

S D C O U T Called to Action by the Holy Spirit





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

Front Cover: Meeting in the jungle for worship - Page 4



Photo: Pastor Sai was continually amazed by those hiding in the jungle—hearts weary from hardship, yet always ready to worship.

don't know why I felt compelled to go," says Pastor Sai, "but I knew I needed to go to Myanmar, even though it didn't make sense." Thing Sai is pastor at Kitchener Emmanuel Church, an MCEC congregation of people from the Matupi area of Chin State in Myanmar.

Under cover of darkness, during a time of war and unrest, he and his young guide slipped into the jungles of Myanmar on a small scooter. They met people who had fled bombs and the military, finding refuge deep in the jungle. To their surprise, they were waved through all checkpoints without question. In each community,

Pastor Sai offered hope. "That's what people are looking for—hope and peace. I preached the love of Jesus."

Civil defenders soon joined them for protection in dangerous areas. More than once, strangers greeted them along the way saying, "We knew you were coming," though no one had told

them or even knew where they were. In one village, locals warned him not to enter because "everyone who goes in doesn't come back." What he discovered was heartbreaking—every home empty of life, its people killed instantly by some type of attack. It was a painful sight, and an even more painful story to share later with a church member in Kitchener whose family was from that very village.

In another settlement, weary from travel, Pastor Sai hoped to rest. But as soon as he arrived, the people began to gather. "We're going to have worship, and you're going to preach tonight!" they told him excitedly. "I don't speak your language," he replied, hoping it might delay the service long enough for him to sleep. It did not.

As he introduced himself, someone exclaimed, "We know your father!" Pastor Sai was astonished. His father, also a preacher, had been killed more than 30 years earlier for refusing to stop preaching and building the church. "It really made me happy," he recalls. "It was like seeing my father again through their stories." He preached until midnight, answering questions until 3:00 in the morning. When he finally lay down to rest, he was urgently awakened and told to leave before dawn.

Hours later, on the road, he met an old man waiting for him. "Thank God

I carry my Bible and share the gospel... I can at least bring hope.

you are here. I have been waiting for you." Once again astonished, Pastor Sai followed him down a narrow path deeper into the jungle, though he feared they might be walking into an army trap. Instead, they reached a makeshift clearing where the sound of singing filled the air. There, a hundred people-hiding from danger-were waiting for a preacher. They told him they had no food and were learning to fast. Pastor Sai stayed and shared the hope of Jesus with them. When he finished, the old man smiled and said, "No one is going to stop you now. You can go peacefully." And so he did.

Thing Sai slipped out of Myanmar as quietly as he had entered. Looking back, he sees God's hand in every step—from the moment he was granted time off work to the strangers who seemed to expect him at every turn, to the echoes of his father's faithfulness and the remarkable protection he experienced along the way.

"The people are living in makeshift villages, afraid for their lives.
Fathers can't feed their children; people are starving," he says with urgency. "I long to go back and bring them the hope of Jesus.
I carry my Bible and share the gospel. I don't have anything else to give them—but I have the Word of God, and I can at least bring hope."

Deep in the jungle, long after nightfall, Pastor Sai (right) shares words of hope with those gathered around him.







Anthony Siegrist
 MCEC Executive Minister

ver this past year I have felt called to remind our church (MCEC) of God's active and pervasive presence. As the psalmist asks, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" God is not merely an idea we talk about or something we invoke to really make a point stick. The stories contained in this issue

of Sprout demonstrate that God's Spirit is active among us, calling us to action. Sometimes the Spirit's call comes through a congregation, as has been the case for Hruai and Thomas. Sometimes, as the stories of Preston Mennonite and Bethel Mennonite show, the call extends over decades, inviting a community to take actions in the present that might

surprise previous generations. Sometimes the Spirit's call takes us to new places and generates new perspectives, as has been the case for Laura and Pastor Sai.

