

# CENTRAL OKANAGAN UNITED CHURCH

Newsletter —

# SUMMER '26





# CANADA CALLING

Central Okanagan United Church is delighted to welcome Kirsten Linford and daughter Riley to Kelowna as Kirsten begins her position as our new Community Minister!



## Kirsten Linford

Kirsten grew up in Boise, ID, with strong roots in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). After completing her Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, she returned to Boise to serve as Ministerial Intern in her home congregation while discerning a call to ministry. She completed her M.Div. at Pacific School of Religion before being called to pastor Westwood Hills Congregational Church (UCC) in Los Angeles. She began her ministry there on September 11, 2001 and served as Senior Minister for nearly 25 years. As LA is such a transient city with many congregants moving in and out over the years, she often says that the experience was akin to serving five or six different churches over that time!

As pastor of a small/medium sized church and preschool, Kirsten loved having the opportunity to do a little bit of everything - worship, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, working with children and youth, stewardship, leader development, and early childhood education. (It was never boring!) Relationship, collaboration, creativity, and experimentation have been core values of her approach to ministry.

**Kirsten is grateful to have been able to serve so deeply and so long in one place.**

Looking for a new challenge and a new adventure (and a new country), with the chance to do more focused ministry and work with a team, Kirsten is excited to be called as Community Minister at Central Okanagan United Church. She and her 12-year-old daughter, Riley, will be moving to Kelowna later this month. Kirsten looks forward to working with the congregation in outreach and justice, as we find our way forward together. Riley looks forward to getting a dog and having a minister who is not also her mother.

Kirsten resonates with these words of Kathy Davies: "All ministry is interim ministry now." She finds that this liminal experience offers us the greatest challenges and the greatest blessings for leadership in this time. We are, truly, making this up as we go along. So, we lean on the Spirit and go together.

# Volunteer Spotlight: *Zeljka*

I have been helping with the outreach program for 4 years. Mostly in the kitchen and a bit with plants and flowers.

When I started the kitchen was serving a hot meal to about 40 guests. That number has now quadrupled. My job is to plan the meals, figure out how to get all the ingredients, precook and finally pull the meal together on Mondays



On Mondays I'll prepare the cutlery, take out containers, trays, coffee service, count the desserts, etc. It's very important to have at least 160 meals, including vegetarian and gluten free.



Tuesday mornings for me start around 7:30am when I start pulling out all the food from fridges and heating it up. A whole bunch of volunteer helpers show up to finalize and do food service. Afterwards it's time to put things away and plan for next week.

I feel good when I'm able to feed people in need, with a hot meal.

Zeljka



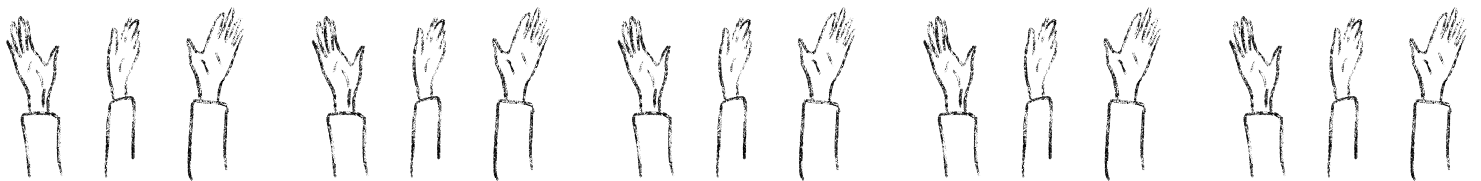
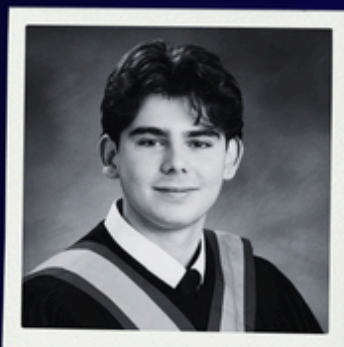
# GRADS 2026



## Happy GRADUATION



Class of 2026



# Class of 2026



*Congratulations, graduates!*



**William Campbell**

William, son of Luke and Arata, is graduating from Rutland Senior Secondary School this year and will be attending University of British Columbia Okanagan in September, where he plans to major in engineering.

