



CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Imagine Church Differently



Annual Report 2023

Image: CCS students Kendra and Ally at "Foolish Worship"

A YEAR OF DESIRE AND LONGING

2023 was a year of desire and longing, with exciting events to energize us.

In February, for Black History Month, Alcris Limongi organized a lively panel discussion with Black diaconal ministers. I did something similar in May for Asian Heritage Month, with Asian UCC friends addressing the question: Who is Asian?

The two-day "Foolish Worship" event with Dr. Cláudio Carvalhaes was refreshing. During the Annual Service of Celebration weekend, Rev. Dr. Wenh-In Ng, recipient of the 2023 Companion of the Centre Award, sat down with UCC Moderator Carmen Lansdowne, guest facilitator for the Right Relations learning circle, for a stimulating conversation on interculturality and Indigenous relations.

We began the year desiring to

strengthen intercultural education. Conversation with the Forum of Intercultural Leadership and Education elevated our imagination. Intercultural and international connections continued in August with CCS's Orientation Circle for ministers coming into the UCC from other denominations.

Longing for direction and financial stability, we hired Julie Ng-Leung to lead a strategic planning activity. After the pandemic, we face a changing landscape in theological education and church life in general. There is a need to sort our priorities, strengths, and future path.

CCS is working hard to envision the future. We do not approach it with fear but with courage and understanding. We pray for and work towards transformation.

- Alan Lai, Principal

10 Things People Tell Us They Love About CCS*

1. High-quality education for leadership
2. Learning circles - mutual learning in community
3. Inspirational, creative leaders
4. Practical skills for ministry
5. Integrative and interactive pedagogy
6. Emerging theologies and a broad worldview
7. Learning to meet the challenges of the church and the world
8. Personal transformation
9. Focus on the love of God in action
10. Living a theology of justice

"CCS gives us the tools to help us in our diaconal journeys!"

*source: CCS donor survey

Planting Church Differently

Sarah Williams and Lynda Dickson started their diaconal studies in 2023. They chose CCS because they wanted to “imagine church differently”. Sarah, coming from an evangelical background, was excited to find out about feminist and liberation theology at CCS - “I didn’t know it was a thing!” - and feels exploring these ideas allowed her to express what she is coming to believe without having to self-censor. Lynda’s experience of church was that queer people didn’t seem to fit, yet she longed to be in ministry as her queer Christian self. She came to CCS wanting to turn the church upside down, making it a place of acceptance for those on the margins like herself.

Both students have found that CCS gave them the confidence to step into new ministries. Sarah is leading Courageous Community, a church plant in Port Alberni, which seeks to be a centre for dialogue and faith. Lynda is involved in another church plant called Sanctuary on 6th in New Westminster.

“Church Planting” is a broad term that refers to starting new communities of faith for the benefit of those who are not currently connected to church. The metaphor of gardening is a way to express the organic and ecological nature of starting new spiritual [Christian] communities.

Sarah’s and Lynda’s ministries look very different from many congregations. Courageous Community hosts plant-based potlucks, forest walks, and “night temple.” Sarah has been able to use what she learned in the Spiritual Practice learning



Lynda and Sarah at Learning on Purpose.

circle at CCS to help deepen participants’ experience of these offerings. Lynda feels like she is doing community development with a theological lens at Sanctuary on 6th. She asked queer members of the Westminster community, “What would it take for you to get involved in Sanctuary on 6th?” The answer seems to lie in offering a place of belonging, with things like the Rainbow Chorus and The Gathering, where people get together to cook, share a meal, and engage in meaningful conversation. Lynda finds her studies at CCS have helped her discover a foundation for ministry that integrates being and doing.

Both students believe that CCS is preparing them to do something different in ministry. Sarah says, “An entrepreneurial spin is the only hope for the church.” Lynda says, “By being and doing church out of the church, we are able to build more authentic spirit-led relationships to heal and support our communities and God’s creation.

2023 DIACONAL MINISTRY GRADS



- **Dyanne Marlok**
is in ministry at Tottenham-Rich Hill United in Tottenham, ON
- **Pat Chabluk**
is in ministry at Keewatin St Andrew’s United in Keewatin, ON
- **Jennifer Prince**
is in ministry at Metropolitan United in London, ON

2023 by the Numbers

11 LEARNING CIRCLES
Living Scripture, Integration 3,
Worship, Right Relations,
Ministry as Listening, Learning on Purpose,
UCC Admissions Orientation,
Integration 1, Integration 2,
Ministry as Storytelling, Spiritual Practice

24 DIACONAL MINISTRY students

3 CERTIFICATE students

18 CONTINUING STUDIES students

20 FIELD PLACEMENTS

VOLUNTEERS

Mentors, Field Learning Facilitators, Council,
Committee, and Working Group Members,
Resource People