Consider these words from the forty-third chapter of Isaiah:

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth;
do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

These lines speak to God's enduring faithfulness. Notice that this faithfulness isn't a static force, like the buttress of a medieval cathedral. God's faithfulness is specific to a people and place. It's like wild animals receiving what they need. Our imaginations sometimes limit our perception of God's presence to the unexplainable or the dramatic. But God is present to each one of us in the normal and the everyday as an active faithfulness that makes new things possible.

I'm deeply grateful that our staff team has the opportunity to serve a church that responds to the call of God's Spirit. Indeed, part of our work is to share our stories, like those in these pages, so that God's God is present to each one of us as an active faithfulness that makes new things possible.

call, as mysterious sometimes as the wind, doesn't go unrecognized. In that sense, this edition of Sprout is a declaration of praise. We praise God for continuing to call our communities into the ministry of reconciliation. We praise God for young folks and for old folks and for everyone in between attending to the Spirit's presence.

United in celebration and worship at the MC Canada Gathering, Kitchener, July 2025.





eing called by God for me was a mix of little nudges and then big, wide openings," says Thomas Reimer, pastor at Rockway Mennonite Church.

Thomas, who grew-up at Rockway, began to participate in worship services as a youth by preparing and sharing prayers. "I've always enjoyed participating in worship. I like the creativity and thought involved," he

says. People in the congregation took notice and encouraged him.

Later, Thomas pursued studies in philosophy. "Throughout my studies I was thinking a lot about religious language—wondering what it really means to say, 'I believe this' or 'I believe that.' Doctrinal statements about divinity felt complicated, especially since I didn't feel I had a direct experience of what they pointed to."

It touched something deeper in me. My faith became alive in a new way.

Graduate studies took him to Toronto for a PhD, which he eventually paused when he and his wife moved to Winnipeg for her medical residency. "My PhD was floundering, so I paused it and stayed home with our kids," he recalls. "I'd been in school my whole life. I needed to do something different." Thomas then worked as a carpenter for five years.

When his family returned to Ontario, he reengaged with church. Someone invited him to join the worship committee, and a year later, when the chair stepped down, he accepted that role. He laughs, "I was naive enough not to know what it would involve, so I just said, 'Okay, I'll try it."

Then the pandemic arrived. "It was a very intense time—we were basically reinventing worship. For the first time, I realized not only could I do this work, but I found it fulfilling. Even though I still wrestled with doctrine and belief, I found that serving others and creating worship together felt right."

Thomas returned to school to pursue a new PhD in theology at the Toronto School of Theology. "While studying philosophy, I had encountered a 9th century Irish philosopher named Eriugena and in my new PhD I became focused on his writings and the mystical tradition of which he was a part," Thomas explains. Immersing himself in this tradition

changed something. "Suddenly, the language of theology touched something deeper in me. My faith became alive in a new way."

Through his work on the worship committee, Thomas' church work began to transform. As he led prayers, preached and collaborated on services, he discovered how rewarding it was to serve. Around this time, Rockway's long-term pastor announced that he would finish his ministry in two years. Thomas began working closely with him and others to imagine the congregation's future.

Even before that announcement, people had occasionally asked Thomas, "Have you ever thought about ministry?" Initially, he brushed it off, focused on his academic path. But as the pastor's departure approached, the questions grew more frequent. "I began to sense that this was different—this was not just my own idea but something rising out of conversations with

people I trusted and cared about," he says.

Eventually, Thomas put his name forward for the interim pastor role. "My call wasn't just an inner feeling—it was something confirmed through the voices of my community," he explains. "When those conversations, personal giftings and life circumstances come together, it really feels like an audible call—undeniably audible."

Now serving as pastor at Rockway, Thomas continues to nurture the community who shaped him. "I'm quite certain this path wouldn't have happened without Rockway Mennonite Church. Being formed here planted seeds within me, and kept them growing," he says. "People noticed things early in my life—like a prayer I led—and connected that with a possible path to ministry. It's my hope that people keep seeing and speaking those possibilities into each other's lives."

Thomas
graduates
from the
MCEC TiM
program,
congratulated
by Marilyn
Rudy-Froese,
MCEC
Leadership
Minister.