**Sophia Chiasson**

Sophia, daughter of Mike and Frances Chiasson, graduated from grade 12 at Kelowna Secondary School. In the fall, she will be attending the University of Waterloo in Architectural Engineering and hopes to continue to pursue her love of mathematics and design. As well as her degree, Sophia hopes to join the Waterloo Dance team to continue to pursue her love and passion for dance in this next stage of her life. She would like to thank her family, friends, teachers and coaches, as well as the church community, who have loved and supported her.



**Will Marentette**

Will, grandson of Michel and Susanne Marentette, is graduating from Grade XII in Pickering. He will attend U of T, Rotman School of Business this Fall.

### **Natasha McCrindle**

Natasha, niece of Tanya Burke & Rudi Seethaler, Graduated from Carleton University in Ottawa with a Bachelors of Engineering in Electrical Engineering. She has plans to work in power generation once she has taken some time off this summer.



### **Kenton Wood**

Kenton, grandson of Linda Gilmour. Graduating class of 2026 from KSS. Future plans are as a fire fighter. He has been selected as a Junior Firefighter by the BC Wildfire Service to help battle forest fires this summer, and has successfully completed CPR and medical/paramedic courses. We are proud of your endeavours so far and wish you good luck with your future goals. .



### **Yota Shiozaki**

Yota is graduating from Rutland Senior Secondary School. He is going to have a gap year, and as soon as he get Canadian permanent residency, he hopes to enroll in college.

Yota in Grade 8 when he first arrived in Canada!





### Rowan Cyr

Rowan is the grand daughter of Ted and Liz Basisty and is graduating from grade 12 at Elgin Park Secondary School in South Surrey BC. Rowan is a musician, songwriter and singer and plans to pursue this into her future. All the best Rowan!

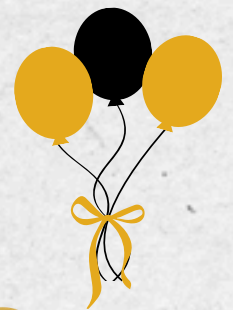
### Drayden Nowakowski

Drayden, grandson of Michel and Susanne Marentette, is graduating from Grade XII in Winnipeg and plans to take a gap year before pursuing post-grad.



### Kyler Neilson

Kyler, great-grandson of Judy Valks, graduated with honors from Victoria School in Edmonton and he will be working at The Keg for a year before pursuing a career as a chef and going to culinary school.



Congratulations!

# Outreach

Summer 2026

“Using my skills at outreach is also paying it forward for all those times that people have helped me.” - Zeljka

For the Community Ministry Outreach report in this newsletter, we decided to let our volunteers do the talking. 67% of our overall volunteers for Outreach have ties to Central Okanagan United Church while 33% have no ties to the church. Our current list of Tuesday morning volunteers shows over 45% have no ties to COUC, so we asked them to tell us how they found out about our Outreach program and/or why they volunteer. Some of their responses are below and they truly reveal what our Outreach program is all about.

Volunteering at the United Church is such a beautiful experience because of the people here. Everyone is truly so happy to help those in our community who are homeless or hungry. You will notice right away that the staff and volunteers always have a smile on their face. It creates such a warm and positive atmosphere for everyone who walks through the door. They are always happy to help with any tasks - no matter how big or small. Seeing this kindness every day makes me feel very proud to be part of this team. It is a joy to serve alongside people who care so much about others.

**Tony**

I found out about the United Church Tuesday morning food program while attending A Christmas Bell Choir event at the Church. On Tuesdays, I really enjoy the diversity of people that participate in the program, both as attendees and the volunteer crew. It gives me the opportunity to learn about languages and cultures of marginalized people, refugees and retirees. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. - **Hanna Miller**

Volunteering for me helps with my mental health. It's also a meaningful way for me to stay connected to both my faith and community. Outreach goes beyond providing support; it involves building relationships and creating a welcoming environment where individuals feel recognised and valued. Being part of this, even in a small role, is deeply grounding. I volunteer because it's a reminder that impact doesn't always come from "big" gestures, but it comes from showing up, consistency and compassion. I look forward to it, not just for what I can give but for what I gain such as perspective and gratitude.

