



**Mennonite  
Church**  
Eastern Canada

# Sprout

Energize, Encourage and Embody



**Just Everyday Life**  
PG. 6

**Heaven on Earth**  
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**Kits and Tables  
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Annual Church Gathering

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

Front Cover:  
Youth from Centre Béthésda  
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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 that 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



# Energize, Encourage, Embody God at work in MCEC



**Ann L. Schultz**  
*Intentional Interim  
Executive Team Leader*

**O**n March 1, 1988, three conferences in Ontario came together to form Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada. It was the commonalities of peace, education and mission that brought the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec, the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, the Conference of United Mennonite Churches in Ontario alongside the Mennonite Mission Board of Ontario together.

I remember that day well. I was a student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, and on the evening of March 1st my dad, Herbert Schultz, Conference Minister at the time for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec and the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, called me to let me know that integration was going to happen! A lot of process and groundwork had taken place to get to this moment, and together we

celebrated this monumental day in the life of Mennonites in Ontario!

In October 2001, MCEC changed its name to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada in recognition of the transformation of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church into Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. And now, over thirty years later, MCEC continues to honor its purpose and identity that was established so many years ago!

In this edition of Sprout, we focus on the many ways our congregations, now numbering 105, are realizing the purpose of MCEC:

- To energize congregations in worship, discipleship and mission;
- To encourage leaders of hope, vision and transformation;
- To embody God's reconciling ministry for all creation

You will be inspired as you read of:

- the rich connections that are developing between Shalom Worship and Healing Centre and the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church;
- the collaborations and connections that are taking place between the Petitediac Mennonite Church and the local prison;

*These stories remind me of the abundant and wonderful ministry of MCEC congregations, at a time when many of us are asking hard questions about the future of our church.*

- the energy and desire of Centre Béthésda Mennonite de Québec, alongside other MCEC congregations in Quebec, to draw youth together for worship;
- the holy moments that took place at the Songwriter's Workshop at Hidden Acres, allowing for both seasoned and developing songwriters to create and worship together;
- the evolving and new ways several MCEC congregations are providing worship spaces, allowing for families, kids, parents and persons who are neurodiverse to engage in worship together.

These stories remind me of the abundant and wonderful ministry of MCEC congregations, at a time when many of us are asking hard questions

about the future of our church. These stories remind me that God is working in us and through us, breathing life in unexpected ways. These stories remind me that, 35+ years post-integration, we are a church that continues to energize, encourage and embody!

I leave you with the final verse of *We are a new Creation* (Jane Parker Huber), the theme hymn, which was sung at the March 1988 Annual Church Gathering. May these words continue to speak as we worship and serve.

*We are a new creation  
By God's own gracious hand,  
Our burdens cast behind us,  
A daring future planned.  
In ministry and mission,  
United let us live,  
In Christ a shining vision  
To God's wide world to give. 🌿*



# Just Everyday Life with Petitcodiac Mennonite Church

As the vehicle drew closer to the building, the people in the van could read the sign – “Petitcodiac Mennonite Church – All are welcome!”

The atmosphere in the van was almost palpable – one of great anxiety. A man in the back felt a tightness in his chest and couldn’t catch his breath. Was he having a heart attack? “They know where

we are from, right?” asked another passenger. The driver smiled and caught his eyes in the rear-view mirror, “Yeah,” he said reassuringly, “they know where you’re from.”

Gord Driedger is pastor at Petitcodiac Mennonite Church (PMC) and a chaplain at Dorchester Penitentiary, a minimum-security prison in the area. Because Dorchester is a “releasing

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*The church  
becomes the first  
idea of a safe  
place for some of  
them.*

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institution,” it is a place that helps people to be ready to leave institutional life and return to society. As a part of that process, Gord sets up “escorted temporary absences” so the men are able to go to places outside of the prison. Two Sundays a month, Gord brings a group to Petitcodiac Mennonite Church.

“The men aren’t used to being with people outside of the prison,” explains Gord. “Often they are unsure if they can even talk to people. The church becomes the first idea of a safe place for some of them.”

