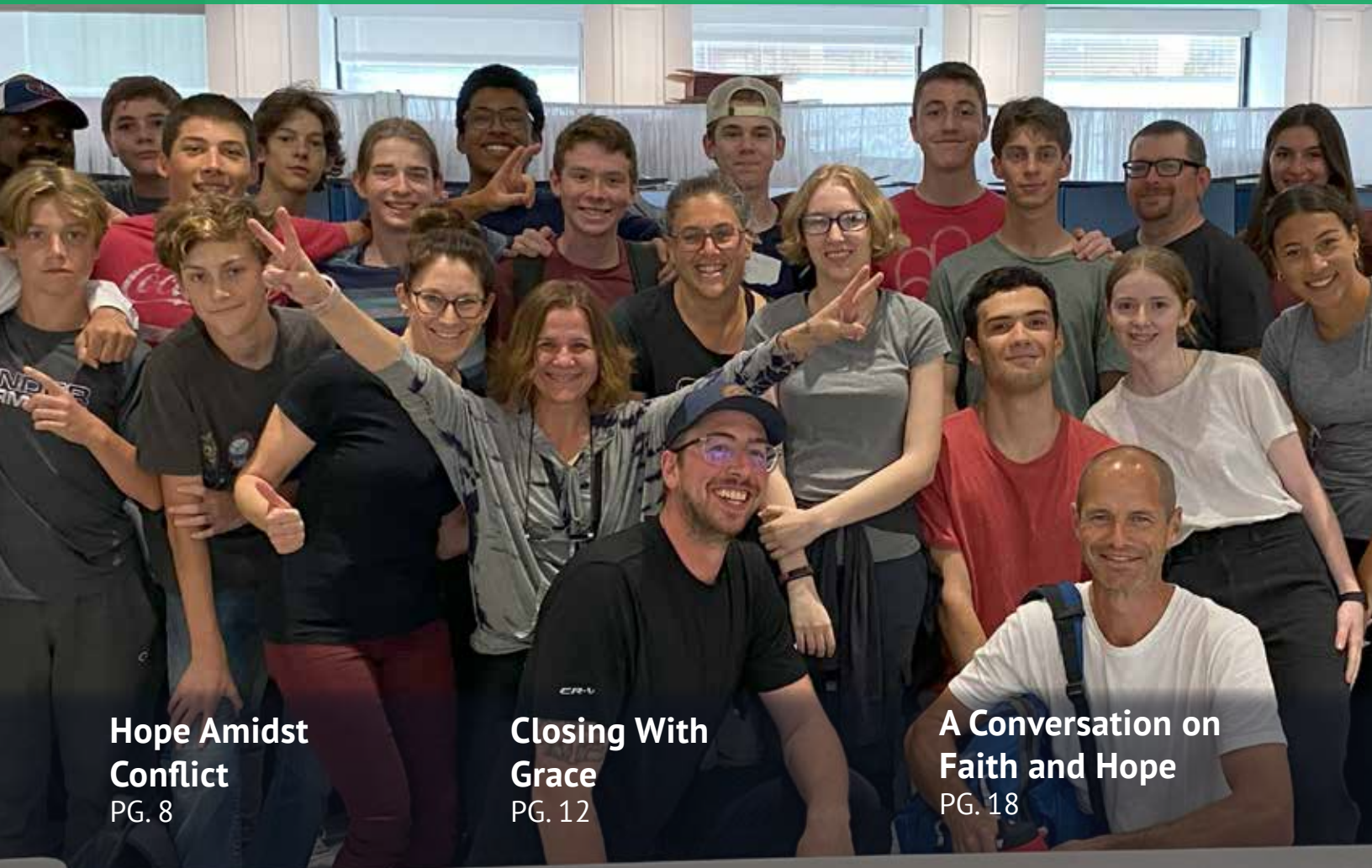




**Mennonite
Church**
Eastern Canada

Sprout

Stories of Inspiration



**Hope Amidst
Conflict**
PG. 8

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Grace**
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Transformed | Inspired | Called

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada is a diverse community
Transformed by the love of God
Inspired by the hope we find in Jesus
Called to action by the power of the Holy Spirit

We come together as a regional church to:
Energize congregations in worship, discipleship and mission
Encourage leaders of hope, vision and transformation
Embody God's reconciling ministry for all creation

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A photograph of Mykayla Turner, a woman with glasses and a plaid shirt, speaking at a podium. In the background, there are posters on a wall, one of which has the text "Mykayla leading Renewing Rural Worship - pg 20".