- **International Student at Okanagan College**

I have been with the united church for 3.5 years and I have found an amazing community of people within - full of heartfelt service, grace, compassion and light. My world would not be half as bright without them and this makes my volunteering a pleasure to do - in Jesus' name. - **Roxy**

“I have found an amazing community of people within - full of heartfelt service, grace, compassion and light.”  
- **Roxy**

I get a lot of satisfaction from cooking & feeding people. Being the eldest child, I was expected to help in the kitchen since I was 10 years old. Now in my life I have fewer loved ones to feed. For me, using my skills at outreach is also paying it forward for all those times that people have helped me. And it doesn't hurt when many of our guests come up to say thank you for the hot meal. - **Zeljka**

# Outreach

Continued...

“Every Tuesday, the moment we open the doors to the long lineup of guests, something magical happens..”

- Julius

I moved to Kelowna 2 decades ago, basically retired, but retirement was boring so I started working part-time at HR Block doing taxes, which I continued to do until 2020 COVID. That's when I hear about the CVITP tax program, and I joined in 2021. Seeing that the tax needs in the community didn't just stop at the end of April, I asked COUC if they would allow me to continue using their space 1 day a week throughout the year and they said yes.

This year CRA was down for the month of February, and not wanting to sit around at home for a month, I asked if I could help out at the Tuesday food program, they again said yes. So, each Tuesday I arrived to help in whatever capacity was required, kitchen, bagging, bread, desserts, or clean up.

Knowing how many individuals are not as fortunate as many of us are, be they new immigrants, widows, young people, all struggling with the expenses of everyday life. Uplifted by realizing that I was fortunate enough to be able to give my time, experience and belief that although not my "brother's keeper" I was a helper. Seeing so many volunteer to this worthy community cause gives hope that we are not in such "me first, me only" society.

I am not a member of COUC, and yet I am.

**Suzan Sutton**

I enjoy volunteering at COUC because I can make a difference. The more opportunity I have to do it, the more meaningful it becomes. Every Tuesday, the moment we open the doors to the long lineup of guests, something magical happens. From each eye contact, each reciprocal smile, and each heartfelt 'thank you' a combination of joy and gratitude fills the room. It makes me feel more purposeful and energized. I knew this was not merely about feeding people nutritionally but spiritually. For instance, by asking, "how are you Emma, Crystal, John, Buck, it is so good to see you again, what would you like to eat today?" ... this good energy increased. One day, I showed up with a fractured elbow yet still carried on with basic tasks, as if I had no injury.

I realized such service can only be provided by a solid team. The hard work of other volunteers funnelled into a synergetic performance by good leaders (church staff) is inspiring and enlightening. Indeed, because I also realized that beyond our mutually sustained satisfaction even with our guests, each and every person was but an instrument in a Divine design. So thank you Jayne for letting me be part of it, benefiting from it while inspiring others to pay it forward.

**Julius**

# FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT



## QUARTER 1

The financial results of Quarter 1 of 2026, were very positive.

Our total revenues for the first quarter were 30% higher than expected due mainly to much higher investment revenue. Total expenses were within 1% of budget, which was also good to see.

Q1 2026	Actual	Budget
Revenues	209,059	158,610
Expenses	265,857	263,160
Operating Loss	-56,798	-104,550

The dividend, interest and capital gain revenue on our investments came in at \$64,050 after fees, and we had projected net revenue of \$15,000 for the period. While this \$49,000 increase in net revenues is a very favourable result, market volatility and future returns remain a concern, and we still need to look for additional revenue sources.



## MOVING INTO QUARTER 2, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ITEMS OF NOTE.

First, the Finance Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the Okanagan Japanese United Church (OJUC) for their generous donation of \$50,000 toward the purchase of chairs for the sanctuary. This donation is greatly appreciated and we are very grateful to the members of OJUC for thinking of COUC. For years, OJUC met in the former First United Church and, while the group is largely inactive at this stage, their devotion to the work of the United Church of Canada is still strong. Thank you, OJUC!

# CONTINUED...

The first payment of the new Pro-Vision grant has been received and is being used to support the Outreach program and provide more sessions on social justice issues, like the film screening and presentation on residential schools held on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The two part-time employee positions created in the first Pro-Vision grant are also continuing so Andrea (program lead) and Fawaz (Arabic translator) will be with us for another year.



