints report*



**OROMOCTO UNITED**

(Oromocto, NB)

is excited about their new energy efficient heat pump

*Credit: Oromocto United Faithful Footprints report*



**TRINITY-ST. PAUL'S UNITED**

(Toronto, ON)  
raising their spirited voices.

*Credit: Lucy Cummings*

"We sing of the Creator, who made humans to live and move and have their being in GOD. In and with GOD, we can direct our lives toward right relationship with each other and with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life"

(Song of Faith 2006)

### EGLINTON ST. GEORGE'S UNITED

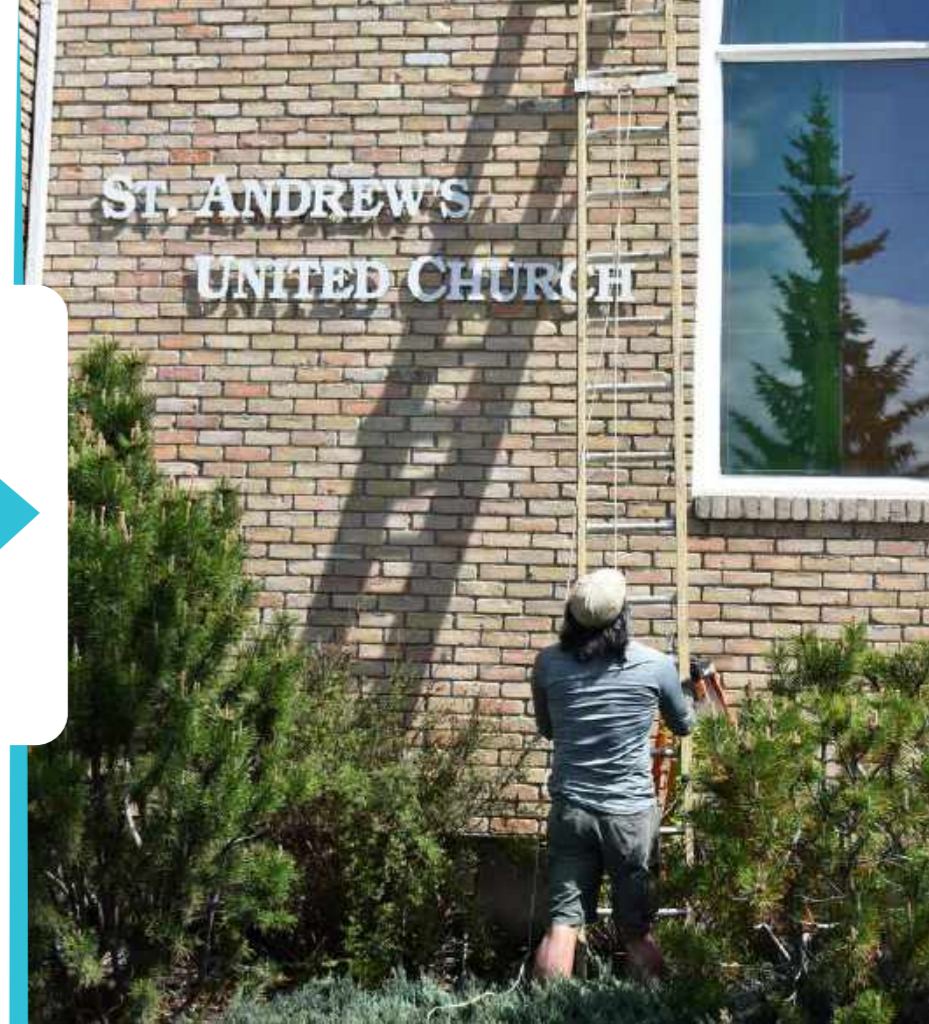
(Toronto, ON)  
community garden blessing

*Credit: Donna Lang*



Prep for window caulking at  
**ST. ANDREW'S UNITED**  
(Cochrane, BC)