84

44% of volunteers are alumni

10% are students

49% are also donors

DONORS

6 are students

19 have taken courses at CCS in the past

145 are alumni

332

INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

Total Donations **\$175,311**

Average Donation **\$110**

60 people have included CCS in their will

41% of donations come from monthly

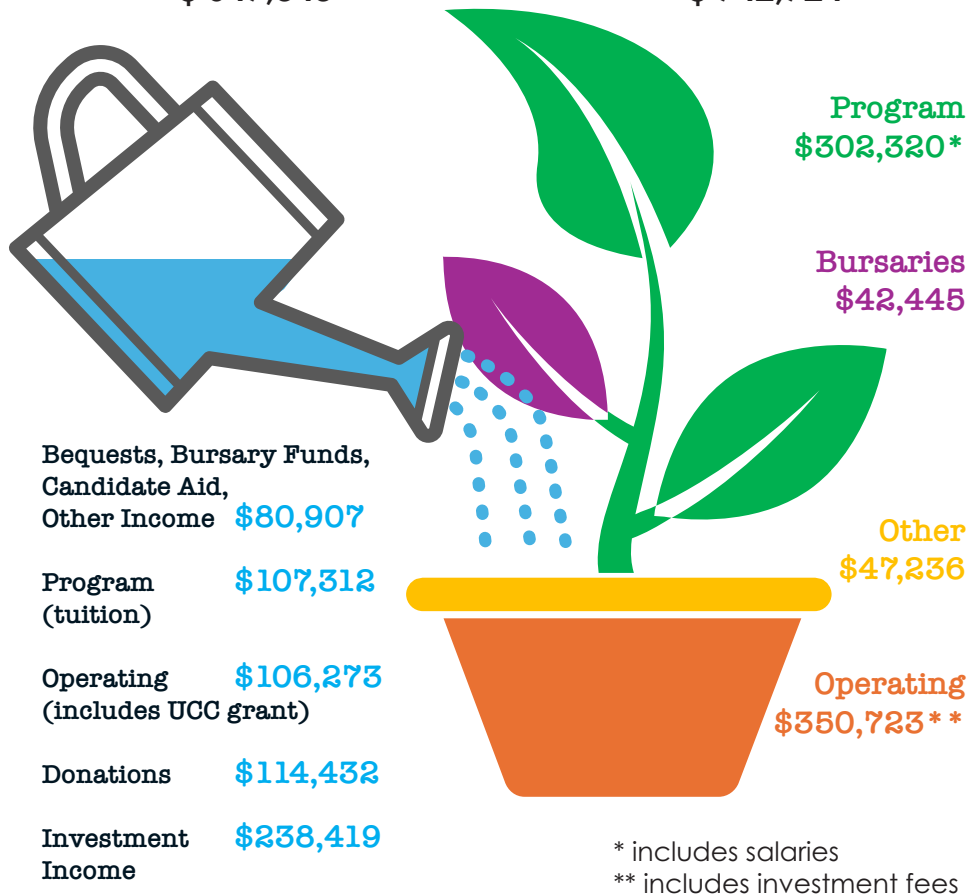
1591

FINANCIAL PICTURE

Once again, we present CCS's financial picture as a *picture* to show how money was used, as well as the financial needs of the school. A big thanks to all the donors and supporters who watered the plant and kept it growing with your financial dedication. Also with this picture, you will see the Centre has faced challenges in generating income. We are grateful to have the Endowment Fund to keep the books balanced. But the practice of drawing more than the interest generated from this fund has negative implications for the Centre's future wellbeing. You have a role in making CCS a vital place of teaching and learning, by promoting the school and our courses, spreading the news of events, and inviting others to support CCS. The goodwill and faithful stewardship of people like you, who value CCS's vision and mission, is a gift that makes CCS a key player in the world of theological learning.

Total **INCOME** for 2023
\$ 647,343

Total **EXPENSES** for 2023
\$ 742,724



Accessibility is Equity

by Alcris Limongi, CCS Program Staff

Last year I experienced severe sight difficulties due to aggressive and fast-growing cataracts. It was a learning moment for all of us. CCS students and staff went out of their way to help me do my work and fully participate in learning circles. Students provided large print versions of agendas for their student-led sessions. Ceiling lights were toned down and screen backgrounds were changed to black. Rides were offered when I could not drive. I felt cared for and valued in community.

Accessibility means something different depending on who you are and what you need. There is no such thing as a “level playing field”.

At CCS we are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We attempt to provide support and accommodations based on individual students’ different needs. We wanted to hear from our students if our commitment translates into their experience. How accessible is CCS? Are we providing the support that students need to feel fully part of this co-learning community?

Some things we heard that we’re doing well:

- Checking in with students on a regular basis
- Asking what students need for their learning
- Creating space for students to share their experiences and challenges
- Assisting where technologies, such as poorly designed online forms, are a barrier
- Connecting students with resources
- Providing flexibility with deadlines when needed
- Being kind and compassionate
- Honoring where students are at
- Asking what we could be doing better
- Being open to feedback



Wenh-In Ng, the 2023 Companion of the Centre, is a minister, educator, trailblazer, and advocate for anti-racism and interculturalism.

Check out the CCS website for more about Wenh-In.



Alcris and the Spiritual Practice 2023 learning circle

Some suggestions we heard:

- When sharing visual content (slides, video), especially online, describe what people are seeing. Don’t assume everyone can read the text or see the pictures.
- Have a quiet space readily available for anyone experiencing sensory overload.
- Pay attention to how online interfaces (such as CCS’s Moodle platform) interact with assistive technologies.
- Have some toys and alternate ways of connecting to topics.
- Make provisions for physical accessibility. (CCS has a ramp to the main floor, but stairs to the second floor.)
- Provide supports for people whose first language is not English.
- Actively recruit more people of different abilities, more people of different cultures, more people of colour.
- Perhaps there could be a staff specifically tasked with diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Advocate for inclusion and equity in the rest of the church.

Everyone needs to feel heard, noticed, and respected. The ongoing work of improving accessibility benefits everyone.



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