



**Mennonite  
Church**  
Eastern Canada

# Sprout

Stories of Transformation



**A Life  
Transformed**  
PG. 4

**Unexpected  
Paths**  
PG. 12

**Annual Church  
Gathering**  
PG. 16



# Table of Contents

**A Life Transformed** 4

*Meet Rachel Demosthene, one of MCEC's newest pastors/church planters. Discover how God has transformed her life, not once, not twice, but continually.*

**In the Bulb There is a Flower** 8

*Ann L. Schultz encourages us to hold in hope the unrevealed mystery that is something God alone can see!*

**Where does our Transformation, Inspiration and Calling come from?** 10

*Fanosie Legesse asks us to take our faith seriously as we renew our covenant with God and each other. From his address at Annual Church Gathering.*

**Unexpected Paths - Journey to South Korea** 12

*"Sometimes God leads us to totally unexpected paths," says Bock Ki Kim. Read about the unexpected path on which God led Bock Ki and Sook Kyoung.*

**MCEC Video Challenge** 15

*How are you being transformed, inspired and called at your church? We can't wait to see what your excited about!*

**Annual Church Gathering** 16

*Transformed. Inspired. Called.*

**Remember, Seek Peace, Renew Hope** 18

*Norm Dyck reflects on a recent study tour to the Philippines and how pain and sorrow might be turned to hope.*



# Hebrews 12:1-3

**T**herefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up.

And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame.

Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

- scripture text from MCEC Annual Church Gathering 2023



Sprout

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Writer and Designer: Lisa Williams

Writers:

Ann L. Schultz - page 8

Fanosie Legesse - page 10

Norm Dyck - page 18

Photos:

Page 4-7: Rachel Demosthene

Front Cover and

Page 12-14: Bock Ki Kim

Page 18-19: Norm Dyck

ACG: Paul Schmidt Photographay

All other photos: MCEC and  
[unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

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

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Front Cover:

Sook Kyoung Park's students in South Korea learn English and peaceful educational skills.

page 12



# A Life Transformed

## Rachelle Demosthene

**A**n aroma of roses, lilies and daisies fills the air in the small shop in Montreal. Vases, ribbons and cards line the shelves by the counter. Warm sunshine cascades through the windows and the atmosphere is busy in Pouvoir des Fleurs, translated Flower Power. Here Rachelle Demosthene creates beautiful floral arrangements and fills orders to meet her customer's needs.

Rachelle Demosthene is one of MCEC's newest pastors/church planters. She and her husband, Ronald Alexandre, minister together at Église de Dieu Réparateur de Brèches (RBD) in Montreal. She is a wife, mother of three daughters, pastor, and president and owner of a flower shop.

Born and raised in Quebec, Rachelle's parents emigrated from

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*God is bigger  
and greater than  
what I knew... I  
still get chills  
when I think of  
that retreat.*

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Haiti. Her parents had run small businesses and had worked hard in Haiti to support their family. Her father was a minister. Rachelle decided to follow the path of her father and became involved within the church. She led the youth choir faithfully, but her heart was not in it.

It was during a trip to Atlanta, Georgia for a multicultural event where God began to transform her heart. Rachelle had never been outside of her Haitian church community in Canada. In Atlanta, she saw people from many nations worshipping God together with an intensity that surprised her. "God is bigger and greater than what I knew. I began to see that God is beyond our borders, our culture and the colour of our skin," she says. "I still get chills when I think of that retreat."

Rachelle returned to minister in her father's church, but she still struggled and asked God to increase her love for his people. "I remembered the scripture that says the Holy Spirit will change our heart," she recalls. Looking back, Rachelle realized that God changed her heart instantly. She says, "It was the biggest transformation in my life. God changed my heart and that is when my ministry really started."

From that point forward, the services and the ministry Rachelle led felt different. "I was no longer ministering as a task that I had to do – I was doing it in partnership with God – and that changed everything."

Rachelle eventually moved into a corporate position and found herself working as an executive advisor for a multinational corporation where she excelled for 19 years. "It was a good lifestyle but something was missing. I felt as though I was passing by my mission," she says. As she continued to look for meaning in her life, she found that there were days when she even struggled to find energy. Rachelle began a yearlong sabbatical and looked to find something more creative to do so that she would come back to her corporate job refreshed and reset.

