



CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Imagine Church Differently

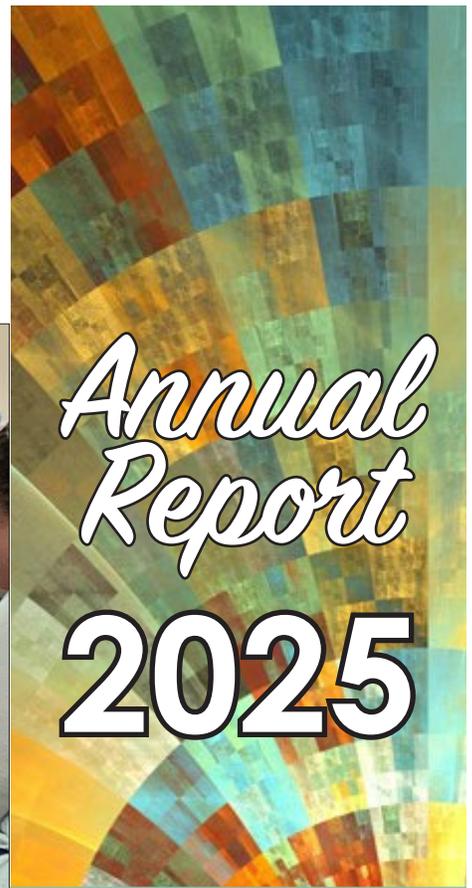


Image: CCS students chat with Companion Ann Naylor.

It Takes A Village

It takes a village to raise a child. The proverb is one that is found in numerous African cultures, especially among the Igbo and Yoruba peoples of Nigeria. The sentiment finds expression across cultures: in the African diaspora, in the Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the USA, in Pacific Islanders and in ancient Jewish wisdom. The proverb expresses collective responsibility: a child thrives because different people with necessary gifts and graces collaborate towards the best outcome.

In 2025 the Centre for Christian Studies drew upon the wisdom and skills of its village, and on the principle of collaboration which is intrinsic to diakonia. The regular cycle of learning circles continued, with collaboration embedded in the pedagogy, and all our students live the language of collaboration in their community placements.

The village which is Central Council received new leadership as Karlene

Kimber and Ian McLean assumed the roles of co-chairs, and have worked collaboratively with the council, staff, the HR committee and other volunteers to ensure the work progresses in a good way.

The CCS staff village saw some movements during 2025. Cheryl Thiessen, office administrator, retired in June; Gwen McAllister completed her contracted time as Interim Development Coordinator in December, and Marcie Gibson happily relinquished the Interim Principal role in October, returning to her role as Program Staff. Robyn Cruz started as Finance and Administrative Coordinator in July, and I joined the CCS village as the new Principal for Leadership and Development in November.

Collaboration was at the heart of exploring the possibilities of deeper partnerships with other theological institutions, one of the recommendations of the 2024 Strategic Plan. Led by a CCS working group, deep and meaningful

discussions were held with two such institutions, then town hall meetings were held with alumni, students, and wise elders, then more meetings with the institutions.

The hope is that the next steps in this collaborative venture will happen by Spring of 2026, ushering in a new era of collaboration, in a different iteration of the village, with Diaconal ministry at the heart of it all.

Grateful to be in the village,

Marlene Britton
CCS Principal



FINANCIAL PICTURE

It takes a village to raise a leader...

Total **EXPENSES** for 2025
\$ 769,814



Making the Difference

Years ago the supporters of the Centre for Christian studies made a commitment. They knew that a school devoted to diaconal values of justice, compassion, and transformation was going to need some cushioning to be sustainable enough to form faith leaders for generations to come. So they contributed to an endowment fund. (CCS actually has *two* endowment funds; a general endowment fund to bolster the ongoing operations of the school and a bursary fund to help students in need access diaconal education.)