Jim\*, who has been in prison for the past 37 years, came with Gord to Petitcodiac Mennonite Church on a potluck Sunday. Jim’s parents, who live a distance away from the prison, have been faithful visitors to the prison to see their son. They leapt at the chance to see Jim in this supervised, escorted visit to Petitcodiac Mennonite Church. “It was the first time Jim and his parents have been together outside of the prison in 37 years!” says Gord. “They shared a meal together in the church and we felt so privileged to be there and share that experience with them.”

Petitcodiac Mennonite Church has a long history of relationship with

*\*Jim’s name has been changed*

the Dorchester penitentiary. Siegfried Janzen who pastored at Petitcodiac from 1985-1995 volunteered at the prison alongside many in the congregation. Siegfried’s legacy lives on through the Siegfried Janzen Award given to outstanding volunteers at the Dorchester penitentiary. Siegfried’s work at Dorchester not only set the stage for Gord to be involved there, but also provided a strong foundation for the church’s involvement.

Petitcodiac Mennonite Church also has a long history of supporting the local community. The food pantry in Petitcodiac is organized by PMC and is a place where local produce is sold for reasonable prices; a place to make organic food available to everyone. There is a community table at the pantry where people bring produce to share.



Supporting their local community through the food pantry.



Building a bridge at Petitcodiac Mennonite Church.



A potluck held at Petitcodiac Mennonite Church was the first time \*Jim and his family had shared a meal together outside of the prison in 37 years!



*What makes the church work properly isn't necessarily the good theology or the strong preaching - it's the relationships that you have with people.*

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*It is significant for the men to give back to society by sharing the bounty of their gardens with those who are in need.*

“There are several guys who have amazing gardens in the yard at Dorchester,” says Gord. During harvest time, Gord takes 150-200 pounds of vegetables each week from the prison to the community table at the pantry. “It is significant for the men to give back to society by sharing the bounty of their gardens with those who are in need,” says Gord. “The church is able to help facilitate that and also help people to see their worth and value in the world.”

“Often the hardest thing for men in prison is to be able to find some grace for themselves,” Gord says. He recalls a story of a man who was serving a life sentence. The man was lying in bed one night, unable to sleep and hating himself. “There is no place that I belong except in prison,” he thought. “There is no place that will ever accept me.” He shared with Gord that

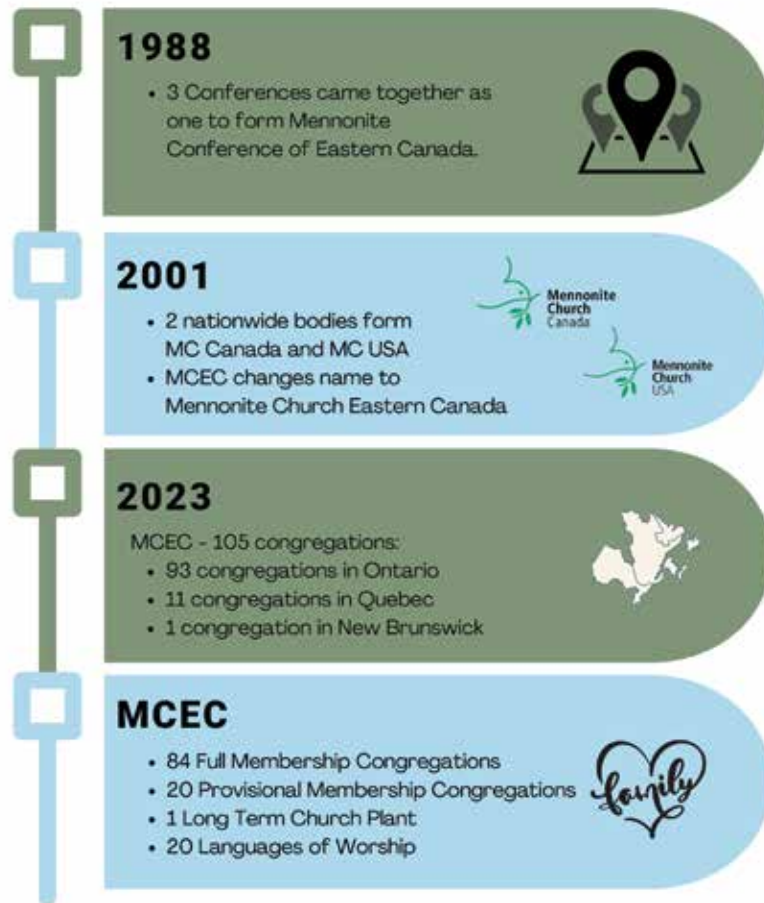
it was in that moment that he thought about Gord and about the small church. He realized there was a place where he could go and people would love and accept him. He was then able to sleep.