However, she continued to struggle with her health, she lost weight as her health deteriorated. Doctors ran many tests and finally came with a diagnosis - Rachelle had lupus. Lupus is a chronic disease that can cause inflammation and pain in any part of your body. It is an autoimmune disease, which means that your immune system - the body system



Rachelle Demosthene

*I was no longer ministering as a task that I had to do - I was in partnership with God - and that changed everything.*





Rachelle worships at RBD.



Rachelle's Flower Shop - Pouvoir des Fleurs



Ronald and Rachelle

that usually fights infections - attacks healthy tissue instead. There is no cure.

Rachelle had little energy and lost all of her hair. She could not feed herself; she could not care for herself; she was hospitalized. She was ill. The church was very distressed to see this happen to their much-loved pastor.

“When you are so close to death you have that moment where you make a list and figure out if you did everything that you wanted to do,” she says. She reflected on ministry and recalled how God had changed her heart, and she was grateful. She reflected on her family and felt she had done her best to care for her husband and her three girls, and she was grateful. She reflected on her career and felt some sadness; perhaps she could have done better. She had had an excellent job and she excelled in every way, but she had not done something that she had truly enjoyed.

“I realized that I wasn't brave enough to live my dream,” she says. God transformed Rachelle once again. “The second biggest transformation

in my life was when God rid my life of fear. I hadn't followed my dream because I was afraid. There are a lot of things that we don't accomplish in life because we are afraid and often the things we fear don't even exist,” she says. She realized that she was afraid because she did not trust God to provide for her. She made a decision that fear would no longer guide her life.

As her health improved and the time drew near to return to work, Rachelle was unsettled. She had been away from corporate work for a year and knew it would take some time to get back into the rhythm of that work. She also had a sense that she might still be missing her purpose. She recalled that she used to love creating floral arrangements and she immediately signed up for a floral design course. “During that first week of my course I felt as though I had been under water for a long period of time and finally was able to come out of the water and breathe once more!” she says.

She prayed that God would show her the way. She soon learned that her favourite

*My task is to leave the transformation in God's hands and not try to figure out how to do it myself.*

local florist, a friend, needed to close his store. The two met and Rachelle bought his business. She left her corporate job and adjusted to her new role of president and owner of Pouvoir des Fleurs.

Throughout her life, Rachelle remained connected to the church in a ministry role. Recently Rachelle covered a sabbatical as interim pastor at Hochma, an MCEC congregation also in Montreal.

“I stopped being afraid and started trusting God,” she says. “I realized that the only thing I need to do is ask God if this is what God wants me to do.”

Rachelle did have some familiar doubts when she thought about stepping into the role of interim pastor but she followed God's leading and took on the six-month position.

“The first day when I went to worship with Hochma I felt at home,” she says. “It was a good experience for me. I really love to see that even if we worship God with different tools and in different ways, God remains the same.”

She meets regularly with MCEC church planters and is a part of the MCEC Transitioning into Ministry (TiM) program for pastors new to MCEC. “When I meet pastors from different backgrounds and see how much they love the Lord, I am so encouraged. It reminds me of my Atlanta experience,” she says. “I love being able to worship together and work with each other. I experience the body of Christ on a different level.”

Transformation has happened in Rachelle's life in unexpected ways and will continue to happen into the future. “My task is to leave the transformation in God's hands and not try to figure out how to do it myself,” she says. She still has lupus but that doesn't stop her. She currently ministers at RBD and creates lovely flower arrangements at her shop while continually asking God, “Is this what you want me to do?” And she then follows God's lead. 🌿





# In the Bulb There is a Flower

“In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free! In the cold and snow of winter, there’s a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.”

We have just sung this simple yet profound hymn by Natalie Sleeth at Mennonite Church

Eastern Canada’s Annual Church Gathering.

Sleeth had a gift for composing texts on challenging and complex theological ideas that were still accessible to people from all walks of life. While this anthem has most often been used at funerals or memorial services with its reference to “our end is the beginning,” I believe this text speaks beautifully



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

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and poignantly to the journey we are on at MCEC: that of transformation.

Over the last number of years, the MCEC staff and executive council have listened to you, the membership, on what you have wanted to prioritize in the coming years.

Out of the Courageous Imagination process, we defined five strategic priorities: navigating change, developing leaders, supporting intergenerational discipleship with a focus on youth and young adults, embracing diversity and seeking peace and justice. And from these priorities, we defined an overall vision for MCEC that is helping us to define our direction for the next five years for MCEC... to be transformed by the love of God, to be inspired by the hope we find in Jesus and to be called to action by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this edition of Sprout, we focus our stories on transformation, sharing how locally, nationally and internationally we are being transformed by the love of God.

