

Building a Shared Story: Courageous Imagination

**Who are we together? What is the church that we are becoming?
How is God calling us as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada?**

"I hear churches grappling with how to be a light in their communities."

"Embracing differences while strengthening our common aspirations."

"I see MCEC as a forward-looking, evolving and vibrant collective of congregations that is striving to follow God's lead by remaining open and adaptable and listening – to God and to each other."

These are just a few reflections from attendees at the Annual Church Gathering, held online April 23-24, 2021. As the people of MCEC, we are on a journey of courageous imagination together to build a shared story. This is a community spiritual discernment process

where as a regional church body – a gathered community – we will look to where God is calling us. We will develop new identity statements and strategic priorities for our regional church body and seek to follow God's leading. This year will be a time of listening for God together as we hear from each other through a yearlong process that will culminate in new strategic directions for MCEC to be launched at next year's Annual Church Gathering.

Extending the peace of Jesus Christ, making disciples, growing congregations and forming leaders are vision and mission statements that have served us well since their development in 2005. It is time to come together again to seek God's

*Courageous
Imagination*



We gathered as a community of faith at the Annual Church Gathering.

wisdom intentionally as we look to the future of MCEC.

In this publication, you will find information about the Courageous Imagination discernment process and ideas for ways you and →

Courageous Imagination Podcast

Mollee Moua, Courageous Imagination Project Manager



What an adventure it has been so far working on the Courageous Imagination podcast. I have had the pleasure of working alongside Hanna Negussie, the podcast sound engineer and genius behind the mixing and creation of the final product, which is now available for everyone to hear at <https://anchor.fm/courageous-imagination>. Between Leah Reesor-Keller and myself, we have had the opportunity to sit down

with 16 individuals across MCEC over Zoom. We have shared our experiences about walking with youth in their faith, working together towards justice with the Indigenous peoples, being an intercultural church and more. The podcast features ten episodes each focusing on different topics that we hope will spur further conversation in congregations. Listen to the podcast in your small group or use it for a sermon. Keep an eye out in the coming weeks for a facilitation guide!

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your congregation can be involved in sharing your own reflections on God's calling for us as regional church. You will also find stories about individuals,

congregations and pastors who are living out God's call to build community and reach out in love as we follow Jesus together. ❖

Lessons from Kimchi: Intercultural Church

"Becoming an intercultural church is tricky, messy and smelly," said Pablo Kim at the MCEC Annual Church Gathering. Pablo led 200 participants at the MCEC Annual Church Gathering in reflecting upon church, discipleship, differences and kimchi making.

It was a unique meeting as participants gathered over Zoom. Throughout the screens, many were cutting vegetables, mixing spices and blending. "I advocate for an intercultural church that is based on our Anabaptist-Mennonite faith," he said. "As we take this journey, we will all be transformed like these kimchi ingredients." From showing how to cut Napa cabbage, to walking through a continuum on becoming an anti-racist and intercultural



Pablo Kim teaches how to cut Napa cabbage during the Intercultural Church kimchi-making session at Annual Church Gathering.

people, he had the full attention of the participants.

Fanosie Legesse, MCEC Intercultural Mission Minister reflected, "I see God shaping us and lovingly drawing us

into each other's lives just as Pablo is shaping the cabbages to easily mix with other ingredients. Some chopping may be necessary, but a chopping that does not change who we are as people and the cultures that we come from. To be part of the body of Christ needs an intentional mixing up, just like Pablo's recipes."

Many homes across Eastern Canada that afternoon were fragrant with the rich smell of spices in kimchi that was continuing to ferment on their cupboards. "Kimchi will not solve all the churches problems and conflicts," Pablo said, "but I believe it is something that can inspire, give us insight and is a good way to start our conversation about Courageous Imagination." ❖

Two Congregations Join MCEC

"These congregations will be a blessing to the MCEC faith community," said Norm Dyck, Mission Minister. "They have gifts to share with us just as we have gifts to share with them." Two congregations were welcomed into MCEC as provisional members at the Annual Church Gathering in April.

Hiyaw Amalak (Living God) has a vision to reach the Tigrinya-speaking population of Ottawa, as well as a larger call of being the presence of Jesus. A congregation of 50 persons of Eritrean and Ethiopian descent, they began meeting more than eight years ago. Under the leadership of

Pastors Fitsum Debesay and Habte Araya, they worship in Tigrinya, but have intentionally moved their youth and children's ministries into the language of English.

