

Report on participation at the Mennonite Church Annual Gathering

Hannah Guerkink

The bi-annual MC Canada gather took place this past summer in Abbotsford MC over a three-day weekend. The gathering was organised into times of worship, administrative events, leadership training, and conference presentations. The topics that were presented on included trauma informed leadership, biodiversity, the future of the church and “neighbouring”. People gathered together from Mennonite churches all across Canada, representing the five different regions of MC Canada.

For me, one of the most impressive parts of the gathering was the fact that the people present represented a more diverse church than one that is often stereotyped. I was very pleased to see that there were many young people, inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues, and acknowledgement of Indigenous land. I find that these components made the experience more enriching and relevant to the future that I would like to see in the Church.

I always experience God’s work and presence very strongly through music and singing. I was so happy that the gathering gave us all the chance to interact with the new hymnal. Worshipping together through song was a wonderful experience.

The topic of community, and how the Church can be a part of the broader community in which it is situated is one that really stuck with me. Our home congregation is located in a community center, I was thinking a lot about how we as a congregation can make a greater effort to use the connections that are already physically present and give back to our community.

I don’t have any specific ideas of what we should do but would encourage us to think more about community outreach and organising events that could benefit the community as a whole. We can be a church that helps the area around us to flourish, not just the individual members.

Besides the topic of outreach, I thought a lot about how we are connected to a wider, Canadian—and world—wide faith group. Sometimes, being a part of a faith group can feel isolating, but the gathering really helped me to think about and realise all the connections that can be formed with other Mennonites from different areas and how these can provide support systems and opportunities to learn from those with different perspectives.

I think that gatherings like this are really important, especially for younger church members or those who are part of a marginalised group. Coming together as a broader Church makes you realise how many others there are who share your beliefs and helps you to feel less isolated and instead more inspired.

I attended two workshops. The first was about the new hymnal and the second about imagining the future of the Church. In the second one, I got the opportunity to talk with a woman who was probably the oldest person present at the conference. I found this really enriching, especially since I was probably one of the youngest people there. Despite the fact that there were so many years between us, we still shared core beliefs. It was so interesting to see the cross generational components and how the younger members want to learn from the older ones, but also vice-versa. Given the specific topic of this workshop, I think this connection was specifically important to consider how the older generation can turn to the younger one and together build a church for the future that corresponds to the desires of those who will be a part of it in the long term.