From Vision to Action The Story of the Healing Garden

n a warm summer morning, people stepping behind Preston Mennonite Church encounter a space that feels alive with possibilities. Bees hum among pollinator-friendly plants, pathways invite quiet walks, while benches offer rest. This is the Healing Garden, a vision that began with casual conversations and is now becoming a welcoming place for all.

Muriel Bechtel, member at Preston Mennonite, remembers early whisperings of a potential garden, but it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic that the idea took shape. As tents appeared for outdoor visits and worship, Fairview villa resident, George Fast, noticed that some of them were on the parking lot and asked, "Why are people visiting on the pavement when we have all this

The garden is a gift for generations ahead for people seeking a quiet place together.

green space?" He sketched a drawing of a garden with pathways and sitting areas.

Muriel recalls her reaction, "His ideas matched what I had been imagining, and I thought, 'Good! Now there are two of us!' That's when the vision began to grow."

The space quickly expanded beyond worship. Fairview Mennonite Home's programs spilled into outdoor space as well: exercise classes using the trees, yoga under their branches and even a drumming circle.

"As plans grew, so did the vision," says Elaine Shantz, President and CEO of Fairview Parkwood Craigwiel Communities. "We were reminded through COVID how important it is to be outdoors. My hope is that residents, staff, families and neighbours will find in this garden a space for rest and renewal, a place of healing."

The garden is still young, its plants small but growing. Over the summer months, Fairview villa resident, Roger Snyder, joined the watering efforts to help them thrive. Shade sails and benches will be added, and by next spring the space should feel lusher and even more inviting.

From the start, Indigenous wisdom was woven into the garden. The Healing Garden committee invited Terre Chartrand, an Omami Ininiwak

Algonquin land-based teacher from unceded Algonquin territory, to bless the land and walk the property before construction began. "The land will tell us what it needs," Terre reminded them.

When unhealthy trees had to be removed, Muriel honoured them with tobacco, as Terre had taught her, recognizing the shade and beauty the trees had provided over the years. A construction worker noticed and said, "It makes our work so much more

our work so much more valuable to know people here really care about this land."

For Preston Mennonite Church, the Healing Garden is about more than landscaping, it's about the future. "We know our church is changing," Muriel says. "This is how we are investing in the future, learning to share our space rather than hold onto it as our own."

Both Muriel and Elaine see the garden as a gift for generations ahead—whether for school groups, residents, staff, church members or families seeking a quiet place together.

My hope is this garden will be a space for rest and renewal, a place of healing.

Elaine reflects, "This land was given by Eugene Langs to the church and Fairview decades ago as a shared trust. In a way, the Healing Garden continues that vision—partnership, community and gratitude for the land that sustains us."





hen Hruai Tu looks back, he remembers the moment when everything began to change.

"I was a Christian, but I never really lived for Christ until about three years ago. I had this emptiness in my heart—I was longing for more," he says. "I told God, 'If you help me let go of the things I'm addicted to, I'll dedicate my life to you."

Several months later, Hruai noticed something different in his life. The struggles that once held him back no longer had the same grip. God had begun to answer his prayer. "I wanted to set an example for those around me, especially for the younger generation," he explains. "When you are struggling, there is a way out —and that way out is in Christ."

Today, Hruai serves as youth president at Chin Christian Church in Kitchener

Hruai finds greatest joy in everyday conversation with youth. "I could talk about God with them forever."

helping to lead youth and run media and live streams. This connects him with the 30-40 youth in his congregation.

Language, however, is one of the biggest challenges. Most adults in the congregation speak Hakha Chin, while many of the youth are most comfortable speaking English. Hruai himself knows the struggle well. He arrived in Canada at the age of seven after spending time in Myanmar and India, where he spoke Hakha Chin and had also learned some Hindi, "It was hard to make friends at first." he remembers. "Hakha was the only language that I spoke well." Over time, English became his strongest language, and he began losing some of his fluency in Hakha Chin.

This tension surfaces when he preaches. "When I speak at my church, I speak in Hakha," he says. "But it's a struggle to find the right words at times. In my head I say it in English first and then translate it into Hakha. Preaching in English actually feels easier for me."