Ma Destinée has a vision to be a beacon of hope for their wider community. A congregation of 25 new believers and persons from Haitian descent in Montréal, they are led by a pastoral couple of Rhea Jean-Claude & Marjory Brutus. They have an active prayer and Bible study ministry, run children's day camps in the summer and assist a children's ministry in Haiti. ❖



Norm Dyck, Mission Minister (top left), introduces Samuel (top right) and Pastor Fitsum (bottom left) from Hiyaw Amalak and Pastors Marjory and Rhea (bottom right) from Ma Destinée at MCEC's Annual Church Gathering.



MCEC in Ministry Videos

God continued to move and speak in 2020 in spite of the world being gripped by the unfolding drama of a pandemic. *“See, I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?” — Isaiah 43:19.* Take a few moments to watch the ministry reports from MCEC staff found at www.mcec.ca.

Leadership Ministry in MCEC



Marilyn Rudy-Froese, Church Leadership Minister
We walk with pastors and congregations through transition and crisis, we approve pastors for credentialing and we affirm the importance of providing financial support to pastors for ongoing formation and renewal.

A Kingdom Impact



Norm Dyck, Mission Minister – Our goal is to create a network of faith communities seeking to make an impact in discipleship, leadership, community, mission and movement.

We are Ready!



Fanosie Legesse, Intercultural Mission Minister – We are ready for a journey of humility and compassion. We are ready to say that we are one body and to become an intercultural church.

Support for Youth Ministry in MCEC



Katie Goerzen Sheard, Coordinator of Youth Ministry Events – We have moved youth retreats to online resources for youth. Monthly Zoom gatherings with youth pastors, workers and sponsors provide a time to share our joys and challenges.

Quebec Catalyzer Ministry



Michel Monette, Catalyzer Minister – Churches in Quebec are growing. When asked why they are joining MCEC and not another denomination, the answer they give is family!

Transitioning into Ministry



Marilyn Rudy-Froese, Church Leadership Minister
One of our goals is to nurture pastors on their journey of ministry. The Transitioning into Ministry (TIM) program is geared toward pastors who are beginning in ministry or new to ministry in MCEC.

A Lifelong Learning Journey



Al Rempel, Regional Minister – Through workshops and learning experiences, we grow together in the ministry to which we are called.

Relationships Across International Borders



Norm Dyck, Mission Minister – MCEC is building relationships across borders by developing Anabaptist resources, congregational leaders, income generation and discipleship training, peacebuilding and conflict transformation ministry.

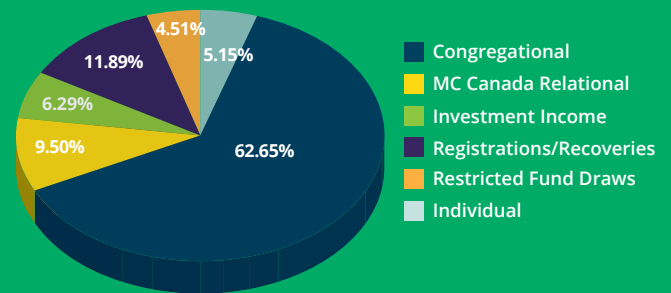
The Next Normal of Pastoral Ministry



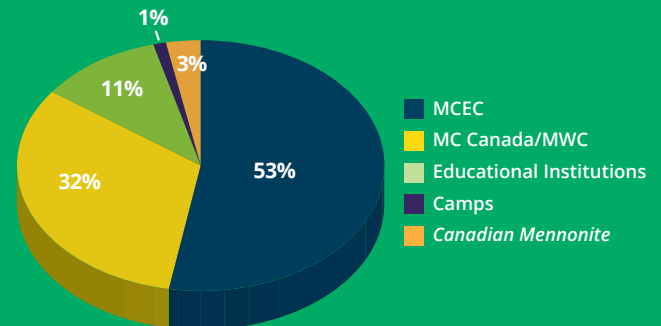
Al Rempel, Regional Minister – We appreciate our pastors who have adapted and lived with challenges as we work together at the next normal of pastoral ministry. ❖

Financial Report 2020-2021

Funding our Ministry



Investing in Ministry



Your financial gifts into your church offering plate or as a donation to MCEC help us to thrive together as a community of congregations, strengthening connections and resources that stretch well beyond Eastern Canada to our nationwide and global family of faith. ❖

How Do You Listen for God?