“The people at PMC have really embraced the role of making these guys just feel at home. The congregation is remarkable. The people in the congregation walk alongside the men. They're not trying to save them. They're not trying to astound them. They're just walking with them,” says Gord. “What makes the church work properly isn't necessarily the good theology or the strong preaching - it's the relationships that you have with people. It is the love that you have for each other and from that, everything else flows.” 🌱





# MCEC By the Numbers



## Our Values

**Beloved-ness:** All people before God are equal and have dignity, created in God's image.

**Spirituality:** Worship and prayer ground us in God's love and connect us to the Spirit's movement.

**Transformation:** We are curious to see what God is doing in our lives and in the world. We are open to change.

**Community:** We grow, learn and serve best in relationship with others, listening for God together.

**Hospitality:** Everyone is welcome.

**Peace & Justice:** We are living into God's Shalom for all creation.



# Ma Jeunesse En Jésus-Christ Centre Béthésda Mennonite de Québec

Pastor Charles walked into the room as all the youth turned to look. Carrying a big white box and smiling, those who watched him couldn't help but wonder what was inside the box. He placed the box on the table, opened it and pulled out a shirt. He held up the shirt – a gleaming white polo shirt with green accents on the sleeves

and collar. Besides that, there was a logo on the front left and on the back it said “Ma Jeunesse En Jésus-Christ” (My Youth in Jesus Christ). “One for everyone!” he called. The shirts were gone in 30 seconds!

David Mufaya, youth leader says, “To me these t-shirts are a very big deal. It is a blessing – a gift. It's rare

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*Some [youth] said that church is no longer interesting to them or they find it too old.*

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to find people feeling proud to wear something with Jesus' name on it – and these youth do wear the t-shirts.” The youth at Centre Béthésda Mennonite de Québec proudly wear these t-shirts created by their pastor, Charles Tabena. “It’s another way to present Jesus,” says Charles.

Centre Béthésda Mennonite de Québec is a growing community. They began meeting in 2019. They noticed that the youth were not engaged or were leaving the church. “The youth are our future leaders,” says David.

Pastor Charles gathered the youth together to “just talk” and listened to their thoughts. “Some said that church is no longer interesting to them or they find it too old,” says Charles. Some told him that they felt as though their point of view is not taken into consideration.

*We want young people to know that the church cares about them.*

One of the ideas that the young people brought to Charles and David was that of youth worship concerts. “One of the most influential thing that attracts youth is music,” says David. October 28th will be the second youth concert they will hold, bringing together five Mennonite area congregations for an evening of praise and worship. “It’s going to be great,” says Charles. “We will have multiple youth choirs from different congregations. They will come and perform and will also



Ma Jeunesse En Jésus-Christ, reads the shirt - My Youth in Jesus Christ.



Youth at Centre Béthésda Mennonite de Québec wearing the t-shirts given to them by Pastor Tabena.



learn a few songs that they will then sing together to lead in worship. It will be amazing.”

“Listening to young people in the church will make the church stronger,” says Charles. “We want to bring young people to church and let them know that the church cares about them.”



# Heaven on Earth

## Anabaptist Songwriters Retreat

“We were surrounded by nature and by creative people that weekend. Everywhere you looked, you could find songs and inspiration,” says Moses Mugisha, writer of MCEC’s Courageous Imagination theme song a few years ago.