In addition, another grant application has been submitted to the Seeds of Hope - The United Church of Canada Foundation to help support refugees and newcomers from Sudan and South Sudan as they gather to build community in their new Canadian homeland, and to provide them a place to meet in safety, enjoy fellowship, heal from past traumas and develop skills that enable them to take part in Canadian life. The Community Ministry team at COUC is committed to supporting these individuals on their journey.

## EXPENSES

As to the expense side, in addition to the usual ongoing expenses, we have larger amounts to consider like replacing the roof on the hall and other much-needed renovations and repairs.



## WANT TO HELP WITH FINANCE?

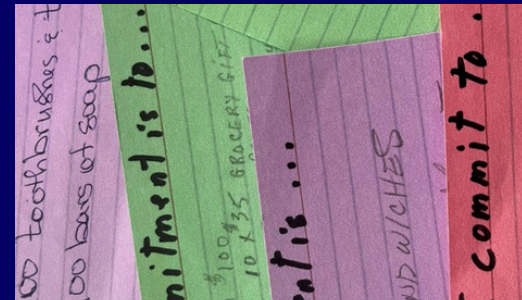
The Finance Committee is always looking for volunteers so if you would like to be involved in any way, please let the office know.

# These are a few of my favourite 100 Year Things!

On June 10, 2025 we marked the United Church's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and throughout this year we have been celebrating as we have honoured our past and looked to the future! This has included several anniversary-themed worship services and events including a High Tea in May, our Anniversary Service with guest alumnus ministers in June, Trivia Night in August, a CGIT Vespers service in December, and several wonderful organ recitals throughout the year featuring our 100-year-old Casavant organ that was a gift from the women of the congregation at the time of Church Union in 1925, the most recent of which "Synergy and Celebration" was held on June 13, 2026. What a year of celebrating it has been!



One of the projects we undertook to celebrate our centenary and all the United Church of Canada has meant to us was to challenge congregants to pledge "100 somethings" in honour of the church's anniversary. Many people pledged an extra gift of money, while others pledged things like 100 sandwiches and 100 toothbrushes and bars of soap for outreach, ten \$35 grocery gift cards, to bring something for the pantry each time they came to help on a Tuesday, to donate all their spare change for a month, a hundred dimes, a hundred prayers. If you were one that stepped up to this challenge, thank you and bless you for your generosity! And may the church continue to benefit from all our gifts of time, talent and offering so that it may be for future generations what it has been for us—a place of friendship, learning and spiritual growth!





# PACIFIC MOUNTAIN REGION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Prepared by your elected COUC Representatives:  
Jayne Brooks, Susan Sullivan and Pat Totton

The 2026 AGM was held at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops from June 3 to 7, and it was a busy few days. This report is a summary only and if you would like more details on any aspect, please feel free to contact any one of us. Cheryl Perry and Ryan McNally also attended for COUC.

The theme of The Shape of Hope was appropriate for these times, and throughout the AGM we heard and saw so many positive examples of hope for the future of the Church.

The AGM left everyone uplifted and very hopeful for the future of our individual Communities of Faith and for the United Church of Canada overall.



## *Celebrations of Ministry*

At the worship service on Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, two individuals were ordained into Ministry and two individuals from other countries were admitted to Ministry in the United Church of Canada.

Looking toward the future, the Office of Vocation reported that in the Region there are currently 31 individuals already on the candidacy pathway with 17 candidates (plus 1 on pause) and 13 serious inquirers. Of course, Ally Phillips and Phillip Breden would be two of those on the candidacy path. Both COUC's Ryan McNally and Kirsten Linford were recognized as new arrivals in the Region.



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## THE SHAPE OF HOPE



with Keynote Speaker, Anna Carter Florence

### **Keynote Speaker**

Rev. Dr. Anna Carter Florence, an ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Peter Marshall Professor of Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, was the guest speaker. She is the author of several books including *Preaching as Testimony* and *A is for Alabaster*, as well as many articles, chapters, posts, and lectionary commentaries. She was a very engaging speaker and gave everyone present something to think about.

### **Worship Services**

Aside from the main worship service on Sunday morning, short but powerful worship services were held throughout the AGM, often with stories of hope and growth and special events from different congregations in the Region. As always, the music was incredible.

Three of the five band members were ordained clergy and the music was jazzy and upbeat with keyboard, bass guitar, drums, sax, and strong vocals. The singing and participation in the room was exhilarating and very moving.