Mykayla leading
Renewing Rural
Worship
- pg 20

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Writer and Designer: Lisa Williams
Writers:
Doug Klassen - page 4
Kelly Freeman - page 22

Photos:
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Thank you to all who shared their stories, offering encouragement and inspiration across the MCEC community of faith.

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Avon Church youth learning experience in Montreal - page 12



A Deeper Calling

Living our Hope in Jesus Christ

*Doug Klassen preached this message at the MCEC Annual Church Gathering
- Inspired by the hope we find in Jesus based on 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3.*



Doug Klassen
*Mennonite Church Canada
Executive Minister*

T Tyler Wigg-Stevenson is an Anglican minister in Toronto. When he had just graduated from college, he worked for a retired politician in the US who was trying to eliminate nuclear weapons. He organized a panel discussion at an old theatre in San Francisco.

Hours and hours went into careful, detailed planning. Everything was choreographed perfectly. Tyler's boss would be the first on the panel to speak.

What Tyler didn't know was what one of the speakers was going to do. The second speaker to the microphone was Patch Adams.

Patch was a 60's hippie kind of guy, and there were some old hippies who had come to hear him. He was known for being impulsive at times.

Patch said to the crowd, "What are you willing to do to get rid of nuclear weapons? Would you take off all your clothes and march in the street?" Some of the old hippies cheered. Then he said, "Let's do it!"

Tyler stood there horrified as people began undressing and heading for the door. His politician boss looked at him in a panic, and they quickly got him out the back door.

The people ran out onto the streets... but nobody really did anything. It was all a foolish and impulsive idea that had no purpose. Just like that all the planning and months of hard work just walked out the door - naked - all for nothing. Tyler was devastated.

Tyler's knees gave out. He crumpled to the floor in a back stairwell and started weeping over how badly this had gone but also weeping for a world that he so desperately wanted to save from itself.

He says, "For the first time in my life, I heard the voice of God. And God said to me, 'The world is not yours to save or condemn. Only serve the One who is saving it.'"

Why in the world would we ever put our hope in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ?

Many of us know the often quoted words of Jesus in John 3:16, but note the next verse, "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Paul writes, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

And just to be clear, this destruction and defeat does not happen through an apocalyptic battle where Jesus returns in combat fatigues abandoning everything he taught in the Sermon on the Mount to settle things once and for all.

No, the defeating of enemies and of the violence they bring is done through the constant outpouring of self-giving love, the same love that we saw on the cross. That love overcomes all things in this world.

So, I ask you this, with all the rich texts we have in scripture, with stories like Tyler's, with all that we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life, why in the world would we ever put our hope in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ?

We see many peace movements or theological/scholarly movements start in the church. Many eventually veer off and become lightly distanced, and then even more distanced, from the church. Over time maybe Jesus is still referred to, but he is no longer central. Eventually he is dropped altogether and then the movement tails off into some kind of special interest group, or even an ideology.

The theologian David Fitch writes, "Even a justice-oriented church can become self-referential and enclosed, reinforcing its own worst traits or beliefs. If not centred on Jesus and what he is doing in the world, justice can become us and what we do. At this point, we call it a cult."

Can I tell you how I think movements in the Christian church get to those places? Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox theologian says, "From its very beginning, Christianity has been

the proclamation of joy – of the only possible joy on earth.”

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a moment of deep despair. Yet three days later, it was met with the announcement of a new, all embracing joy that transformed what seemed like a disastrous end into a joyful new beginning. “I have seen the Lord!” became the first Christian sermon preached.

Without this as a foundation, Christianity is incomprehensible. With the loss of joy, the Church has lost the world and it has ceased to be a credible witness.

But what leads to this loss of joy? Perhaps it has been our humility. We have subconsciously thought that for our witness to be more sensible in our culture it would be best if we would downplay the incarnation, God taking on human form, and talk about Jesus as simply a rabbi, a teacher - comparable to Rumi or Gandhi.