Moses, along with 24 songwriters’ from across North America,

gathered at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp this past spring for the first ever Anabaptist songwriters’ retreat. The retreat, organized by the Anabaptist Worship Network and funded by a grant from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, gathered songwriters from across Canada, United States and Mexico for a weekend of inspiration and creativity to write songs from an

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*There is a promise of a God who walks with us within the messy bits of life.*

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Anabaptist perspective for the church. “We wanted to provide a space to nourish our Anabaptist songwriters and support them in the work that they do,” says Anneli Loepp Thiessen, co-founder of the Anabaptist Worship Network. Creative teams formed organically throughout the weekend as they shared songs and lyrics with each other and worked collaboratively.

“Worship is critical within the church,” says Amanda Pot, songwriter and worship leader. Amanda, who has dabbled in songwriting over the years, met Julia Kasdorf at the retreat. Both women were drawn to each other because of their work with vulnerable persons, many whom have experienced great trauma. As Julia and Amanda came together creatively, a song was born – *With Open Hands (Be Still)*. “Julia had the verses and we were working on the chorus,” explains Amanda. “We sat down together and the song just spilled out.”

“Sometimes life is hard and there are no easy answers,” she says. “There is promise of a God who walks with us within the messy bits of life.” Amanda was able to share the song with the women

## *This weekend honestly felt like heaven on earth.*

with whom she works. “It was almost like sending them with a blessing,” says Amanda. “It was really, really special.”

“This weekend honestly felt like heaven on earth,” says Amanda. “There was an openness and vulnerability the entire weekend as people received and shared their work.” Moses also similarly expressed, “I was in a room with people who like to do what I like to do – serve and worship God. It was like heaven on earth.”

Marilyn Rudy-Froese, MCEC church leadership minister, who was invited to visit that weekend, offered a blessing to the songwriters. “Our congregations benefit so deeply from this important work,” she says. “It was an honour to be able to join them and offer a blessing to them.”

Gifted worship leaders led Sunday morning worship, which included an anointing



Collaborating together



And the next generation!



Worshipping and recording

*Gifted songwriters are pouring into the church and shaping our community worship in a prophetic way.*

service. “Songwriting is so often an invisible and unrecognized labour. The credits are on the bottom of the hymnal page or on the first slide of a song, yet often we don’t pay attention to who wrote the piece,” says Anneli. “We have so many gifted songwriters who are pouring into the church and shaping our community worship in a prophetic way. It’s exciting to be able to share their contributions.”

Songs that emerged that weekend continue to be uploaded to the Together in Worship website ([www.togetherinworship.com](http://www.togetherinworship.com)) where they can be found and taught to congregations.

“It was very encouraging for me to be a part of this weekend,” says Amanda. “It gave me a deep, deep hope for the church. It really did feel like heaven – it was a beautiful thing and I am grateful.” 🌿

Amanda and Julia collaborate as they write *With Open Hands (Be Still)*.



## **With Open Hands (Be Still)**

Lord, help me  
in this season of suffering;  
my plea is my offering  
Lord, help me.

Longing for mercy,  
the crumbs from the bread of life  
are enough to satisfy  
longing for mercy.

Be still with open hands.  
God, you understand.  
Be still.

I will kneel;  
blessed humility,  
you honor vulnerability.  
I will kneel.

I will persevere;  
no shame in suffering,  
you meet me with comforting.  
I will persevere.