### **Other interesting thoughts from the AGM:**

- God has not given up on us!
- Stewardship is everything we think, say, and do after we say we believe.
- We, as the church, are not preserving a legacy. We are Building a Future!
- Hope is a trust that God is not finished with us yet and will be with us in the future.
- Declutter – keep the main thing the main thing
- Pray hard – pray the future church into existence
- Just go do it – do the Jesus stuff as no one else is
- Discipleship is core
- The Bible arose from the people and belongs to the people, so give it back to the people

In her first presentation she talked about *The Shape of Hope in a Storm*, which was based on Acts 27 where Paul was sailing to Rome and got shipwrecked in a storm. Some points:

- Embrace the shipwreck and be the shipwreck that you truly are
- Embrace the truth that you have a lot of cargo (baggage) that you need to let go. Life and survival are more important than cargo
- Embrace the maxim that no one can be left behind or lost
- Embrace the holy and know it will be where you least expect it so let everything else go
- A crisis always leads to clarity of what is important



## **The Business of the Meeting**

Reports were received from all of the committees and groups within the Region.

The Finance report of the Region was very positive and the Region is in a strong financial position.

The Brenda Fawkes Bursary Fund was established to assist new and continuing theology students.

The United Church of Canada's Chief Finance Officer gave a welcome from the National Church.

A presentation on how UCC in 1988 began ordaining all gender identifying folk was very moving and close to home.

Two new Executive members were elected to keep the Executive number at seven.

## **Proposals**

Three proposals were presented at the meeting. No action was taken on one of them due to lack of clarity, and it may reappear again at the next AGM.

The second was for the Region to receive the Kairos Palestine II "A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide" document, endorse it for study, reflection, and action by the Region and by Communities of Faith.

The third was for the Region to become a signatory to "A Joint Call: BC must recommit to meaningful implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act" and encourage Communities of Faith to also do so and to engage in Truth and Reconciliation initiatives.

*The new president of the Pacific Mountain Regional Conference is an incredible young woman – just 23 years old with the composure and grace of someone much older. She has already spent the past several months touring around the province visiting many communities of faith and talking to congregation members.*



*Left to Right:  
Rev. Dr. Simon LeSieur, Outgoing President  
Thea Sheridan-Jonah, Incoming President  
Treena Duncan, Executive Minister  
Rev. Cari Copeman-Haynes, Vocational Minister*



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# LAY LEADERS SUPPORT GATHERING

## CREATING A CULTURE OF COOPERATION

### JUNE 3 – JUNE 4 2026

The Lay Leaders Support Gathering was held in the Kamloops United Church.

Rick Roberts led a stimulating conversation on “Attraction and Retention of Volunteers”. Social Worker, Nan Maxson, led an interesting discussion called “Exploring Conflict” within the church and beyond its walls.

We were introduced to Thea Sheridan-Jonah, President Elect for the Region, who talked about her findings from touring the Region visiting with many Communities of Faith, and held a Q&A session.

Rev. Jenny Carter, from Salmon Arm First Community, spoke about transforming their United Church building into a Community Hub, and the importance of community partnerships.



Aftermath of fire on August 13, 2024



Treena Duncan, Executive Minister, reintroduced the “Towards 2035” report. COUC is currently in the process of determining the role of our church in the future. Treena suggested we consider: If we were starting the church today in our community, what would we create? What does faithful ministry look like in this time and place? and Where is the Spirit at work beyond our walls and ahead of our plans? She says we need to be bold and dream big; recognize that partnerships are the key; and determine how we can “Be” the church in the world. Our plans should consider depth, connections and sustainability. Participants left feeling encouraged that, if we follow God’s leadership, we will design the future church.