The “Christ” or “Messiah” part of Jesus is outside the framework of the binary/polarized way that western culture works. Something can be fully human or fully divine, but it can't be both. It just doesn't make sense. So, we err on the side of the human. Yet, the ancient

We are working out of an inspiration that turns the world upside down.

mosaics or frescos of the Greco/Roman church remind us of the transformative Christ mystery of fully human and fully divine. The church made that proclamation without reservation.

And here is where it becomes challenging for us. That fully human, fully divine idea isn't just for Jesus, it is also meant for us.

In Ephesians 3:18 Paul writes, “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, the breadth, the length, the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

In Galatians 2, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” And the words of Jesus himself. “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.”

So, when we talk about being inspired by the hope we have in Jesus Christ, we are tapping into an inspiration that goes way beyond our tendency to ponder his parables, or reflect on his

wisdom teachings. This stuff is so daring, that most of the time we shy away from it.

We are working out of an inspiration that turns the world upside down, not through violence or manipulation, but through cruciform love that overcomes all things.

That is why Jesus could say to his disciples just before his crucifixion, “Take courage, I have overcome the world.”

Our world is changing. Deep political and economic interests fuel conflicts. Ideologies have become powers and principalities themselves. We must avoid thinking that assembling a panel of politicians and speakers will be enough to bring about real change.

Those things are good but inevitably, at some point along the way, it will all run out the door naked and we will be crying in the stairwell.

In order for us to do greater things than these, we need to learn again to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And by Lordship, I don't mean in a rule-over like Pharaoh or Caesar sense, but like what Meghan

Good writes in her latest incredible book, *Divine Gravity*. She says to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ “is to make ourselves available to a presence that is itself the centerpiece of all human transformation.”

Jesus said in John 15:4, “Make your home in me as I make my home in you.” Live in my embrace. That’s what it is. And there is nothing in the world that is more radical than this – than to become at one with the Living God.

If we think that we have to flatten Jesus a bit so that the message becomes more palatable, we have it backwards.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ not only is the world going to be put back to rights but the final enemy, death itself, is going to be defeated once and for all. For death is the unmaking of God’s creation. The resurrection is its remaking.

It is a story so beautiful, that no matter what is in your back stairwell of despair, the simple invitation to “come and see” can completely transform your life.

Some years ago, I was serving as a chaplain at a hospital. One day I was asked to visit someone in Unit 21 – the psychiatric unit.

It was an awful place, the décor was dingy, furniture was broken. I discovered on the way to the unit that the person who asked to see me was a high ranking gang member from the city’s northeast.

I walked into the ward and there he was sitting in the glass-on-all-sides observation room waiting for me. He was one tough looking dude. I opened the door, walked in and introduced myself. Before I could shake his hand, he simply said, “Have a seat.”

He just stared at me and then said, “I have been talking with the other chaplain; she has been reading the Bible with me. But I have a question for you, because you are ordained, right?” I swallowed apprehensively. “Yes, I am,” I answered.

He said, “We have been talking about forgiveness and new life, and my question is this: after all that I have done, can you look me in the eye and tell me that I can have a new start?”

I replied, “Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come.”

“You’re not just saying this to make me feel good, are you?” he asked.

“No, I’m telling you the truth. Give your life to Jesus Christ, and you will find a

The world is not yours to save or condemn. Only serve the one who is saving it.

joy that comes to you in pain, and you will discover a love that will not let you go.”

He was quiet for a minute and then abruptly said, “I’ll think about it. Thanks for coming by. Let yourself out.”

The next Sunday he had a day-pass and walked over to our church.

After the service he said, “I had no idea that anything like this exists in our world.”

The world is not yours to save or condemn. Only serve the one who is saving it.

Glory to God in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever.

Amen. 🙏



Hope Amidst Conflict Ben in the Philippines

Photo:
“How did I even get here?”
Ben ponders as he and the
team met with Cmdr Bravo .

As the delegation left the rebel camp, men lined each side of the road, a seemingly stark and tense scene. On one side stood rebels in camouflage, carrying large assault rifles, their expressions hardened by years of conflict. On the other side, the armed forces of the Philippines, equally armed and vigilant.

For Ben Isert Bender, a newcomer from Canada who had just arrived to begin his year-long internship, this was a moment that struck deep. The stark reality of the situation was unlike anything he had experienced before.