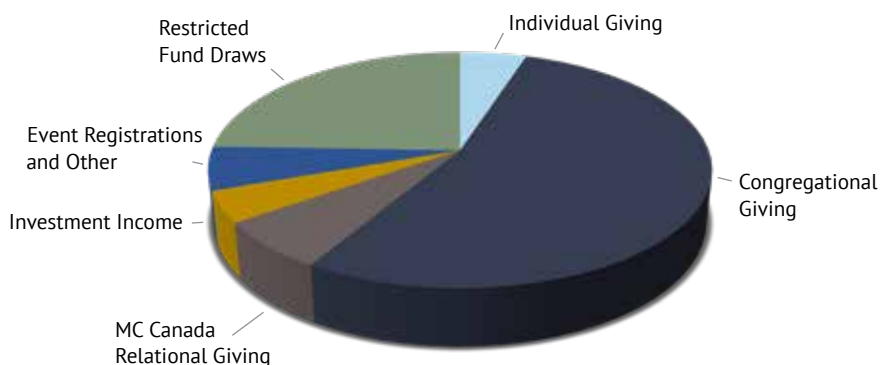
Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know I am.

Oo----ooh.  
Oo----ooh.

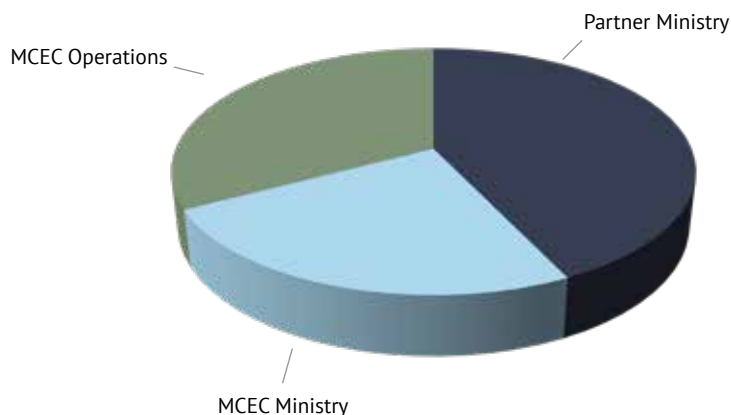
Julia Kasdorf and Amanda Pot (Canada), 2023.  
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Download at [www.togetherinworship.com](http://www.togetherinworship.com).

Your financial gifts or donations to MCEC help us to thrive together as a community of congregations, much like a grove of aspen trees connected with a single root system. A gift to MCEC is a gift of hope as we work together to energize congregations, encourage leaders and embody God's reconciling ministry for all creation.

## Funding our Ministry



## Investing in Ministry



# Our Financial Story



# The Mission of the Church

## Shalom Worship & Healing Centre

“Jesus says, ‘Go and tell them what I have told you. Teach them and baptize them. Make them my disciples.’ This is the mission of the church!” says Daniel Tela, one of the pastors at Shalom Healing and Worship Centre in Kitchener.

Even though COVID was a time of isolation and loneliness for many,

some families in Windsor found it a time of fellowship and connection with a family of faith almost 290 kms away! Technology brought Eritrean families in Windsor and Kitchener together in worship through online Zoom services. Since then, several families from Shalom in Kitchener moved to Windsor to become a part of that new church family. Eventually connecting with

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*Because we realized that this was also our story, it was no question that we would walk alongside of Shalom.*

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Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, they now worship in that building two days a week. “We are honoured to share space for worship and prayer with them,” says Rielly McLaren, pastor at Windsor Mennonite Fellowship.

Shalom Worship and Healing Centre has grown. They currently have six church plants in the cities of Windsor, Toronto, London, St. Catharines, Kingston and Guelph. Some are growing quickly and some are growing more slowly. Some are gathering in church buildings and some are gathering in homes. “We encourage the people to worship God and to fellowship together,” says Daniel. Through intentional teaching, Shalom has developed leaders and families who have then started or connected with new church plants in different geographical regions.

At an MCEC church planters’ retreat, Brian Quan, pastor at Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church (TCMC), noticed a man taking interest in the Toronto Chinese Mennonite building. “I didn’t think too much of it, even when the man took pictures of the church; the sanctuary is quite lovely with large windows and beautiful stained glass,” says Brian. Daniel Tela introduced himself to Brian as a pastor

at Shalom Worship and Healing Centre in Kitchener, and the two men exchanged contact information. Eight months later Brian received a text from Daniel wondering if they had space to use for a church plant. “And that’s when the ball started rolling,” says Brian.

Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church also was a church plant at one time. Hosted and nurtured by Toronto United and Danforth Mennonite churches, the TCMC board swiftly came to a decision about Shalom. “Because we realized that this was also our story,” says Brian, “it was no question that we would walk alongside of Shalom.”

Shalom Toronto has been growing quickly. The leaders of TCMC and Shalom stay in contact with each other around logistics of building use. “I remember when we were worshipping


*We want to be a catalyst to help this church to grow.*

at Danforth,” says Brian. “There was a lot of trust and I feel this relationship is like that too. We just opened the door and welcomed them in,” he says of Shalom Toronto church plant. “We want to be a catalyst to help this church to grow.”

As each church plant finds their way, the leaders at Shalom Worship and Healing Centre in Kitchener continue to meet with them for weekly prayer and teaching. “We at Shalom are amazed by the hand of God,” says Daniel. “It’s not our talent. It’s not our power that does this. But God is merciful.” 🙏

Brian and Daniel continue to build a strong friendship.





Tables are set and families are ready for worship at Steinmann Mennonite Church.

# Kits and Tables and Chairs

## Worship in a New Way

The tables are ready at the back of the congregation with worship bags containing stickers, crayons, puzzles, colouring pages and pipe cleaners. As people began to arrive on Sunday morning, an interesting thing occurs – the tables began to fill up before the pews do!

“We’re trying different things as we try to be intergenerational,” says Liz

Weber, pastor at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener. “There’s a little chaos involved; that’s a good thing!”

Congregations are trying new things, thinking outside of the box, and even removing pews to make room for some tables and chairs.

At First Mennonite Church, they have tried different ways to include all generations in worship: children’s

*We’re trying differing things. There is a little chaos involved; that’s a good thing!*

## *We're not just heads when we come to worship. We're also bodies. How do we worship as a whole being?*

time, front foyer games, craft, song, Bible stories and more. They have had a labyrinth, or a walking path and have practiced different ways of praying together.

“We want to have a space where everyone is comfortable in the service and feel as though they are a part of it,” explains Liz.

One Sunday, Liz observed a young child who found a magnetic sketchpad in his worship bag. He brought it to an older couple in the church who was sitting near him. They took the pad and drew a little cat on it. The child was really excited and showed it to everyone who was in his family. He then returned to the older couple and gave it back to them.

“That is church to me,” says Liz. “The older couple embraced this child who was not their own and helped to create a space where the child felt welcome.”

Sara Erb, pastor at Steinmann Mennonite Church says, “We used to have worship bags that children could take into the pews in the sanctuary but we noticed that they would then be turned around backwards, using the bench as a table.” During COVID, Steinmann set up tables around the outside of their gym. “When we held our service in the gym and they were sitting at tables, they could actually see what was happening,” she says. “It was fascinating to watch. We started running out of tables because there were more and more families!”

When Steinmann moved out of their gym and back into their sanctuary, they removed some benches in the sanctuary for tables and chairs. They made worship kits that included worship bulletins, bingo cards, finger labyrinths and fill in the blank puzzles. They soon realized they needed more space so even more pews were removed for families!

Waterloo North Mennonite Church also has tables with worship resources available for children, their parents and anyone else who is interested. Prior to COVID, they had yarn, knitting needles and prayer shawl instructions for those who find it easier to engage



Children scatter hearts down the aisle during Active Sermon time at Waterloo North Mennonite Church.

in the service when their hands are occupied.

“We wondered how we might create space in a new way for an intergenerational community,” says Carmen Brubacher, pastor at Waterloo North.

Congregations continue to adapt worship styles and practices to include families, children and persons who are neurodiverse. “We’re not just heads when we come to worship,” says Carmen. “We’re also bodies. How do we worship as a whole being?”

Carmen challenges us to think about worship as invitational. “Some congregations don’t have the demographics to have intergenerational worship,” she says, “but we all have the ability to have relational worship.” 🙏



**T**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/giving](http://www.mcec.ca/giving) or e-transfer to [financeoffice@mcec.ca](mailto:financeoffice@mcec.ca).



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