

Executive Summary of Annual Report Submissions from MCEC Congregations
Ann L. Schultz – Intentional Interim Executive Team Leader

Greetings!

On behalf of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, I would like to say thank you for submitting your annual reports to us. MCEC is a diverse community of 108 congregations and 12,500 members and active participants across Eastern Canada. We celebrate that 67 out of our 108 congregations shared their reports with us, giving us an excellent view into the work and ministry of MCEC congregations.

You may recall that our invitation to share your annual reports was connected to our strategic plan entitled *Growing into the Future*, which includes a goal to make data-informed decisions to support sustained growth. In order to achieve this goal, we needed to gather and use the data we compiled to help us identify trends in MCEC such as growth, giving patterns, and congregational languages. In turn, these would help us realize our strategic priorities of navigating change, developing leaders, collaborating with congregations and ministry partners in support of engaging youth and young adults and intergenerational discipleship, and seeking peace and justice.

Additionally, our hope was to also better understand how, as a regional church, we could support congregations and also look for ways to support pastors.

Before I share some of the findings and themes, I would like to extend my gratitude to Lisa Williams, Norm Dyck and Thomas Beech, all of whom were instrumental in contributing to this executive summary.

We thank Lisa for her diligent communications work throughout the process including inviting, collecting, and storing the reports safely, allowing Norm and Thomas to advance their work. Norm has a passion for looking at data and analyzing it and we thank him for doing a deep dive into the reports with this lens. He also provided mentorship and support to MCEC's summer young adult intern, Thomas Beech, whose role this summer included a review of the pastor and church council chair reports. Thomas' contribution was greatly appreciated and much of his work is represented in this executive summary. It was a privilege to have him as a part of the MCEC team this summer! Thank you, Thomas!

Thank you, Lisa, Norm and Thomas, for your diligent and insightful work on this major project!

Please note the following findings:

Finance and Giving Trends:

We analyzed three key indicators in congregational financial data: total revenue, operational expenses, and salary expenses. Despite some year-over-year fluctuations at the local congregational level, which were at times significant, the overall data reveals stability in both revenues and expenses. The real challenge arises when considering the impact of historically high levels of inflation. However, it is encouraging to see that support for local congregations has remained steady throughout. This consistency is a strong foundation upon which to build and grow.

Themes:

COVID-19

Pastors and congregational chairs noted in their reports how the COVID-19 pandemic altered congregational life and continues to impact programming and other ministries, specifically in the area of incorporating electronic technologies. This has led to the development of digital literacy within congregations in the area of facilitating hybrid worship. Some of the programs that were lost during the pandemic have re-emerged, while others were permanently lost or altered as they restarted. Programming for youth and children, specifically in the area of faith formation, significantly decreased in the time following the pandemic. In select congregations where youth involvement has been high, the youth are engaged and are choosing baptism.

Service and Outreach

Over the last five years, there has been more of a prioritization on caring for one another within the congregation, emerging out of necessity during the pandemic. This has, in some cases, resulted in a decreased focus on mission and outreach ministries.

Peace and Social Justice

The most commonly named peace and social justice concerns include creation care, Indigenous-Settler reconciliation, and affordable housing. These were most commonly expressed in the context of internal education and discussions rather than active mission and service.

Visioning

Many congregations have engaged in visioning work in the last five years, noting a desire to be intentional about shaping the path forward following several years of uncertainty. Some churches named the challenge of coming to a consensus on what the vision should be and how to translate that vision into tangible change. In some cases, this process has led to changes in congregational structure and ministries, usually taking the form of making congregational structures leaner and embracing being a smaller, more adaptable, informal, and lay-led congregation.

Volunteerism

Numerous congregations noted the decline in volunteerism, leading to challenges filling a slate.

Land and facilities

Some congregations noted that they are using their facilities to a lesser extent and sought creative ways to use their resources, often inspired by a call to peace and justice. There is a deep desire to connect with, honour, and steward the land, yet there is uncertainty about how this could happen. Connecting with other churches or organizations is a common path for reimagining how to use their facility.

Policy and Procedures

Congregational leadership councils are spending significant amounts of time ensuring policies and procedures are up to date and compliant with regulations.

Connections

The annual reports noted the importance of connections: grieving families desiring connections with their pastors; developing activities to support intergenerational connections; and finally, pastors noted their desire to connect with the regional church, as they cherish the feeling they are a part of a network.

Conclusions and Closing:

The goal of this project was to use this information to help us, as a regional church, understand trends in our congregations – such as attendance, giving, and volunteerism – through evidence based data, and to better understand the needs of our pastors and congregations in this season of navigating change.

The findings of this project have already been helpful to us as we work in the area of finance, specifically as we prepare the 2025-2026 budget, and as we continue to discern effective ways to support and resource our pastors and congregations. We are grateful!

It is clear that the shape of the church is also changing quickly and there is much uncertainty about the future. What do we need to claim and what do we need to let go of in order to live into being a people of Christ? We hold MCEC congregations in hope, knowing that MCEC churches remain strongly rooted in faith in God and a desire to be disciples of Christ.

I thank you once again for engaging with MCEC in this way. These findings and learnings are already serving us well as we continue to *grow into the future*, and as we *work together to energize congregations, encourage leaders, and embody God's reconciling ministry*.

With gratitude,

Ann L. Schultz
Intentional Interim Executive Team Leader