

2023 YAAY Report for 2024 Regional Meeting

2023 saw a complete return to in-person programming, with the YAAY committee's first major event, ZEEBU 2023, being held at Knox United Church in Brandon from February 18-20th. Face masks were mandatory for this event, however, these masks became optional for YAAY events by the end of the year. 31 participants and 22 young leaders attended ZEEBU 2023, and the theme for this event was "H.O.B.B.I.E.S.: How Our Bible Builds Important Extracurricular Spirit", with a focus on exploring how youth can practice spirituality through their passions.

Of course, a theme such as this gave youth the opportunity to try many different activities throughout the weekend, including Irish dance, sports, juggling, Dungeons and Dragons, Origami, watercolour painting, karaoke, calligraphy, board games, and puzzles! A special thank you as well to Elder Rev. Susie McPherson-Derendy who shared some teachings, and Sam Jackson who taught the youth Pow Wow Dancing!

The YAAY committee was proud to host our other retreat, ALF, at St. Mary's Road UC in Winnipeg from October 19th-22nd. The retreat's theme this time around was "Lost in Translation: the History of the Bible, How it has Changed through the Ages, and Whose Voices Are Missing". This theme allowed the worship team to incorporate perspectives from women, Indigenous peoples, and the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Theme-focused activities included a bible scavenger hunt, translating scripture, and studying the relationship between storytelling and different cultures. Special activities at ALF included swimming at St. James-Assiniboia Centennial Pool and participating in an Indigenous drum ceremony led by young people who had connected at Neechi Camp at Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre! Overall, 36 participants and 20 young leaders gathered to make ALF 2023 a truly special event!

Speaking of Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, four Indigenous and four non-Indigenous youth gathered there to participate in Neechi Camp from August 20-25th. The camp for this week was specifically titled "Mamawe Ota Askihk – Sharing Life Together Here on Earth". Activities that the youth participated in included ceremonial drumming, braiding sweetgrass, sewing ribbon skirts, making drums, scraping deer hides, cutting meat, harvesting wild rice, and horse riding, among many other things! A special thank you to SSSC, Elder Stan McKay and the rest of the adults, and finally the youth present for making Neechi Camp a resounding success!

The YAAY committee is pleased to announce the completion of the mural at Harrow UC in Winnipeg, a project over two years in the making. The mural was created in connection to reconciliation and features a turtle, an Indigenous elder, and the silhouettes of the 12 youth who spent a day working with the artists and actually painted themselves into the mural! An opening ceremony was held in May to celebrate this monumental achievement, where the artists, Jeannie White Bird and Charlie Johnson, were able to discuss the meanings behind the mural. Bannock, jam, berries, and tobacco ties were exchanged between Harrow United and those in the community present. Thank you to Jeannie and Charlie for their beautiful art, Harrow UC, the Winnipeg Foundation and the "Walking Together" grant team, the youth, and everyone else who worked hard to celebrate and contribute towards a future of reconciliation!

The YAAY committee met three times over the course of 2023. While we conducted a virtual meeting in January, we would like to send a thank you to St. Mary's Road UC and St. Charles Headingley UC who hosted our in-person meetings in May and October, respectively. Given that most of the committee's turnover takes place over the summer, it was especially great to hold these two meetings in person as it allowed the committee to say goodbye to those who have since moved on while also welcoming new faces!

Other happenings in the regions included Travelling Youth Group, which continued to meet in 2023. The Travelling Youth Group went to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in March. John Black Memorial UC hosted "The Jesus Olympics" in April and a "Pizza Party" in September, UC in Meadowood hosted "Jesus In The Wild" in June. Trinity UC hosted "Making TYG World Records" in November and Fort Garry UC hosted a "Christmas Extravaganza" in December. Thank you to all the host churches for their youth engagement work!

One youth from Winnipeg and two from Brandon also participated in the Climate Motivator Program over the summer. These youth were tasked with undertaking a climate project of their choice and participating in Camp Pringle in British Columbia, where they participated in an MP panel, and wrote letters to their MPs as well as Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault. Meanwhile, our young adult group, YARG, met a few times in 2023 for activities including skating at the Forks in Winnipeg.

The YAAY committee would like to thank each and every one of the volunteers for the time and work they put in to make events such as these possible, as well as Regional Staff Twila MacNair for the unbelievable support she provides. We would also like to thank the youth not only for their continued support, but more importantly for their participation and the work that they have put in as well in many cases. If you have youth or young adults in your community of faith who are looking to connect with other United Church youth, we would love to include them!

For more information about YAAY's activities, see the YAAY page on the Prairie to Pine website: <https://prairietopinerc.ca/programs/young-adults-and-youth/>

We wish our Prairie to Pine community all the best for the rest of 2024!

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YAAY Co-Convenors