

ESQUIMALT UNITED CHURCH COMMUNITY OF FAITH PROFILE

February, 2025

(This document was compiled with congregational input as we prepared to hire our present ministers.)

Here's how some members describe our faith community:

- Warm welcome, people feel a part of the community quickly
- Music (humour, hymn choice, good integration with service, uplifting, joyful singing)
- Involvement opportunities
- Unpretentious
- Respect for diversity / change
- Inclusiveness
- Children's Ministry
- Connections with people / Rainbow Kitchen
- Authenticity of people
- Highly recommended
- Proximity/physical location
- Strong lay participation / opportunities to use individual gifts
- People and their stories – receive support from church family
- Sense of belonging
- Theological openness
- Diversity
- Spiritual/social warmth
- Progressive/searching growth
- Time for possibilities to unfold
- Congregation participation – lots of community involvement
- Worship is invigorating / personal growth
- Spirit is tangibly present (amplified by preaching, music, worship); we leave rejuvenated/full of hope
- Strong lay participation, culture of commitment/caring
- Feeling that we all can participate
- No one obviously “in charge” / flat governance structure
- Baseline commitment to social justice/inclusiveness
- Entrance point for everyone
- Loving community within structure/Holy Manners
- Moving past dogma into spirituality
- Sense of continuous pastoral care
- Forgiving congregation
- Perfect imperfection
- Growth, accepting perspectives, encourage participation
- Resilience where there are challenges but we are still carrying on
- Open to different ways of doing the service/prayers
- Environment (care for the planet); local effort to reduce junk

Our Mission Statement:

Esquimalt United Church is a congregation of the United Church of Canada that offers opportunities for spiritual nurture, learning, service and celebration as we to promote justice within community, both locally and beyond.

Our Vision is to be a church committed to:

- spiritual development
- being vibrant, accepting, inclusive and diverse;
- the integration of social justice and community outreach into our life as a faith community;
- being good stewards as we continue to value financial and environmental sustainability

Our Values are:

- to be welcoming to everyone
- to encourage questions and openness to change/transformation
- to respect all people
- to have respect for the earth and the environment
- to translate personal faith into action

Our Beliefs are consistent with the New Creed of the United Church of Canada.

We have been without a full-time minister since January, 2023. Since then, there have been periods of part time ministries interspersed with vacancies during which lay teams led all the worship services. Esquimalt United has a history of strong and plentiful lay leadership and values a collaborative relationship with ministry personnel.

The strong lay leadership is present every Sunday as the readings and Prayers of the People are done by volunteers. We have five lay worship teams that continue to lead services periodically and the congregation has expressed the desire to hear the variety of voices and experiences.

We have 4 teams [(Steam – Spiritual Team), Stamp (Property and Assets), Trustees, and Ministry & Personnel] that together look after matters of governance and they report to the Official Board. All groups within the church liaise through one of these teams.

We have a highly proficient and enthusiastic support staff that consists of a Administration and Facilities Coordinator, and Office and Rental Administrator, a caretaker and a music director.

Our adult congregation ranges in age from mid 90s to early 20s as well as a very small number of children, mostly pre-schoolers and a couple of elementary school age. Children are encouraged to take active roles in worship services. We have been engaging young adults from the broader UCC community to assist us with this endeavour.

Music plays an important role in the celebration of worship at EUC. Our music director is very accomplished and brings a thoughtful approach to creating a sacred acoustic space in which to encounter Spirit. He leads several musicians and singers who gather in the sanctuary to practice before worship - giving all congregation members the opportunity to learn new pieces and to join in familiar songs as they are practiced. The use of both traditional and contemporary music is enjoyed by young and old alike.

Many members who come to EUC live within 3km of the church building. But many others travel a long distance to be members of this church family. A considerable number either bike or walk to

church or use public transit. Since the closure of Pilgrim United Church in Colwood, there are several members who make the 15 km commute to attend EUC.

We post the video of our weekly reflections on our website (www.esquimaltunited.com) along with highlighting our ministries and posting upcoming events and news stories. Our Facebook page (Esquimalt United Church) is used to promote our activities as well as inspirational and thought-provoking articles in line with our stand on justice issues.

With a significant number of elderly members in the congregation, pastoral care plays an important role. A small trained group plus the minister does pastoral care visiting, with the Minister taking an active role. Pastoral Care Training has taken place and plans are underway to increase the number of participants.