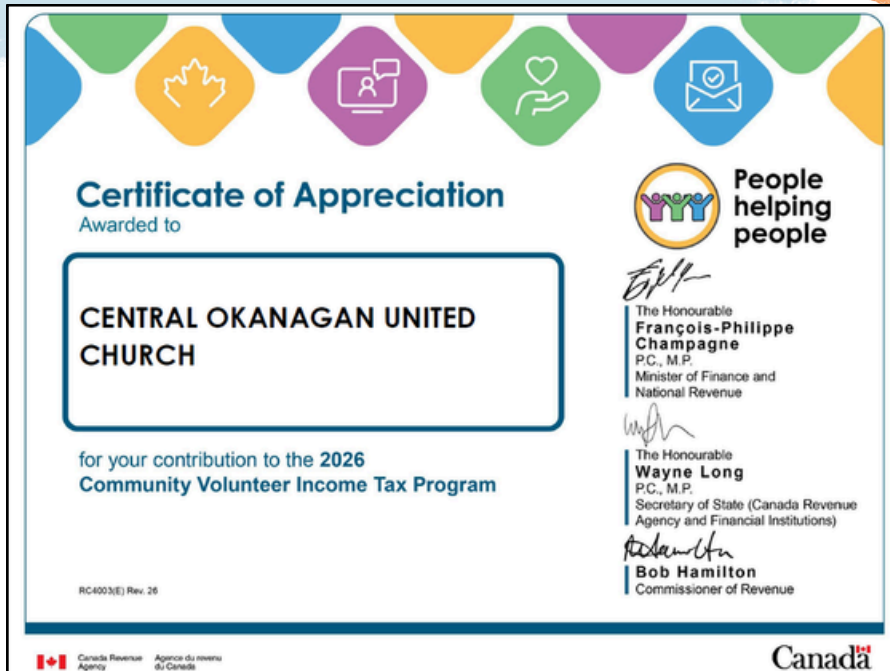
We would like to offer a special thank you to Kamloops United Church for their hospitality. Following a fire in 2024 they had the opportunity to rebuild to meet their future, not their past, needs. We explored their refurbished space and considered what COUC could do with our properties if we could start again to build for the future. The volunteers wore bright yellow tee shirts, so it was very obvious who to ask if we had questions. We felt very welcome in their space.



Kamloops United Church’s new sanctuary which was reopened on December 7, 2025

# 2026 TAX-FILING SEASON

Thank you!



A big thank you to our five volunteer tax preparers who worked at our tax clinics in April and May:

**Suzan Sutton,  
Henriette Faber,  
Barbara Duffy,  
Jagdish Goel,  
and Karen Haddrell.**

The group divided their time between Thursday mornings in the COUC church hall and Monday mornings at the Rutland Seniors Activity Centre; and Suzan also did returns for individuals from the Cottonwoods Care Centre, David Lloyd Jones Home, and Three Links Manor.

Together the volunteers prepared tax returns for hundreds of low-income individuals and families so they would receive the refunds, credits, and benefits to which they were entitled. In total, over 700 returns were completed and e-filed with CRA, and a lot of positive feedback was received from those who attended the tax clinics as they were incredibly grateful for the free assistance.

Also, a special thanks to Betty Richards for helping with coffee and cookie service some Thursday mornings.

From June 2026 through January 2027, COUC will still have Thursday morning tax services available for those who need assistance. Suzan and Karen have volunteered to keep that service running year round. The 2027 tax-filing season will have us running clinics again in March and April 2027 – another great service for members of our community, brought to you by the Community Ministry team at COUC.

# PHOTO GALLERY

A Vibrant Spring in and Around COUC!

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# SPRING

What a wonderful community we have!



Ed Turns 90!



Maundy Thursday



Women's Group High Tea



# THE ALLELUIA RINGERS 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CONCERT!



HERE'S TO THE NEXT 20 YEARS!