That became clear in 2024 when Hruai was invited to speak at an MCEC intercultural worship service. "Preaching in English felt so natural to me," he says.

As he spoke to people from many cultures, he reminded them that every person is a valuable part of the body of Christ. "Worship was beautiful," he recalls. "I thought to myself—this must have been how Paul felt in Acts 17, standing before people from so many different places."

Hruai is currently studying pastoral ministry at Heritage College and Seminary in Cambridge, where he is midway through a bachelor's degree. He has a passion for proclaiming God's Word. "I've been studying Hebrew, which helps me understand Scripture in a new way," he says. He dreams of continuing his studies toward a master's and maybe even a PhD, combining pastoral ministry with scholarship. One of his greatest hopes is to share the beauty of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Chin community, showing the culture, context and depth behind God's Word.

But for now, Hruai finds greatest joy in everyday conversations with youth. "Sometimes I talk to them like a brother or a friend, not just as youth president," he says. "When they ask questions about God, and I see that look on their faces when



It's a beautiful thing to study Scripture on a deeper level and share it with others.

they understand—that's my favorite part of ministry. I could talk about God with them forever."

His calling is clear: to serve the next generation and to share God's Word with his community. "It's a beautiful thing to study Scripture on a deeper level and then share it with others," Hruai says. "That's what I want to do with my life."



e are leaving quite a legacy and it's something we will never completely see," says Steve Hiller, a member of Bethel Mennonite Church, which will close its doors at the end of October. "We have no idea how many lives God has touched through Bethel. My life was changed here, and I'm just one person. There are hundreds more."

As Bethel prepares for its final service, members remember and celebrate God's faithfulness across 78 years. At Bethel's 75th anniversary, someone referenced a map of the world indicating Bethel's global outreach – at least 42 countries where members had served. Closer to home, countless lives were shaped through Bethel's worship, mission and youth programs. During a youth homecoming in 2014,

the sanctuary overflowed with hundreds returning to give thanks for the nurture they had received.

"God has been faithful throughout the years at Bethel," reflects Robert Musselman, who incidentally was one of the first children born into the congregation. "Twelve families were called to start this congregation, and God's Spirit has faithfully led us from there to here."

Like many congregations, Bethel faced dwindling numbers and aging leadership. "It became evident that we can't go on like this," recalls Vera Bauman. "We were wearing out."

To discern their future, Bethel began a series of "Town Hall" meetings — gatherings where nearly everyone attended. "We sat in chairs in a circle and talked," Vera says. "We listened to one another."

These conversations grew into a deeper process of discernment. Bethel invited Marilyn Rudy-Froese, MCEC Leadership Minister, to walk with them. With her gentle presence, she helped create space for honest reflection and supported the congregation as they discerned their way forward.

Though no one wanted to close, members gradually realized it was the faithful path forward. "I would have loved to vote the other way. That's where my heart was," admits Chester Martin. "But it didn't feel like an option." In the end, the congregation made the decision to close.

Once that decision was made, Bethel members committed to closing well. Worship became a time of remembering and giving thanks. Former pastors returned to preach on themes of greeting, memory and blessing.

"We've had such meaningful worship these last months —a lot of remembering," says Joyce Bauman. "Hearing pastors talk about the work we did while they were here reminded us of how God worked in and through us."

Twelve families were called to start this congregation, and God's Spirit has faithfully led us from there to here.

The remembering has been honest, too. "It hasn't always been easy," admits Robert. "There were challenges. But that's normal for any community, any church. And God remained faithful even then."

Part of closing well meant discerning what would happen to the church building. Relief came when a growing Anabaptist congregation, bursting at the seams, purchased the property. Bethel hosted an open house for the new congregation and was thrilled when

A sweet morning of fellowship - good food, good friends and God's presence.



Life changes and the church changes with it. It's just a different chapter.

200 to 250 people streamed through the building. "It was amazing," Vera says. "Children were excited, and the place was alive with people. It was wonderful to see such energy."

For Bethel members, it was bittersweet joy. "If you look at this from God's eyes," reflects Chester, "it's not the end of church here. It's just a different group of people continuing what God has always been doing in this place."