- You will be inspired as you learn about the work of Bock Ki Kim and Sook Kyoung Park, our International Witness workers in South Korea.
- You will reflect on how Rachelle Demosthene, a Haitian business

women, flower shop owner and pastor of Église de Dieu Réparateur des Brèches, has been transformed on her own journey, and how her work is now transforming others.

- You will hear and see the story of our Annual Church Gathering and some exciting new initiatives that may transform MCEC.
- And finally, Norm Dyck who recently led a study tour to the Philippines, will share a story of how he was transformed as he learned about the experiences of our indigenous partners from the Philippines, and how this experience brought him to reflect on our story in Canada.

As we enter these early days of realizing our strategic priorities, may the words of Fanosie Legesse, keynote speaker at ACG, remind us that “we choose to live a life of constant transformation, unceasing inspiration [being] filled with courage to stay strong in our calling.”

And, in the spirit of a God who transforms, inspires and calls us all to action by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we hold in hope that “from the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery, unrevealed until is season, something God alone can see.” 🌱



## *Strategic Priorities*

*Navigating Change:*  
*Fostering a culture of learning, innovation and adaptability.*

*Developing Leaders:*  
*Strengthening leadership and forming of faith.*

*Intergenerational Discipleship:*  
*Collaborating with congregations and partners in support of intergenerational discipleship and faith formation.*

*Embracing Diversity:*  
*Inviting and challenging the church to explore the variety and richness of God's people.*

*Seeking Peace and Justice:*  
*Supporting and resourcing congregations to engage peace and justice issues.*



# Where does our Transformation, Inspiration and Calling come from?

The book of Hebrews argues that nothing compares with Jesus. Jesus is the living God, the everlasting High Priest and the Redeemer of humanity. The author uses a metaphor of running an agonizing race to describe the believer's call - a call to carry one's cross and walk to Calvary to crucify all that is against God's eternal will.

Why should we persist on transforming our lives to fit the course, instead of changing the course to fit our situations? Why are we intentional on being inspired to continue the journey, despite the struggle? Why do we believe that our covenant relationship with God and each other is our calling in life, and not just a temporary pledge?



*Fanosie Legesse*  
Intercultural Mission Minister



*Growing together into the likeness of Christ Jesus is not just a choice, but is a lifelong calling.*

**We belong to the company of the covenant people of God.**

We identify with those in Hebrews 11 and the believers after them. We belong to the company of all of the Old and New Testament believers who truly followed God. We belong to the church fathers who never wavered from the way of Jesus even though they suffered. The Anabaptist believers who chose the way of discipleship and peace interconnect with our identity.

Following the example of this holy pilgrimage, we choose to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives



Listening intently at Annual Church Gathering in Kitchener, ON.

continuously. We draw inspiration from the stories of those who have walked before us. We know that growing together into the likeness of Christ Jesus is not just a choice, but is a lifelong calling.

**We know the joy that comes from journeying together.**

The writer of Hebrews gives us a bird's eye view of the tested faithfulness of those who went before us. We know from the biography of the believers who trusted God that the reward is endlessly enjoying God's presence. People would have expected "an eye for eye" response from Jesus as he was put to death, but instead he prayed for those who killed him. Why? Because he clearly knew the joy that comes as the result of this agony and calls us to join him in this joy-inducing suffering.

I saw the spiritual courage that believers show under persecution during the communist regime in Ethiopia. Abebe, a friend of my grandfather, declared his faith in Christ to everyone he met. He was not even a year old in his new faith in Christ when the government handcuffed him and dragged him on rural roads as villagers watched. They did this because he refused to recant his faith in Christ. He proclaimed loudly, "My Lord



"We are willing to journey together; to carry each other's burdens; to cry with those who cry; to laugh with those who laugh; and to celebrate with those who celebrate."

Jesus, I rejoice that you have given me the joy of sharing your suffering. Now I understand what you have done for me on the cross even better."

It is time for us to take our faith seriously as we look at the story of our biblical faith community, early church leaders and the Anabaptist covenant community. Let us renew our covenant with God and each other as we stay on the path to the heavenlies together. 🌿



# Unexpected Paths Journey to South Korea

“Sometimes God plays unexpectedly with his children and leads us to totally unexpected paths,” says Bock Ki Kim, MC Canada International Witness worker in South Korea. Bock Ki and his wife, Sook Kyoung Park, have found that their lives are completely different from how they would have ever imagined them to be.

