

Davenport Perth Community Ministry

A Community Ministry of the Shining Waters Region of the
United Church of Canada

Don't Look Back!

The year 2020, was a wilderness place. We longed to get back to the way it was and hoarded what we thought we might miss. While our leaders stated, "We are all in this together," the pandemic revealed the disparity of our lives and heightened how really different we are from each other, that not everyone is treated with the same respect, dignity and consideration.

Poor people did not create poverty. Homeless people did not create homelessness and sick people did not create the conditions necessary for disease to spread.

In our desire to see the end of this pandemic, we cannot look back to the way things were. Idit was the name given to Lot's wife, the woman who turned into a pillar of salt when she decided to look back at what she was leaving behind.

In a context of deeply inadequate options, encampments existed before the pandemic. We cannot look back to the times when so many people are still unhoused - the very existence of encampments is indicative of the failure to respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to adequate housing. In the midst of this pandemic, people joined these encampments over shelters where residents were unable to follow safe distancing. Housing was a need before the pandemic, housing is still a need in this pandemic and will still be so when the pandemic is over.

We cannot look back to warehousing our loved ones. We cannot look back and say that only the deserving should benefit. We cannot look back to saying that people are poor because they are lazy and that they have no jobs. Recognizing the systems that have benefitted some while keeping others in poverty should help us to see how interconnected we are. Recognizing our interconnectedness is what will bring us to our beloved community where everyone can meet their basic needs, live with dignity and can participate. We cannot reduce poverty by moving social assistance recipients to jobs that do not pay enough to live on.

We must join with many others to demand a guaranteed liveable income that will address the disparity of our lives and everyone is treated with the same respect, dignity and consideration.



Idit - Don't Look Back by macconlon

Blessings in the Year of Loss

DPCM's work in Community Development and Organizing, Pastoral Care, Networking and Advocacy in 2020 was challenged by the COVID protocols to socially distance. Weekly and monthly meetings remain necessary occasions to check-in with each other. The world has changed. The world has revealed what we felt was true but wanted to believe was not: Markets over morals; profit over people. Don't look back.

DPCM began the year with bright hopes of looking toward a year that would



Photo by Henry Chan, courtesy of Gardiner Museum

gather people together and bring them to seeing new possibilities. The exhilaration from the previous year's participation in the Gardiner Museum's Community Arts Space program held

so much promise for plans to re-create a street mural that got erased over time and to create another mural that inspired ecology. The excitement over meeting TUNM Staff at Family Camp at Five Oaks was to have a drum-making workshop and storytelling with seniors and young people. The emotions of participation in the Homeless memorials, the Strawberry Ceremony and the launch of the Cramper was to raise the hope of a community to safely housing all their members. Encampments that were visible before COVID became more visible during COVID. Their very existence is indicative of the failure to respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to adequate housing.



Our last in-person activity was hosting Olive Senior where she is seen here, reading her children's book, Boonoonoonous Hair to children at EarlyON Child and Family Centre. Later, she joined Bread and Bricks and discussed self esteem in embracing boonoonoonous hair.



On March 15, we could no longer hold in-person gatherings but we discovered other ways to gather. The key was to physically

distance, not socially distance, by visiting with each other outdoors, with masks on, telephoning each other, checking in regularly with each other and then came ZOOM, where our words became, "Can you hear me now?" and "Unmute yourself!"

DPCM-Bread and Bricks continued to meet on ZOOM in April, checking in and hosting workshops such as Andrew Costa's presentation on Wet'suwet'en, participated in the Homeless memorial and in a conversation with Arundhati Roy's "The Pandemic is a Portal."

Carlos Bernardes, who ran a monthly Pelham Rocks wellness recovery activity at Pelham Park Gardens, cancelled his March 28 activity. By connecting with the Rev. Alexa Gilmour from Windermere United Church, and with other west end churches, other friends and he found another way to gather and distribute food among the many residents who were shut in.



On October 18, Tina, DP Community Minister, led the liturgy service for the Shining Waters Celebration of Ministries Service, echoing the year's loss with the antiphonal theme: "Refuse to give death the last word."