As they departed the 10th anniversary celebration of the peace

*Rebels on one side,
government forces
on the other - fully
armed, but... they
were simply talking
to each other.*

agreement between the rebels and the government, where PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI) was honoured with a plaque of appreciation for their support of the peace process, something remarkable caught the attention of Ben and his colleagues.

What they observed was a quiet yet powerful sign of progress: the men on each side of the road—rebels on one side and government forces on the other—were engaged in conversation. They stood there, fully armed, but instead of the usual tension or hostility, they were simply talking to each other.

“This was such a powerful moment of hope for PeaceBuilders Community,” Ben reflected. “It highlighted the significant growth and progress in helping to lay the groundwork for lasting peace in the area over the last ten years.”

Ben Isert Bender is currently midway through his year-long internship in the Philippines, where he is working closely with Dan and Joji Pantoja

at PBCI and Coffee for Peace. Sponsored by MC Canada and MCEC, Ben’s internship has immersed him in peacebuilding efforts and community development in a region marked by a history of conflict. His experiences so far have been both challenging and deeply meaningful, offering a unique perspective on the complexities of reconciliation and the power of dialogue.

Ben shares, “Several times now I have been in situations where I suddenly wonder, ‘How did I get here?’ I wonder how I was even allowed into the room!” His words capture the surreal yet significant nature of his work, as he finds himself often in spaces where few outsiders have tread.

Commander Bravo of the North Western Mindanao Front of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) extended an invitation to the PBCI team to visit his headquarters. During the visit, he shared his transformative vision for the MILF

camp base, aiming to shift it from an armed rebel stronghold into a thriving social entrepreneurial community. By partnering with Coffee for Peace, they plan to cultivate a coffee plantation to create jobs, stimulate the local economy and foster a sense of shared purpose and peace as a site of conflict becomes a beacon of hope and cooperation.

“My view of the world has been challenged for sure,” says Ben. “When I look at the Philippines I see hope. It is moving in a positive direction. A lot of work has been done and a lot still needs to happen but there is definitely a lot of hope.”

You can read more about the work that Ben is involved with, including his personal reflections, by visiting waves.ca. This site offers insights into their ongoing peacebuilding and community development efforts, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes they encounter along the way. 🌱

Ben and team at the 10th anniversary celebration where PBCI was honoured for their support of the peace process.





A night of worship, faith and friendship - young adults from across MCEC.

Building Community Young Adults in MCEC

“I have wanted to draw young adults together for awhile,” says Rachel Reid.

Over the past year, a group of Mennonite young adults from across Ontario have made significant strides in coming together, forging faith-driven connections. From Leamington to Kingston to Kitchener-Waterloo, they have bridged hundreds of miles through virtual meetups. “It started

small, but it was powerful,” says Rachel. “We had people joining in from all over talking, praying and sharing life.” What began as a simple connection has grown into something far more impactful, sparking a movement of faith and friendship.

In February, Rachel travelled with Aimee Reid to the Music & Worship Leaders Retreat at Laurelville Retreat Center in Pennsylvania. “That’s

We’re all here to encourage one another and work together to follow Jesus’ call.

where we met Jane Schultz-Janzen from Shantz Mennonite Church in Ontario,” Rachel explains. “Her son and his friends were also working to organize more young adult events.” It was this encounter that sparked a change. “I had a desire to start something and it was connecting with Jane that really gave me the energy to move forward.”

To help bring young adults together, Rachel launched an Instagram account as a hub for connection. From there, online meetings began, linking young adults from across the geographically diverse MCEC. “I think our biggest meeting had about seven persons, so it was definitely a small group,” Rachel shares and quickly adds, “but that’s all you need for a meaningful small group!”

A worship night soon followed at Shantz Mennonite Church, with over a dozen young adults coming together to plan and lead the event. “That night was such a joy for me,” Rachel recalls. “I love to worship. Getting to worship with other young adults was really special.” The evening featured a blend of worship styles, from traditional hymns to contemporary music, creating an atmosphere where everyone could connect through their shared faith.

In June, Rachel attended a young adult Anabaptist conference in British Columbia as a representative

of MCEC. They met Zachary Shields, an event coordinator for a young adult Anabaptist task group in MCBC. Both share a similar vision for fostering connections among young adults. “What I valued most was being with other people at the conference,” Rachel says. “My favorite moments were the conversations during meals—networking, connecting and sharing ideas. I left feeling enriched by every single conversation.”