Listening for God is a learned activity. The journey that we take needs to be authentic to ourselves. We are all unique and God speaks to us individually and collectively as the body of Christ. As we begin the Courageous Imagination journey, we are called to listen for God.

Seun Olowo-Ake moved to Canada in 2017 to obtain a degree in media production. Last summer, she worked with youth at Warden Underground to produce a podcast, created videos for kids at Camp Unity and oversaw social media and content creation for Connect City. Seun shared the following when asked how she listens for God.

"Honestly, I find that being still is one of the harder things to do. I found that it makes me uncomfortable. I know people

say that we should listen for God by being still and trying to hear His voice. For me, I have found that the most helpful way to hear from God is just reading my Bible. I find sometimes that as I'm reading, words jump out at me that are related to what I'm going through at the moment. They make me know for sure that this is what God wants to say to me. I've also journaled for a few years now and find that sometimes as I'm journaling about something, when I pick up my Bible I will read something that literally applies to the situation. Things like that are really amazing. So even if I get worried that when I'm being still I may not hear God's voice, knowing that the Bible is actually physically available for me is really cool." ❖



"When I pick up my Bible I will read something that literally applies to the situation."

Seeking Placement While in a Pandemic



Donna Kerfoot's new role as pastor finds her on Zoom every Sunday evening with Zion Mennonite Fellowship.

"We didn't go into this thinking we'd have a pandemic," said Terry Martin, member of Zion Mennonite Fellowship, Elmira, ON. "We had to think differently and find new ways."

Zion Mennonite Fellowship was looking for a pastor when the pandemic hit. They filled out their congregational profile and submitted

it to the MCEC office knowing that there were more placements needing pastors, than pastors who could fill them.

Donna Kerfoot was not looking for a job in pastoral ministry but found herself pondering that call. "I saw a need and felt called to answer that need," she said. She met with Al Rempel, Regional Minister, and began the process. "I felt at home in his questions and appreciated his guidance and direction," she said.

"I trusted that God was going to lead."

Because of a pandemic lockdown, an online candidating weekend was scheduled. "Al was helpful in giving

us suggestions for the online format," Terry said. "I trusted that God was going to lead but, if I'm honest, there was a part of me that was anxious."

"It was challenging to prepare that first sermon and not have the feedback of body language or responses from the congregation," said Donna. "But I felt God nudging me to go in a certain direction and I believe the Holy Spirit spoke to people."

Donna began her ministry as pastor at Zion Mennonite in April. "I'm looking forward to meeting in person and those fellowship meals I keep hearing about!" she said. "I think that people may turn to faith following the pandemic and we need to be prepared. We need to stay open to God's direction." ❖

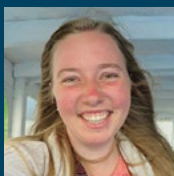
Transitioning into Ministry Graduates 2021

"We trust that TiM has served you and that what you have learned here you can carry with you into your ministry," said Marilyn Rudy-Froese, Church Leadership Minister, at the virtual MCEC Transitioning into Ministry (TiM) graduation. Five pastors graduated from the TiM program this April. TiM, a jointly funded partnership between congregations and MCEC, provides a three-year formational experience for beginning or pastors new to MCEC. Meet the TiM graduates of 2021 as introduced by coaches, Myrna Miller Dyck and David Brubacher.



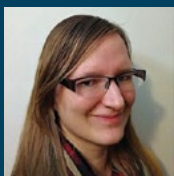
Jonathan (Yoni) Abrham – Shalom Worship and Healing Centre

Yoni's prophetic and apostolic leadership strengthens his passion to see the Word of God spread so that people live and walk in their relationship with Jesus.



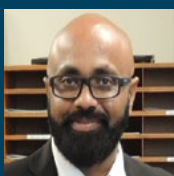
Rebecca Penner – Bethany Mennonite Church

Rebecca is a very energetic woman. Whether she is baking cookies for her youth or preparing for online Bible studies, she does it with passion, integrity and laughter.



Danielle Raimbault – Preston and Wanner Mennonite Churches

Danielle brings thoughtful questions, reflections and a deep love for her congregations. She began working with two new congregations in the middle of a pandemic, a testimony to her flexibility.