On November 18, Tina was invited at a United Church of Canada Partner Council Exposure, presenting the church's work in Community Ministry. A partner from CREAS (*Centro Regional Ecuménico de Asesoría y Servicio*) remarked that what we face in Canada is very similar to what they also face in Argentina.

March 11 was the last meeting of Table 91 and we found that all resources meant for Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategies were diverted toward the City's response to COVID-19. From our gatherings, we told our stories in a letter to the Mayor and City Councillors on May 12. On June 9, we met with John Smith, Manager of Community Development for the City of Toronto on behalf of the Toronto Office for Recovery and Rebuild (TORR) and on September 24 we received a letter from Mayor John Tory encouraging us to stay engaged and continue to monitor the City's COVID-19 pandemic response and rebuilding efforts in the DP neighbourhood and beyond.

Lessons we learned in the year of loss: We yearn to return to this community, to see Anna or Marena's face in the morning telling us about the flower that just bloomed from underneath the indoor tree, smell the wonderful lunch that Marcela is preparing that Friday, hear the thump, thump, thump of Monica's Zumba classes, see the expectant eyes of a child waiting to get in the Centre, the eager members of Bread and Bricks.



TD-IV. In its fourth year, DPCM renamed Tasting Davenport Routes as **Tracing Gete-Onigaming** in consideration of the portage, the ancient routes that people took to get to this place. In view of the closures due to the COVID pandemic, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) made some flexibilities to its Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program and allowed our four CSJ participants to work part time outside of the summer months.

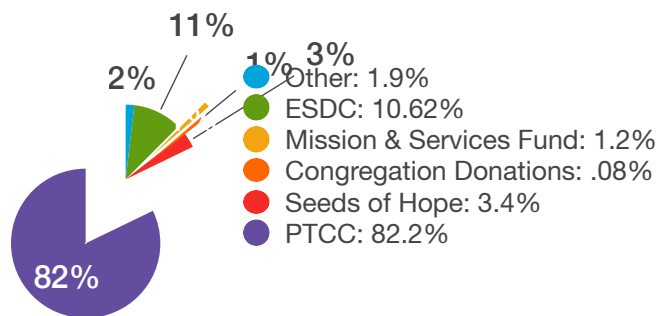
While celebrating Black History Month early in the year, we reconnected with the young artist Gillian Mapp who was the artist who created the mural on the west side wall underneath the bridge on Symington, just north of Dupont (*picture shown below*). Gillian is now part of Jamii Esplanade that wanted to collaborate with DPCM in the WIND project. This was one of many projects we planned but were abruptly ended in the time of COVID.

Tina is also a member of the Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Region and represents the region at the Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions.

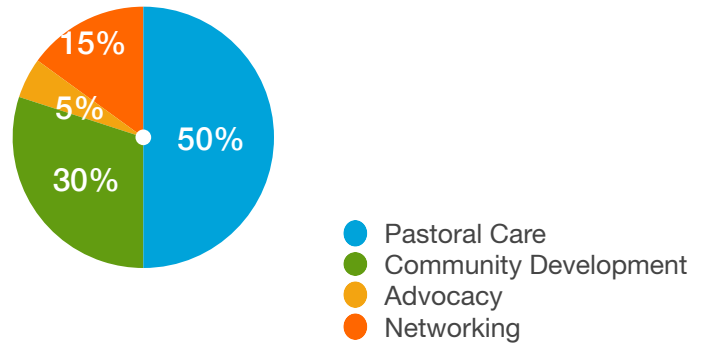
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 Henry Lu, Ayesha Meher and Tina Conlon.

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Community Ministries
Board Representative to the
DPCM Steering Committee

Contact

Dominique Brown, Administrative
 Coordinator, dominique.dpcm@gmail.com

Tina Conlon, Community Minister,
dpcommunityministry@gmail.com

Davenport Perth Community Ministry
 1900 Davenport Road, Toronto, ON M6N 1B7

416-654-3726

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 support of DPCM at [Canada Helps](https://www.canadahelps.org).