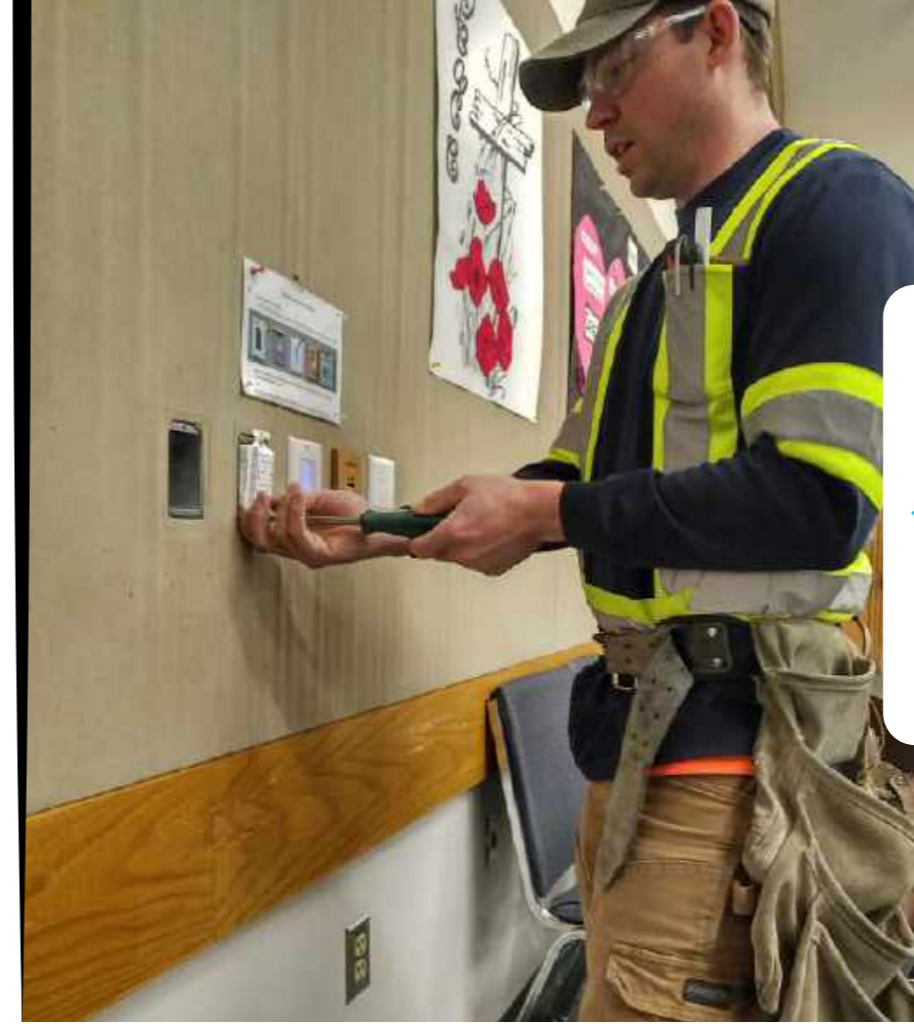
*Credit: St. Andrew's United,  
Faithful Footprints report*



### WESTDALE UNITED

(Hamilton, ON)  
is an active member of EcoWHAM  
(Eco Churches of West Hamilton)

*Credit: Environment Hamilton*



**McCLURE UNITED**  
(Saskatoon, SK)  
upgrading their sanctuary  
lighting to LED.

*Credit: McClure United,  
Faithful Footprints report*

We acknowledge that we live, worship and work on Indigenous land.

We are committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and recognize that includes aligning ourselves with the values of living with care in creation

Report prepared by **Faithful Footprints**, (a United Church program delivered by Faith & the Common Good) with input from United Church members across Canada.

For more information, contact Faith & the Common Good's Lucy Cummings, [lcummings@faithcommongood.org](mailto:lcummings@faithcommongood.org)



Faith & the  
Common Good