Kapilan Savarimuthu – Markham Christian Worship Centre

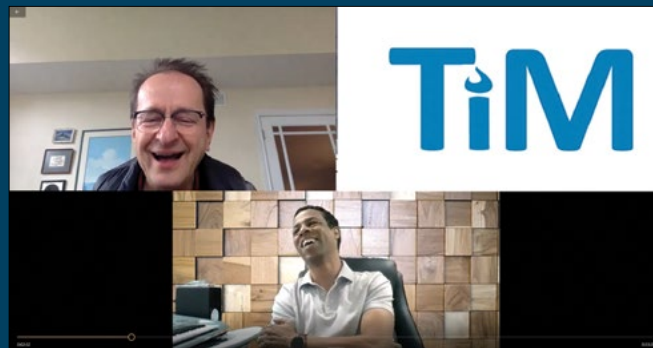
Kapilan is dedicated to his congregation and his community. He brings humility and gentleness, a deep love for God, and the desire to share that love with others.



Yared Seretse – Meheret Evangelical Church

Yared is a pastor and teacher with a passion to see people come to know Jesus. He invests much energy walking with, teaching, praying with, helping to identify the challenges of life and encouraging his congregation. ❖

Walking Together in Ministry



Jim (top left) and Yoni's (bottom) TiM mentoring relationship was a further expression of their 10-year friendship.

When Jonathan Abrham (Yoni) needed to choose a mentor in the Transitioning into Ministry (TiM) program, he and Jim Loepp Thiessen saw it as a natural expression of their friendship. The program, a jointly funded partnership between congregations and MCEC, pairs TiM pastors with an experienced pastor as a mentor.

"Yoni and I have walked together for years," said Jim. Yoni added, "Jim was with us right from scratch," referring to when Shalom Worship and Healing Centre first began. Their friendship connection was instantaneous as they shared a love for God, evangelism, ministry and coffee.

"Pastor Jim has helped me a lot with questions in every corner in my life," said Jonathan. "We connected right away because of a strong spiritual connection through the Holy Spirit."

Along with pastoring Shalom Worship and Healing Centre, Yoni and his wife, Sesuna, are recording artists and have a large international ministry. Jim also recalled a time when he was moved by Yoni's intense longing to go and minister to stranded refugees off the coast of Ethiopia. Jim said, "It's exciting to watch a brother in Christ to whom the Lord has given this very large anointing and gift to serve not only our body of Christ, but the church internationally."

The two men continue to support each other, even though the official mentorship has ended. "Pastor Jim's vision and gifts are rare. I need that in my life," said Yoni. Jim responded, "I thank God for my brother in the faith and for what he has taught me." ❖

Called to the Journey

Leah Reesor-Keller, Executive Minister

I have a vivid memory of taking a walk through the fields of my parents' farm over Thanksgiving weekend 2019, talking with my mother and sister about the new-to-me idea of applying for the role of MCEC executive minister. It was a big leap of faith to consider changing from working in social services and community development leadership into church leadership. Yet, this role had me thinking in new ways about how my skills and passions could align here in service of the church. I felt a personal call to apply. I thought about what I am so passionate about that I was willing to take a risk, even though I might fail. This was a desire to follow Jesus myself, and to give leadership to our faith movement seeking to put God's love in action and make our own lives look more like Jesus. As I mulled over how to listen for God's leading to apply, my mother reminded me that part of our Mennonite-Anabaptist faith heritage is a belief that community discernment is a powerful way to



hear God's voice. It is not only up to us as individuals.

My decision to apply was guided by input from people I trusted, by reading scripture, praying and reflecting deeply on my values and experience of calling. The community discernment process of the executive minister search committee and

MCEC's executive council confirmed my personal sense of call to the role when I was appointed in March 2020.

On our journey of Courageous Imagination, we seek to live into what God is calling us to as the people of MCEC. We begin by asking this question: How do we listen for God? It is a question that we need to ask ourselves as individuals and as a regional church body. We need to hear each other's stories of faith, hopes and prayers so we can discern God's leading together. The Courageous Imagination podcast series is one way that we can hear a variety of voices reflecting on God's leading across our faith community.

How do you hear God best? What has worked for you in your life and in your congregation when you are seeking to discern God's leading? I would love to hear your story. You can send me an e-mail at lreesorkeller@mcec.ca.

May God open our eyes, our ears and our hearts as we journey together! ❖

WHAT IS COURAGEOUS IMAGINATION?