Rachel and Zachary are collaborating on another conference, set to take place in Ontario during the summer of 2025, coinciding with the MC Canada Gathering in July.

“My vision for this year is to keep offering online spaces for those who can’t attend in-person events,” says Rachel. “I’m also planning to host some in-person gatherings in the Hamilton, Niagara and Kitchener-Waterloo regions.” She

I have wanted to draw young adults together for a while.

envision a broader, more inclusive community. “I want to connect with other Anabaptists too. It doesn’t have to be just Mennonites—our family can grow. We’re all here to encourage one another and work together to follow Jesus’ call.”

Rachel, a young adult based in Hamilton, is passionate about fostering friendships and faith connections among young adults across MCEC. Through a blend of online and in-person faith-based events, they aim to create a supportive community. To learn more, join the online conversations, or connect with Rachel directly, you can send a message on Instagram to [@menno_ya](https://www.instagram.com/menno_ya) or email them at mennoniteyoungadults@gmail.com. 🌱



Quiet moments, powerful praise:
Young adults share together in worship.



Hawkesville Prayer Circle
- an important part of
congregation life.

Closing with Grace

Hawkesville Mennonite Church's Journey

“There truly are no regrets,” says Julene Fast from Hawkesville Mennonite Church. “There is sadness and we wish it had not happened. But there are no regrets.” After 74 years of ministry, Hawkesville Mennonite Church closed their doors in June 2024.

Nestled in a small village overlooking the Conestoga River Valley, the

congregation was known for their deep care for both their members and the wider community. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and with their pastor's retirement, the church decided to take time to reflect on their future direction before calling a new pastor.

Betty Pries and Marjike Strong, consultants with Credence & Co,

“Most of us thought that that's where it would go but most of us had hoped it wouldn't.”

conducted interviews with members and listened intently to their feedback.

The results of this process, not surprising to the congregation, revealed a significant sense of tiredness and a clear recognition that change was needed. In response, the congregation embarked on a six-week intentional season of prayer, seeking guidance and clarity for their future.

An internal reference group began to process the options for the congregation. When David Martin arrived as interim pastor, he was aware of the process already underway and began to support the congregation through their discernment journey.

As the group deliberated, it became clear that closing the church might be the most viable option. “It was a

painful, painful conclusion,” recalls Julene. “I think most of us thought that that’s where it would go but most of us had hoped it wouldn’t.” Within the congregation, there were mixed emotions: some members were ready to accept the closure, while others found the prospect too difficult to bear. Despite these differing feelings, the congregation decided to face the end together and close.

They chose to spend a purposeful final year together, focusing on closing this chapter well. To manage this transition, they formed several committees. One was responsible for handling the sale and cleanup of the church building. Another was tasked with organizing celebrations and transition planning and another on fostering intentional connections among members after closure.

“It was no small task! You have to do the work. This was now our job and it was an important job to do well.”

Julene notes, “It was no small task! You have to do the work. This was now our job and it was an important job to do well.”

David Martin played a crucial role in guiding the congregation through their final year with sermons that addressed grief, lament and new opportunities. Julene emphasized the importance of his support, stating, “We needed a shepherding

A heartfelt celebration on May 4, 2024 brought former members and friends together to honour the legacy of Hawkesville Mennonite Church.



“It was a morning of quiet sharing where we all had a chance to say what we needed to say.”

leader. I don't know how anyone could close a congregation without strong help. David was a gift.”

On May 4, 2024, Hawkesville Mennonite Church held a heartfelt celebration. The event brought together former members and friends, creating an opportunity to reminisce, rekindle connections and honour the congregation's legacy. Many spoke about the profound richness and lasting influence of their connection to Hawkesville Mennonite Church.

The final worship service for the congregational family took place on June 2. This service provided a reflective and intimate space for members to express their thoughts, feelings and farewells. Julene describes the service as deeply meaningful. “It was a morning of quiet sharing where we all had a chance to say what we needed to say.”



Hawkesville Mennonite Church - 74 years of ministry. The faithfulness of this congregation has created a lasting impact for years to come.