Study and discussion groups are well attended. A group meets every Sunday afternoon to discuss their personal reading on progressive Christian topics, as well as studying a book together. Monday mornings a group meets to talk about topics raised during the previous day's service. A monthly Wisdom Circle comprised of both church and non-church members meets to share the challenges of daily living. A more recent addition has been the Death Café, an evening opportunity provided about every 6 weeks for people to talk about death and dying. This is well attended by the broader community with a few congregation members attending as well. A real openness exists for sharing our faith not only with other U.C. members but with other faith communities.

We are finding ways to reach into our community. We host family dances periodically where our music director gathers some of his local fellow musicians for a live band. Every month we hold a free toy and clothing exchange. Twice a year for the past several years we have hosted a 4 week 'Aging to Saging' workshop series for the larger community. The facilitators were originally funded through a UC Pro-Vision Fund Grant and now continues successfully by a Pay-it-Forward Donation Method. Coffee break/refreshment sales at Buccaneer Days are great for fundraising, fellowship and being in the community. Walking in our local Buccaneer Days and Christmas Light parades as well as joining with the larger Victoria United Church presence in the Pride parade give us good exposure. We have a mutually beneficial relationship with the Rainbow Kitchen, an autonomous soup kitchen that rents our church hall and kitchen in order to serve up to 10,000 free breakfast and lunch meals every month. In the wider city we are supportive of Our Place, the U.C. Campus Ministry and Esquimalt Neighbourhood House. Support for the Mission and Service Fund is encouraged with monthly M&S stories during worship and we consistently exceed our yearly budgeted goals.

Another recent venture is our participation in the Victoria Contemplative Network wherein we host twice monthly meditation opportunities as well as workshops on learning to meditate.

The EUC Justice Team is a small, committed group advocating for social and environmental justice. Working as much as possible in partnership with other church and community organizations, they advocate for Indigenous rights, a just peace in the Middle East, a sustainable environment, and support for the vulnerable in the local community. Methods include letter-writing campaigns, presentations to Esquimalt Municipal Council, joining with others in walks and demonstrations, hosting all-candidates meetings, selling Zatoun products to support Palestinian farmers, and making the congregation aware of justice-oriented events and programs. Some members work in justice-oriented projects outside of the church, such as Madres de Nicaragua and Elders for Ancient Trees.

The church is located on four adjoining city lots. Our sanctuary was built in 1913 with an adjoining Christian Education building built in 1964. The buildings are structurally sound but require continuing maintenance. A church vegetable garden attracts the interest of neighbours and reflects our commitment to respect the earth and our environment. Fresh produce grown is used by the Rainbow Kitchen.

We have a variety of local organizations that rent our space for their community programming. These include AA groups, local clubs, and a Francophone Pre-School.

HISTORY

Originally established as a Methodist Church in 1911, the first services were held in the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, Esquimalt/Admirals corner. A decision was made to purchase property at the corner of Lyall St. and Admirals Road. The Esquimalt Naval and Military Church opened at that location on September 11, 1913.

In 1925 the congregation joined the United Church of Canada and served both the civilian and military communities until WWII when the Military appointed their own Chaplains.

From 1930 -33 ministry was shared with James Bay United Church. From 1933-54 the church was served by Supply Ministers and full time Ministry began in 1954.

The congregation has fluctuated through the years. In a community where the largest employer is the military, it is expected that some of our young families will be with us for just two or three years and often the summer cadets are here for one short season. Other fluctuations are caused by lifestyle changes which see a majority of families with both parents working and many single parents. Recreational activities increasingly involve both the young and older folk during time that has been traditionally been set aside for worship creating challenges to meet spiritual needs outside the Sunday Worship service.

The most painful cause of loss of members is nearly always through disagreements. During most of our more than 100-year history, dedicated parishioners have worked, studied and worshipped in harmony together. These times of transition have helped us to look at and cherish our history, deal with our past differences and train leaders to recognize conflict, accept it as a natural part of our interaction with each other and to treat all ideas with respect.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a trying time for all, but, also an opportunity to pivot to electronic productions of services and communication via Zoom. Finally, there was the return to in-church worship, so that services and events are now available in person or electronically to people who are unwell, shut-ins and friends at a distance.

In recent years, however, the congregation has shown great resilience in maintaining spirituality and vibrancy to worship in community as we worked towards becoming a sustainable congregation. We have achieved that goal. We have been blessed with new young adherents, families with young children and transfers from other congregations.