Dave Tiessen, pastor, captured it in his annual report: "Through our grief we began to realize that what we had always wanted Bethel to be—a strong, Anabaptist Mennonite church, devoted to worship, biblical preaching, fellowship and community—God was



Moments like these are unforgettable.

now at work in making it happen right in front of us in our own building."

As the final Sundays take place, the grief is real. "Some people said, 'I thought Bethel would always be here' or 'I always thought I'd have my funeral here," Vera shares. "It won't be the same."

Yet there is hope. "Life changes, and the church changes with it," says Joyce. "This hasn't been a failure. It's just a different chapter."

For 78 years, Bethel Mennonite Church has lived out its calling. And in closing well, they leave behind not just a building, but a legacy of faithfulness, community and hope for the future.

Bethel MYF Homecoming 2014







– Laura Rodriguez-Reyes MCEC Representative to the MWC Global Youth Summit don't know if I was called to become a delegate to the Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit in the way some describe hearing God's voice. What I do know is that I felt a strong push to apply because I deeply value Anabaptist commitments of peace, justice and love. I also hoped this opportunity would allow me to show my Latin American identity. In many

Mennonite spaces in Canada, I often feel like I don't fully belong because of my cultural background. Yet globally, Mennonites are incredibly diverse. So, part of my motivation in applying was to help challenge and decolonize the unspoken stereotypes of what a Mennonite "looks like."

That push took me to Germany and Switzerland, where I met Mennonites

Sometimes the Holy Spirit calls us to change ourselves.

from every corner of the world. I quickly realized the trip would be much more than I had expected. I saw firsthand just how different we are, not only in appearance but also in theology, customs and in how we live out our faith.

In Germany, I joined other delegates for deep and sometimes difficult conversations about theology and the struggles our churches and countries face. At times, I felt frustrated, even overwhelmed. Looking back, I now see my calling in that season as one of seeing and learning: seeing the roots of where Mennonites came from and how that history

has shaped our global church, and learning that my role was not to change others, but to embody peaceful dialogue and understanding in the midst of disagreement.

For example, I often found myself disagreeing with certain theologies, beliefs or practices. I believe women belong in leadership. I believe it is my duty to take care of the planet. I also believe that the Mennonite story of migration from Europe to North America, because of persecution, teaches us something vital: we must extend compassion to others who face persecution today. For me, that includes standing with Indigenous communities who have endured genocide for over 500 years, and embracing LGBTQ+ communities within the church, who too often face rejection. These beliefs shape who I am.

So, in moments of disagreement, I learned that sometimes the Holy Spirit calls us not to change others, but to change ourselves by embracing compassion, understanding and peaceful dialogue during disagreements despite the rage or injustice you feel in your heart.

While I had other expectations when applying, perhaps unknowingly, I was called by the Holy Spirit to see and learn—an invitation I still struggle with but am working on. Ultimately, we may all have different theologies, beliefs, and practices, but we are all called to be better disciples, caring for one another and for creation.

Celebrating MCEC Support: Thank You for Inspiring Youth and Young Adults to Lead With Purpose

We are truly grateful for the generous support that enabled Laura Rodriguez-Reyes to represent MCEC at the Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit in Württemberg, Germany.

Through a special campaign drive, congregations and individuals across MCEC came together to raise \$1,950.00, making this incredible opportunity possible. Thank you for investing in this generation of leaders as they make global impact!

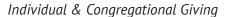


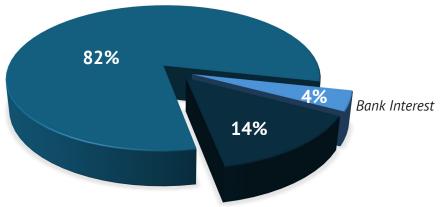
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Every contribution to MCEC is more than a donation - it is a gift of hope that strengthens congregations, empowers leaders, and deepens our shared commitment to embody God's reconciling love for all creation.

Giving to MCEC





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he 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/qiving or e-transfer to financeoffice@mcec.ca.



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