She emphasizes that the story of Hawkesville Mennonite Church is not a story of failure: “We did not fail. If you are in a congregation where you are getting smaller, you may feel as though you are doing something wrong because you are not growing. You are not doing anything wrong. Just be who you are and do it well and with integrity.”

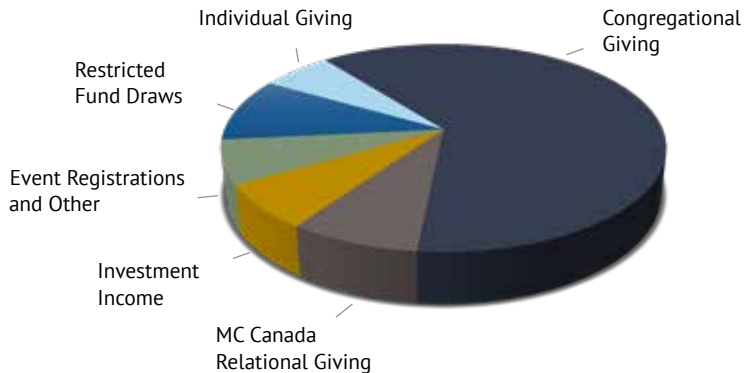
For 74 years, ministry at Hawkesville Mennonite Church has influenced countless lives. They have been a community deeply committed to loving God, their neighbors and the world around them. The faithfulness of this congregation has created a lasting impact for years to come. 🌿

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFTS TO MCEC

Your financial gifts and donations to MCEC help us to grow and flourish as a vibrant community of congregations. The glow of fireflies reminds us of the awe and wonder of God's presence. Your generosity fills us with hope and inspiration.

Every contribution to MCEC is a gift of hope—a spark that energizes congregations, encourages leaders, and strengthens our commitment to embody God's reconciling love for all creation.

Funding our Ministry



Inspired By Hope!



Avon Church youth group
learning experience in
Montreal.

A Conversation on Faith & Hope with Callum and Peer

Callum Wideman and Peer Wahlquist are youth from MCEC who participated in the Youth Engagement in MCEC Churches research project, offering their voices and wisdom. As active members of the youth group at Avon Church in Stratford, ON, they recently traveled to Montreal, QC, for a learning experience. During their trip, they packed meals at a kosher

Jewish soup kitchen, volunteered at a food bank, toured an urban garden program, visited a local market providing produce for those in need and learned about homelessness and gentrification. Now that summer is over, the Avon youth group gathers weekly for games, fellowship and Bible study.

Where do you find hope in the church? What difference does faith make?

Callum

This summer, Callum spent time at camp where he experienced significant growth in his faith through the teachings and experiences there. Each morning, chapel provided inspiration as he deepened his understanding of Jesus in fresh and meaningful ways. In Montreal, Callum came face to face with homelessness and heard surprising and thought-provoking stories from the people he met. Reflecting on his experiences, he acknowledged how difficult it is to maintain the same spiritual “fervor” from these powerful summer moments once he returns to the routine of “real life.” Yet, Callum finds hope—hope in a God who loves us “no matter what.” In his own words:

No one is too far from God’s love

“Faith in Jesus brings a unique kind of joy. It fills a hole that nothing else can fill. Nothing on earth can really compare to God’s love for us.

After returning from summer camp, I decided to read the entire Bible. I’m working through it each day. My faith has made me more considerate of my actions. Whenever something happens, I try to think about what Jesus would do in that situation and recall something from the Bible to apply to it.

At camp I was reminded that no one is too far from God’s love. We hear it often—God loves us

no matter what—but this time, I understood it in a new way. I realized that nothing anyone does can ever change how God loves us. That gives me hope, knowing that God isn’t done with us yet. It excites me to share this with others and hopefully help them understand what it truly means to be loved by God.

At school, there’s a lot of pressure to not be a Christian. For me, youth group is a safe space where we all come together to hang out and have fun, but also to praise God. It’s a place where everyone is on the same page, and we can talk about God and ask questions. I want to keep going to church



Nothing anyone does can change how God loves us.

and youth group to stay strong in my spiritual life.