Bock Ki had planned to study landscape architecture in North America and, while pursuing his PhD, he found himself studying theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg and at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. “It was never my intention to be Mennonite,” Bock Ki recalls. “Sometimes God twists our lives in good ways.”

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*My call came  
from the outside,  
not from an  
inward voice.*

*- Bock Ki Kim*

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When they returned to Canada, Sook Kyoung volunteered in an under-resourced neighbourhood in Toronto. “As I asked God what he wanted me to do, the thought came to me that I could be a childcare worker,” says Sook Kyoung. She took an intensive course and interviewed for a job in the childcare sector. During the interview, she shared honestly that her weakness was the language – English – but told them that she deeply loved children. The manager hired her, was thrilled to find someone who cared for children and was confident that Sook Kyoung would learn more English.

Their call to return to their homeland, South Korea, was also an unexpected one. “My call came from the outside, not from an inward voice,” says Bock Ki. “It was Tim Froese’s (former MC Canada staff) nudge that caused us to consider returning to South Korea.”

Sook Kyoung was surprised when she found the transition from Canada to South Korea difficult. She struggled to find what God had for her to do in South Korea. Her love for children and her gift for developing relationships with people was strong.

She shared with their congregation, Jesus Heart Church, her vision of working as a childcare educator. Their congregation prayed with Bock Ki and Sook Kyoung to help discern her call. This was a brand new experience for both them and the congregation.

Over the next few weeks a plan emerged and Sook Kyoung began a small business teaching English. “That was an unforgettable moment for us and for the congregation,” says Bock Ki. “We had never before practiced that kind of discernment as a community. Listening to brothers and sister’s voices is one very important way of listening to God. It was a transforming moment.”

Sook Kyoung is a private English teacher and runs an after-school program teaching English and peaceful educational skills to children and youth. “For me, working with children is God’s calling on my life,” she says. “I’m not just teaching English but I’m also teaching the students to respect and care for each other.”



Bock Ki educates and trains facilitators.



South Korean children at work.



Sook Kyoung teaches English and peaceful educational skills.

*My life has changed...  
God's unexpected call  
has challenged me.*

*- Bock Ki Kim*

Bock Ki is a peace-church pastor and a resource on pacifism and conflict transformation. He has translated 35 books on Anabaptism and peace theology and has helped to establish the Korean Anabaptist Journal. "I never thought I would be a translator but God is using me and has trained me to follow in that way," he says. "I have been transformed because of it."

Bock Ki now works in the area of restorative justice. "My life has changed over the past five years," he says, "God's unexpected call has challenged me." He educates and trains facilitators who then work in areas of conflict mediation, domestic violence and restorative justice.

"It's amazing how God leads us and guides our feet wherever we go and whatever we do," says Sook Kyoung.

"We stay open and ready to hear from God," affirms Bock Ki. "Wherever he wants us to go, we need to follow."

Bock Ki and Sook Kyoung have been in South Korea for ten years as Witness workers. Bock Ki says, "When God showed us his plan 10 years ago, we barely understood. But now we see and know that it is, and was, God's way of transformation in our lives." 🌿



*The image of an aspen grove was used at the  
Annual Church Gathering.*

*Aspens are multiple trees connected with a  
single root system. Like the aspens, each MCEC  
congregation belongs to one living community of  
faith. Miraculous, isn't it?*

*We are 106 congregations, and yet we are also one  
church, sharing a root system that nourishes us all,  
and helps each congregation to flourish and thrive.*

*How do we hear God calling us  
to build a thriving and healthy  
forest of congregations in MCEC?*





# MCEC Video Challenge

## Your invitation!

**W**e thought it would be fun to offer an exclusive insider look at how excited we are to be serving alongside congregations and our many wonderful partners as we are transformed, inspired and called. Scan the QR code to watch our video!

How are you being transformed, inspired and called at your church?

This is your invitation.

Make your own short video sharing what you're excited about. How are you being transformed? Where is your inspiration coming from? And what do you feel called into?

Contact Lisa Williams @ [lwilliams@mcec.ca](mailto:lwilliams@mcec.ca) to submit your video and share it with the MCEC community. We can't wait to see what you're excited about!