The Pennies Were Already There

Produce was spoiling and people in the city were struggling to find food. The pandemic lockdown halted the transport of fresh vegetables from the mountains of the Philippines into the city. Lakan Sumulong and Lakambini Mapayapa (Dann and Joji Pantoja), International Witness workers, shared with friends in Leamington their dream of a dehydrator to preserve vegetables and provide economic stability for International Witness ministry.

An article, *A dehydrator and a dream*, was published in the *Canadian Mennonite* on March 24, 2021.

"I was shocked," said Lois. "Within two weeks of that article being printed, the money was raised – over \$10,000!"

Because of the response, Leamington United Mennonite and Mennonite Church Canada increased the project to include a truck to haul the vegetables to the dehydrator. The project will be just under \$40,000.

"It is by the grace of God that this is happening."

"Dann and Joji are excited," said Lois. "The quicker they have the dehydrator, the quicker they can dehydrate the food."

"People across Canada are generous," said Norm Dyck, MCEC mission minister. "It's inspiring to see the care of our Witness Workers and ministry." Congregations and individuals across Canada have formed a Mennonite Church Canada



Lakan and Lakambini are excited by God's God provision for resources to support ministry during the pandemic.

Witness Support Network to raise support and awareness for ministry in the Philippines.

"It is by the grace of God that this is happening," says Lois. "We planted the seeds, but we hadn't done anything to nurture it! It truly is God at work." ❖

Treaty as Sacred Covenant



"Our goal in creating this series has been to provide a space for learning and relationship building," said Scott Morton Ninomiya, member of the MCEC Truth and Reconciliation Working Group. "It's gone better than we could have ever imagined."

Over the past year, the working group hosted eight webinar storytelling sessions. Storytellers have included Indigenous and Mennonite Settler voices shining light on the history of broken covenants. Registrations poured in from MCEC, other church denominations and people from Indigenous communities. Each session included 100-200 participants from across MCEC, Canada and other parts of the world.

Conversations centred on covenants made and broken, how we might live into justice and healing and possibilities

for renewal of treaties as sacred covenants. Indigenous peoples invited Settlers into the deeper stories of the land, resistance and survival. Settler allies/friends shared of friendships with Indigenous communities as a part of their life and work.

"We've had so many people tune in and have had great dialogue and wisdom," said Scott. "This is only the beginning of a collective learning journey and the work that we need to do."

The constituency-based MCEC Truth & Reconciliation Working Group serves the MCEC constituency by promoting awareness and education on specific issues and topics. ❖

Courageous Imagination

A Journey Together Listening For God

As the people of MCEC we are on a journey of Courageous Imagination to build a shared story together about who we are and who God is calling us to become.



Coming Soon!

Anabaptist Essentials

by Palmer Becker, translated into Lao by Som Phanhpa, Sangoune Ounbounheuang and Sririsack Saythavy. "We are very excited for this," said Som. "This book will help Lao congregations and people understand what it means to be an Anabaptist and how important it is to follow Jesus in daily life." Norm Dyck, mission minister, said, "This project grew out of the deep desire of Lao congregations to be able to share Anabaptist faith both at home and in Lao speaking communities throughout Southeast Asia. We are excited about the faith shaping potential this resource provides."



Inspiring a Gospel of Peace in Myanmar Video

Reacquaint yourself with Pastor Jehu who feels a deep sense of call to share the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith perspective with the people of Myanmar. Discover how Chin congregations in Mennonite Church Canada are reaching out to their homeland with God's message of healing and hope. Watch for the release of this video from Mennonite Church Canada International Witness. ❖



Get Involved: Everyone's voice is important to the journey. How will you listen and share yours?

Share Your Thoughts: Share your thoughts and ideas on the questions guiding our journey. Host a church forum, or a small group discussion. Post on social media and add the hash tag #courageousimagination, send an email to Courageous Imagination project manager Mollee Moua mmoua@mcec.ca or write a letter.

Participate: Join the upcoming Courageous Imagination events on Zoom. Check out www.mcec.ca for more information. Listen to the podcast episodes (we are working on getting the podcast recorded onto a CD) and have conversations with others. Use the forthcoming podcast facilitation guide for a Sunday school or small group series in your congregation.

Keep Connected: Email mcec@mcec.ca to sign up for the MCEC Weekly Bulletin newsletter. Follow Mennonite Church Eastern Canada on Facebook and Instagram.

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