I just want to build my faith and grow in my relationship with God because, as I said, no one is too far from God’s love.” 🙏

Peer traveled to Montreal this summer for an incredible experience with the youth group. This was his second learning experience in Montreal and he was not disappointed with the connections and encounters. At school, he is president of the Student Council and cares deeply about his friends, both at school and at Avon. Passionate about filmmaking, he worked on numerous video projects last year and looks forward to creating even more this year. He is driven by a desire to make a difference in the lives of those around him. In his words:

The kingdom of God is found in the love between people

“One thing I really liked at youth group was when Stephen Kennedy, our youth pastor, had us sit in a circle and say something encouraging to the person on our right and on our left. It was a bit uncomfortable at first, but it turned out to be a great experience. What really inspires me is seeing how my friends from Avon make a difference at school. I notice places, groups, and clubs positively influenced by people from our youth group. Kindness makes a difference and people definitely notice.

I believe the kingdom of God is found in the love between people. One of the key messages we hear at youth group is: “You belong here.” People need each other, especially as social media increases our isolation. If we

were meant to live alone, why would there be so many people on the planet? Connection between people is essential and by fostering these connections, we also strengthen our connection with God.

Church is significant in my life for several reasons. One is the sense of community—these people are incredibly important to me and are my closest friends. Attending church each week serves as a reminder of God’s presence and renews my thinking. It allows me to take the qualities I’ve learned at church and apply them to my life, helping me to become a better person.

I care deeply about my school community and want to make a positive impact. By applying the



The church could change the world.

values I’ve learned at church—stripping away the religious aspects that can sometimes be frowned upon—and focusing on messages like “you belong here,” I believe I can help make a difference.

If people can take the values that they learn from church and apply them to the real world, it would help to bring heaven on earth. The church could change the world. 🌱

The logo for 'Each Gift' features a stylized orange flame or drop above the words 'Each Gift' in a light green, sans-serif font, all enclosed within a circular border.

MC Canada YOUTH Gathering
July 2 -5, 2025
Kitchener, ON
Conrad Grebel University College

MC Canada Gathering
July 2 -5, 2025
Kitchener, ON
Rockway Mennonite Collegiate



Mennonite
Church
Canada





Renewing Rural Worship

More gifts than challenges!

“We caught new glimpses of the image of God in the people that we met through Renewing Rural Worship,” says Mykayla Turner, project director.

What does it mean to be in a rural place? What makes rural people and their connections and interactions unique? The Church at Nairn began to explore the nuances of worship in

a rural setting. Mykayla developed a six-session workshop series entitled Renewing Rural Worship. Recognizing the importance of this work, she applied for and received a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

“The Church at Nairn is hosting a FREE ecumenical workshop series to address the gifts and challenges of

worshipping in a rural context,” read the invitation as it reached congregations within one-hour driving distance. The response was enthusiastic, with people from Mennonite, Presbyterian, United, Baptist, Lutheran and Non-Denominational congregations answering the call to join the series. By focusing on the distinct characteristics of rural life, the

series aimed to foster a deeper understanding of how these communities can draw on their strengths and create vibrant worship experiences.

In a session focused on communion, a leader began by standing at a table, guiding participants as they formed a single line to receive the elements. From there, the participants moved to the four corners of the room, gathering in small groups. In these intimate settings, they served communion to one another. Finally, the participants came together again, forming two lines that met in the middle of the sanctuary. As they reached the front, they served each other. The workshop participants observed that the act of communion takes on new dimensions depending on how it is served and by whom. Each method of communion offered fresh insights into understandings of God, neighbours and the Christian journey.

The Church at Nairn has since shifted their focus to explore how repetition can bring depth and ease to worship. Members discussed the practices of one congregation who chooses

to conclude every service with the same song, a practice that simplifies worship planning by eliminating the need to select a different sending song each week.

The conversation extended to other aspects of worship, such as using the same benediction or the prayer to receive the offering for every service. "It can be meaningful and good for us to return to the same song or prayer each week," Mykayla highlights. "Not only does it enrich the congregation in ways that we may not be used to, but it reduces the burden for some of our worship leaders and helps to minimize lay leadership fatigue that many of us experience in rural congregations."