# Annual Church Gathering Transformed. Inspired. Called.

**W**e gathered as a family of faith to worship at the Annual Church Gathering in April. Speakers and panelists reminded us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses to this race set before us - this life of faith.

We welcomed two congregations and their pastors, Jesus-Christ Appelle Tous and Église Bethésda Mennonite de Saint-Hyacinthe, and celebrated with two congregations, Hochma and

Shalom Worship and Healing Centre, who moved into full membership.

We approved a spending plan that combines the gifts of the past and the gifts of the present into a vision for future ministry. The MCEC slate of volunteers with 60+ positions was approved. The Legacy Initiatives Fund was celebrated as a new approach is nurtured.

Over the next year, MCEC will continue

to lean into our strategic priorities with some exciting new initiatives in the areas of youth, young adults, intergenerational faith formation and leadership development.

- MCEC has hired Centre for Community Based Research to help us answer the question of how we might support ministry and faith formation with youth and young adults.





- We look forward to what our next generation of leaders has to teach us as we provide subsidies for youth and young adults exploring ministry and mission internships in Toronto, Montreal or with our International Witness partners through MC Canada.
- As we navigate change, both theologically and sociologically, we move toward hiring a part time fundraiser for MCEC and

providing additional funds for Wendy Janzen's ministry as eco-minister and Fanosie Legesse's ministry to conduct intercultural workshops for church clusters.

MCEC is a diverse community 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. ✨

*"I appreciated the opportunity to think and talk with others about important matters and knowing that we are not alone in some of our challenges."*

- ACG participant

# Remember, Seek Peace, Renew Hope

The mountains misty air was a refreshing reprieve from the heat and humidity of Davao.

Our Mennonite Church Canada Learning Tour to the Philippines (made up entirely of participants from MCEC) was on our way to visit the last of three indigenous communities who partner in peacebuilding and coffee

growing with Peacebuilders Community Incorporated (PBCI), the international Witness ministry led by Dann & Joji Pantoja.

Traveling around Mt. Apo, and slowly making our way closer to the Bagobo Tagabawa ancestral lands, every turn provided a breathtaking view of mountains and valley's covered in lush vegetation.



*Norm Dyck*  
Mission Minister

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**Rano Monument:  
Depicts life, renewal, and transformation after the painful massacre.**

The dead leaf - it is bigger than all of us.

The sprouting leaf - in the shape of a dove symbolizing peace and new life.

The van engine whined as we climbed the last steep entrance towards Balay Kasunayan, House of Peace. The clouds were there to greet us too, slowly rolling through the open air meeting place welcoming us to this “thin space.”

When asked to remark on what I was experiencing, I wondered if this could be a glimpse of what heaven might be like. A place of deep peace, but also a place that carried a deep pain.

An elderly woman stood before us to share her first hand account of the Rano Massacre, which brutally took the lives of 39 members of the tribal community, including her husband and four children. Immediately following her story, our group was invited to climb the steps to the memorial built to remember, to seek peace and to renew hope.

Witness Workers Dann & Joji Pantoja have been in Mindanao, Philippines for more than 15 years building relationships and sharing a model of peacebuilding rooted in Jesus. They have helped to broker

peace agreements between warring parties and have built relationships with all sides of the conflicted region.

The ministry is now in a season of transition, as the Pantoja's transfer leadership to young indigenous leadership.

The relationships that have grown with indigenous communities may yet hold significant learning for us as we wrestle with the pain and suffering being unearthed in Residential Schools across our country.

The mist hovered over the monument shaped as a dead leaf over a concrete cross. Reading the names of the dead etched in a memorial stone, I couldn't help but wonder how many memorials like this one will need to stand in Canada before the story of our First Nations sisters and brothers can turn from pain and sorrow, to hope and a relationship of peace.

Together, MCEC is called to embody God's reconciling ministry for all creation. May it be so. 🌱



*How many  
memorials will  
need to stand in  
Canada before  
the story can turn  
from pain and  
sorrow to hope  
and a relationship  
of peace?*





**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/Sprout](http://www.mcec.ca/giving/Sprout) or e-transfer to [financeoffice@mcec.ca](mailto:financeoffice@mcec.ca), noting it as "Sprout Summer 2023." Thank you for supporting MCEC!



MCEC  
201-50 Kent Ave  
Kitchener, ON N2P 3G1  
[www.mcec.ca](http://www.mcec.ca)