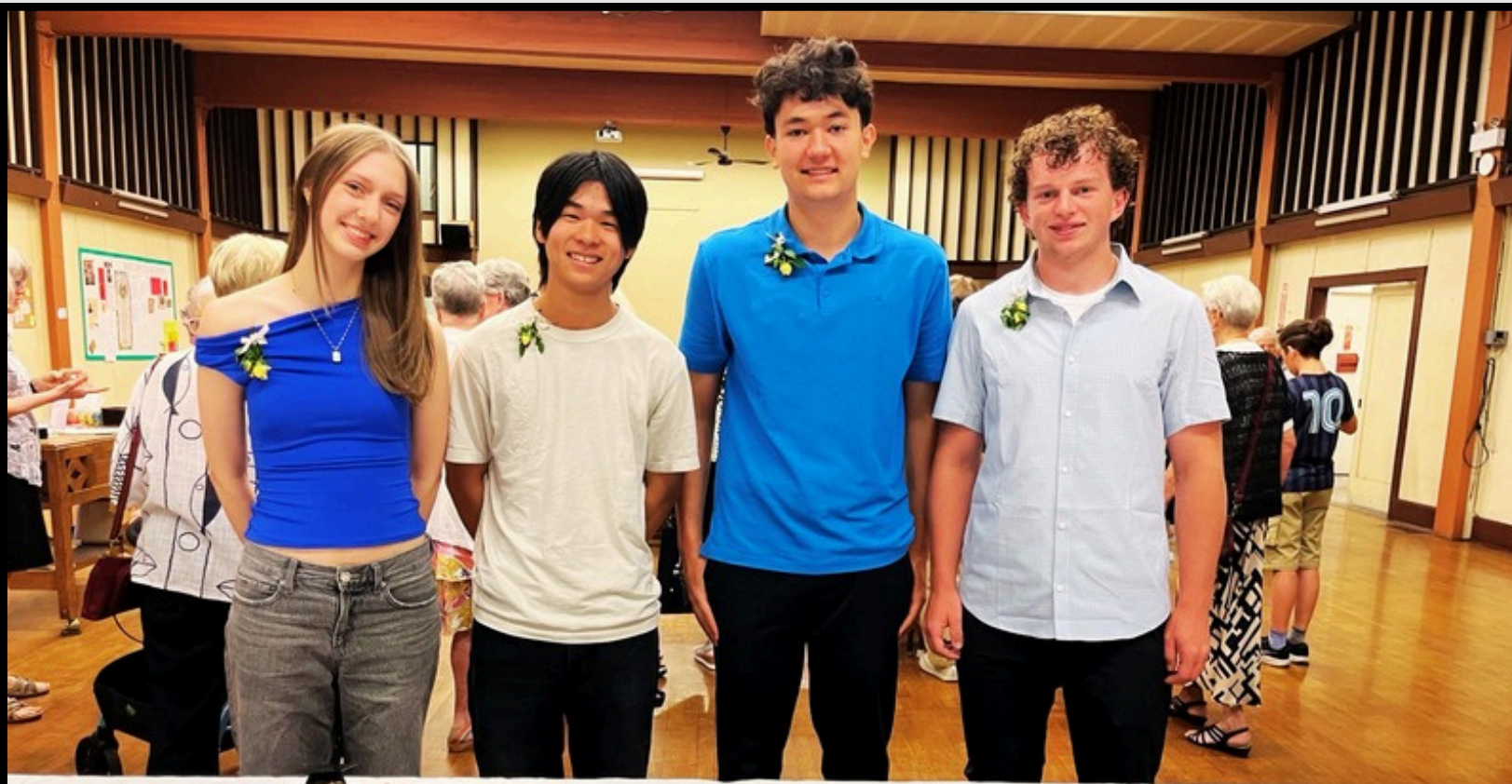
# THE ANNUAL YOUTH TRIP TO MABEL LAKE!



# COUC DOES PRIDE IN THE PARK!



# GRAD SUNDAY!



SYNERGY & CELEBRATION  
HISTORICAL ORGAN CONCERT  
WITH SPECIAL MUSICAL GUESTS!



L-R: ANDREW FRASER. AL SZELIGA, CHRISTINE MOORE,  
SANDRA FLETCHER & ANGELIQUE PO

# COUC

## Summer Notes



**Thrift Store: Closed July & August (Reopening Sept 1st)**

\*Clothing will be available during Outreach on Tuesday mornings in the Hall.\* Please, no donations during this closure

**SongShine: No SongShine July 6, 13 & 20th & Aug 3rd**

**Breathing Class: No Class July 9, 16 & 23rd**

**Choirs are on summer hiatus**

**Planned COUC website outage July 24-28 (approx)**

During the summer months our staff are away on vacation and training more than other times of year. Please call the office or make an appointment with staff to ensure availability.

# CENTRAL OKANAGAN UNITED CHURCH

# Contact

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250 762 3311

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[centralokanaganunitedchurch.com](http://centralokanaganunitedchurch.com)

Office Open:

Mon - Thurs 9am - 12pm

Worship: Sunday 10am

Jazz Vespers: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month 5:15pm

Queer vespers: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month 6:00pm