Ecumenical dialogue and connections emerged as an enduring gift of this project. "There is so much that we gain when we do these things together, especially for those in isolated communities," Mykayla observes. "Ecumenical dialogue brought us closer to God who is much bigger than what we could imagine ourselves. Trusting in that kind of God, through the ups and downs of rural worship, brings a lot of hope and comfort." 🌿

"Not only does it enrich the congregation, it helps to minimize leadership fatigue that many experience in rural congregations."



Learning about worship together.



Worship leaders talking with each other.



INNOVATE @ West Hills

Inspiring Lives, Making a Difference

“**H**omer would have loved it!”
I said.

One of our families at West Hills Fellowship hosted a movie night at their business location. It is an *OUT* weekend for our congregation which means we forego a traditional worship service in lieu of intentional plans to invite those who are part of the fabric of our daily lives but

who may not otherwise engage the traditional church. Our church members were almost outnumbered by the families that accepted the invitation to the movie night. Those in attendance ranged in age from infant to 90 years of age.

We watched the movie *Family Camp*, a faith based comedy by The Skit Guys about two polar opposite families



Kelly Freeman, part of West Hills Mennonite Fellowship and participant in INNOVATE, along with her husband Jeff, have found it deeply life-giving to live as family on mission.

forced to camp together. Again I say, “Homer would have loved it!”

Homer Witmer, a long time member of our church family went to be with his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ this past year. He had served as director at Fraser Lake Camp in the 1970s. His obituary shares the story of a life given in service to others and an example of passionate spirituality, radical community engagement and missional zeal. He once answered a newspaper ad for someone new to Canada looking for a friend. That is a beautiful way to describe Homer, a true friend to all. Homer’s life is an inspiration to all of us.

Homer asked in his last few days “What will happen to West Hills?” We are a small group of dedicated families joined together by a desire to be the light of Christ in our neighbourhoods, on our sports teams and in our workplaces.

Homer was a visionary and someone willing to change with the times, all the while keeping Jesus Christ at the centre. Homer would have been reassured on that movie night that the church is not a building or a place, but the people gathered together in God’s name.

David Platt (radical.net) says “We’re together in this thing. We love our God. We want His glory known in the world. He’s given us a Great Commission to

The church is not a building or a place, but the people gathered together in His name.

make disciples of all nations. Let’s build each other up in Christ. With the Spirit of God in us, we’re a body working together for the glory of our God and the world.” This is how Homer saw brothers and sisters in Christ, as builders working alongside each other to further the Kingdom of God.

Although we didn’t plan our movie night to honour Homer, it was a beautiful and fitting way to remember our dear friend in faith and love. Homer would have loved it! 🙏

The following letter was received by INNOVATE leadership from Waters Mennonite Church after INNOVATE’s farewell/closing celebration.

Dear Norm and Friends:

The *INNOVATE Be the Change* model of learning to know God and learning better ways to be his church has enriched us here at Waters. We have felt closer to God. We have felt empowered by God’s Spirit to carry on as a church, even when “numbers” might suggest otherwise.

Our huddle has transitioned into our church’s visioning team. Our church in turn has responded to

the *OUT* challenge by cooking 100 meals a month for the Local Lively Food Bank and by volunteering as a group of 8-10 once or twice a month at The Mission in Sudbury. On 5th Sundays, we bring a Service of Song to Meadowbrook, the local seniors home. I believe we also better support each other on *IN* challenges. As a church, we have developed more of a team approach to everything.

Thank you so much for inspiring us to listen to God better - to truly hear his voice. You’ve guided

us through the learning circle, encouraging us to observe and process what we heard, repent as needed and discuss with others for affirmation and wisdom. We’ve then planned and acted on what we heard. What is God telling us and what are we going to do about it?

Maybe because we are a small church we have been able to take these teachings to heart and to apply them. It is with deep appreciation that we say “Thank you” and “God go with you and bless you and make of you a blessing.”

Go forth in peace! 🙏



The stories in Sprout represent just a small portion of what God is doing in MCEC. Your prayers, words of encouragement, donations and gifts of time play in the background of each story. Together we are transformed by the love of God, inspired by the hope we find in Jesus and called to action by the power of the Holy Spirit.

To make a financial gift please mail a cheque to the address below, scan the QR code, visit our website at www.mcec.ca/giving or e-transfer to financeoffice@mcec.ca.



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MCEC
201-50 Kent Ave
Kitchener, ON N2P 3G1
www.mcec.ca