

## LEARNING COMMONS | Overview of the MCEC Learning Commons

The [MCEC Learning Commons](#) builds on MCEC's rich history of education and training, including pre-existing initiatives such as the Pastoral Leadership Training Commission (PLTC), the work of the MCEC/Grebel Coordinator of Leadership Formation, and the MCEC/Grebel Anabaptist Learning Workshop (ALW). The Learning Commons also benefits from longstanding collaborative relationships with other organizations that have contributed training expertise, know-how in specific ministry areas, and all-around encouragement as we aspire toward mutual goals. May we continue to walk the path together, and may we continue to learn more and more about what it means to be people of God.

### Summary

The MCEC Learning Commons is a new education-and-training framework that is designed to facilitate shared experiences of learning, teaching, collaborating, coaching, creating, and growing together both as individuals and as communities of faith. As a flexible learning space – both physical and virtual – the MCEC Learning Commons welcomes pastors, congregational leaders, laypeople, and organizational partners into a journey of lifelong learning.

### Objectives

The MCEC Learning Commons intends to meet the following four objectives:

1. To foster collaborative, innovative, participatory learning in Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective,
2. To organize a series of learning events annually for the MCEC constituency often in collaboration with our partners,
3. To support MCEC pastors in creating and maintaining Ministry Portfolios, and
4. To increase intercultural capacity of MCEC as we more fully live into our vision of welcome and hospitality.

### Core values

The MCEC Learning Commons intends to embody five core values:

1. *Discipleship* - We want this initiative to be part of the centuries-old project of following Jesus. We value the challenge and the thrill of nurturing Christian discipleship.
2. *Hospitality* – The Learning Commons welcomes MCEC pastors, congregational leaders, ministry partners, and other participants – especially with their diverse experiences and perspectives.

3. *Curiosity* – A spirit of curiosity means that we open ourselves to new ideas, and that we get excited about God’s continuing creative work in our world.
4. *Encouragement* – We will ask how we can help each other. This is not so much about arriving somewhere, but about how each of us finds joy in traveling together and in inspiring one another along the way.
5. *Adaptability* – The Learning Commons is meant to be flexible and “modular” so that it can be used variously depending on the participant(s) and their needs.

## A new expression of MCEC’s vision

Much of MCEC’s vision points toward learning, creativity, and collaboration – specific ways of extending the peace of Jesus Christ include *making* disciples, *growing* congregations, and *forming* leaders. The vision of the Leadership Council talks about how “we work closely with pastors, chaplains, and congregational leaders as we learn how to do church together.” The vision of the Mission Council talks about supporting existing and new disciple-making initiatives, and nurturing intercultural and global connections. The MCEC Learning Commons is a new way of expressing the combined vision of making, growing, forming, working together, learning, supporting, and nurturing.

As well, the Learning Commons is designed to respond to two hungers within the MCEC constituency:

1. People are hungering for inspiration and innovation. People want to ask questions and seek new opportunities in the rapidly-changing conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church.
2. People are hungering for meaningful collaboration and connection. The “commons” is about shared ends and coordinated activities, all of which maximize resources.

## Why “Learning Commons”?

Although the phrase “learning commons” has been around since the 1990s, it has greatly increased in popularity over the last ten years especially in public libraries, schools, universities, and colleges. A rough definition of a learning commons is a learning space – both physical and virtual – designed to facilitate shared experiences of studying, tutoring, collaborating, coaching, creating things, and even playing games. The learning space is designed to be used variously (and rearranged) depending on the participants and their needs. Many learning commons have been created within conventional libraries as both renovated physical spaces and programmatic innovations. The [Ontario School Library Association](#) explains that “within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn new ways to learn.”

To bring the concept home to our MCEC context, how interesting that Jesus’ ministry could be considered one of the prototypical learning commons! Learning to follow Jesus involves many similar activities: participatory learning, inclusiveness, new relationships, and multiple ways of engaging within a whole-church approach.

All of this builds on the recent experience of the Anabaptist Learning Workshop (ALW) program in which participants worked together and explored new material alongside one another. The existing

momentum includes a deep desire to learn together as a community of collaboration, curiosity, and faithfulness.

Therefore, the name MCEC Learning Commons does the following:

- Identifies a clear educational focus within MCEC as a learning community
- Indicates a culture of collaboration and creativity
- Suggests that resources are held in common, available to all members
- Nurtures a vision of something accessible, relational, dynamic, innovative, welcoming
- Encourages us to think about how the gospel itself can be held in common

## Two principal tools

The MCEC Learning Commons features two principal tools:

1. *Annual Guide* – On one level, [the Annual Guide](#) now incorporated into a website continues along the lines of the “traditional” MCEC events listings in terms of containing a comprehensive array of workshops, training opportunities, and other learning events. MCEC ministries and partners regard the Annual Guide as an expression of the “market place” in which they can offer a variety of opportunities, and yet there will be active curation of the events – i.e. opportunities will be listed not just because they are available but because they meet criteria of the Learning Commons for a given period of time. On another level, the Annual Guide encourages integrative work by posing strategic questions and offering specific inspiration for pastors, congregational leaders, partners, and others – this is why it is a Guide and not just a list.
2. *Ministry Portfolio* – [The Ministry Portfolio](#) is designed to enhance MCEC’s current priority on pastoral training. The Ministry Portfolio will be a living document maintained by each pastor. It will be a tangible, disciplined way to encourage each pastor to see themselves on a learning journey, and it will provide pastors with a common language with which to accompany one another on the journey. The portfolio “lives” because it is integral within the life journey of the pastor as they make sense of their past and current experiences in light of the [Six Core Competencies](#), and as they aspire toward future pastoral ministry. The Ministry Portfolio nurtures a specific kind of self-reflection within pastors – i.e. readiness to learn, to reflect on learning, and to make creative connections among ministry experiences. It is a basis on which to engage in discussions with peers and denominational leaders, and an incentive for participating in continuing education.

## How will we keep it moving forward?

The Leadership Office will take a lead role in the development and oversight of the MCEC Learning Commons. The Regional Ministry Associates will be invited to support two key roles with respect to the Ministry Portfolios (i.e. introducing the portfolios among pastors and encouraging pastors toward ongoing learning). The Mission Office will be asked to share the resources of the Intercultural Minister in specific advancement of intercultural goals within the MCEC Learning Commons. There will be opportunity for individuals to engage the annual guide process through a collaborative process that is still not defined.

## What we hope to achieve?

The MCEC Learning Commons will be launched in the fall of 2020 with a view toward ongoing evaluation. The effectiveness of the MCEC Learning Commons will be evaluated on a participatory, self-study basis by assessing:

- Engagement and participation of MCEC pastors seeking to develop and foster their skills and capacity for pastoral ministry.
- Accessibility of the MCEC Learning Commons to a full range of interested persons beyond pastors as reflected by participation in events designed for that purpose.
- Fiscal viability in meeting the needs of the program while being at a manageable cost to those who use the space.
- Evidence-based reflection on the part of MCEC staff, Councils, and partners with respect to how the Learning Commons moves MCEC and partners toward shared ends.