Thanks to all those donors of the past, and to the 1997 sale of the school's property in Toronto, CCS established a fund with an initial capital of 1 million dollars, the interest from which could be used to support the ongoing work of the Centre. CCS draws 5% annually, which seems like a safe amount to withdraw without depleting the initial investment too much. If you look at the financial picture above, the investment income shown there includes interest from the endowment. It's a big part of what keeps us going.

You'll also notice that the school's total income last year (from tuition, donations, etc.) is less than its total expenses, so, as in previous years, additional draws were made from the endowment fund to make up the difference. Not ideal, and we are looking at various strategies to bump up our income. But in the meantime, we are deeply grateful for all those donors and past stewards of CCS's resources who made a difference by creating a fund to ensure that diaconal education could continue for years to come.

2025 by the Numbers

- 11** LEARNING CIRCLES
Ministry as Community-building;
Intercultural Leadership for Education Ministry (with Emmanuel and St. Andrew's);
Integration 3, Worship; Grief & Loss;
Ministry as Listening; Learning on Purpose;
Integration 1; Integration 2;
Power & Privilege; Health, Pain & Trauma
- 28** DIACONAL MINISTRY students
- 2** CERTIFICATE students
- 12** CONTINUING STUDIES students
- 18** FIELD PLACEMENTS
- 125** VOLUNTEERS
Mentors, Field Learning Facilitators,
Council, Committees and Working Groups,
Resource People

CCS in the World

Diaconal ministry is often described as being the church in the world, bridging the spaces between congregation and community. In a paper that Principal Marlene Britton recently wrote as part of CCS's exploration into deeper partnership with other theological schools, she describes diaconal ministry as "where the rubber hits the road."

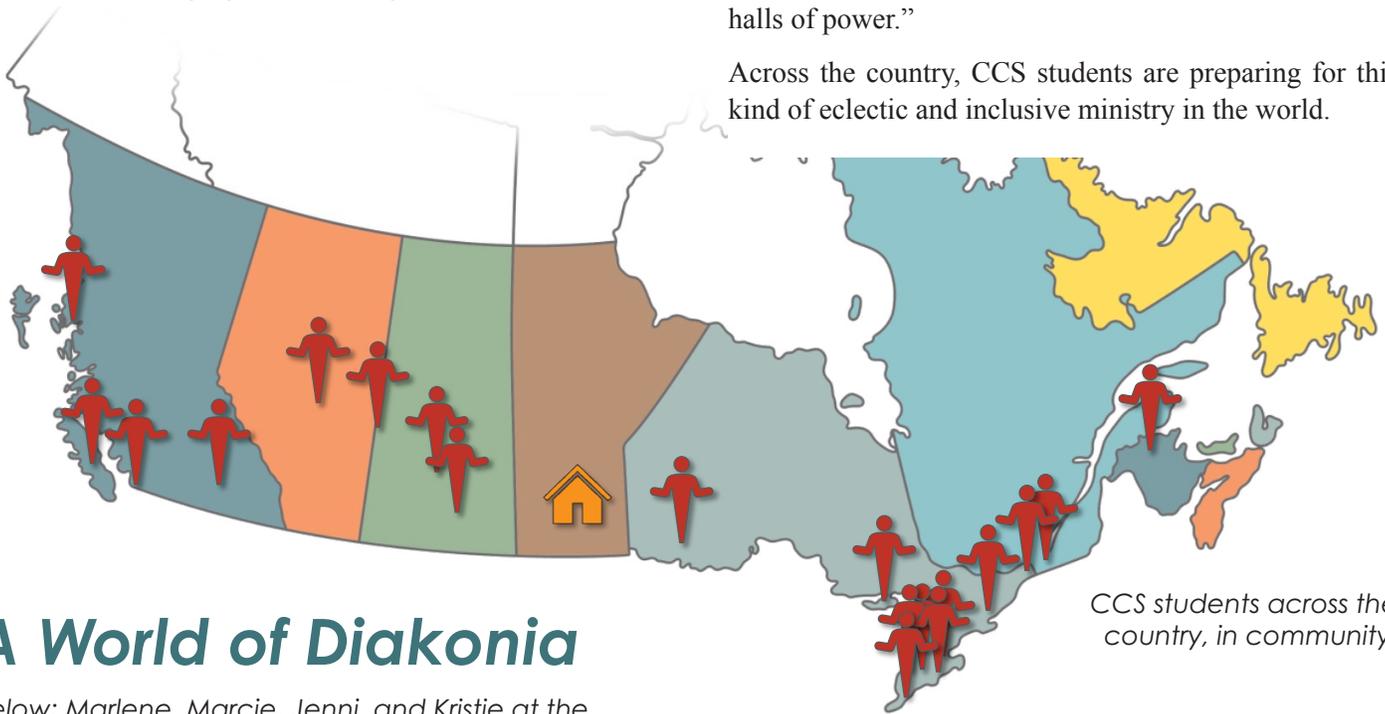
"Jesus' miracles were often done in the context of community," she says, "gathered in the temple for worship, healing the wounded in the public square, sharing space as they walked from place to place or communed together in the open spaces of creation. Contemporary diakonia seeks to be present with the gospel to the same kind of community that surrounded Jesus; one that is very eclectic and inclusive."

In 2025, CCS students engaged the world through their field practice. For some this meant developing their ministry skills within a congregational setting. For others, field meant

working in a friendship centre, care home, university chaplaincy, cultural education centre, thrift store, or prison. Our students come from all across Canada, and through their field practice they learn to engage and ground themselves in the specific concerns of their local context.

"Deacons chosen by the apostles had the responsibility of taking care of the widows, making sure that those who needed food and other practical services were provided for – where the rubber hit the road," Marlene notes. "By doing this they raised the consciousness of the whole community about needs which might not have otherwise been acknowledged. In our contemporary setting, diakonia is raising consciousness, both in the gathered community and in the public square, around the issues that are at the cutting edge of modern society... The work ranges from responding to the immediate needs of people lacking the basics for survival, working as allies in coalitions trying to reshape the narrative, to speaking truth to those in the halls of power."

Across the country, CCS students are preparing for this kind of eclectic and inclusive ministry in the world.



CCS students across the country, in community.

A World of Diakonia

Below: Marlene, Marcie, Jenni, and Kristie at the DIAKONIA World Federation in Tanzania



DIAKONIA World Federation held its quadrennial assembly in Moshi, Tanzania in 2025. Two CCS students - Jenni Krall and Kristie Pilling - attended the gathering as part of their Global Perspective Experience. They were accompanied by at-the-time-interim-Principal Marcie Gibson and soon-to-be-Principal Marlene Britton. The World Assembly, held for the first time in Africa, was a unique opportunity to meet and connect with diaconal ministers from all over the globe.

"It was a joy to accompany students' learning up close," says Marcie, "to visit and hear about other diaconal formation programs, and to recognize both the continuity and distinctiveness in our approaches."

2025 DIACONAL MINISTRY GRADS



Lisa Leffler
is working at
Parkminster United
in Waterloo, ON



Letitia Berger
is in ministry at
Aldergrove United
in Aldergrove, BC



Hyerim Park
is in ministry at
Westminster United
in Humboldt, SK



Lynda Dickson
is in ministry at
Sanctuary on 6th
in New Westminster, BC



Lisa Byer-de Wever
is in ministry at
Merging Waters
United in Ste Anne
de Bellevue, QC



2025
Companion
of the Centre,
Ann Naylor,
is a diaconal
educator and
former Program
staff at the
Centre for
Christian Studies.

Check out the
CCS website
for more about
Ann.



At the end of 2025 it was announced that CCS was among the United Church theological schools collectively awarded a \$9M grant from the Lilly Endowment. This fund will be used for a project reimagining theological education across the UCC-affiliated schools. Reimagining is something CCS is good at! Watch for innovative and collaborative work made possible by this grant in the year(s) to come.

*It
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**The Centre for
Christian Studies**
60 Maryland Street
Winnipeg, MB, R3G 1K7
204.783.4490
info@ccsonline.ca
www.ccsonline.ca