

## Faith Shaping and Tending Within MCEC

*I will put my law  
within them,  
and I will write it  
on their hearts;  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall  
be my people.  
(Jeremiah 31:33)*



As a church, the faith formation of children, youth, young adults, and adults continues to invite us to be attentive, thoughtful and wise. In 2011, leaders from 50 MCEC congregations participated in six regional conversations.

They spent time reflecting together, telling stories, and listening to how faith is being shaped in their particular faith communities. MCEC reviewed the data gathered at these conversations and offers the following summary of key observations as a tool for continued discernment.

I'd encourage you to use this brochure as a catalyst for further discernment within your church. Use the questions on the back of this brochure to guide the conversation and please forward insights, additional questions, and ideas to share with other congregations to [jsteckley@mcec.ca](mailto:jsteckley@mcec.ca).

Jeff Steckley  
MCEC Congregational Ministries Minister

*This summary is divided into three sections, faith formation challenges, signs of God's presence and care, as well as a gathering of the shared wisdom that emerged from our conversations together.*



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## For Further Reflection

1. What do we need to let go of as new ways of shaping faith are emerging among MCEC congregations?
2. What do we need to pay attention to as new ways of shaping faith are emerging among MCEC congregations?

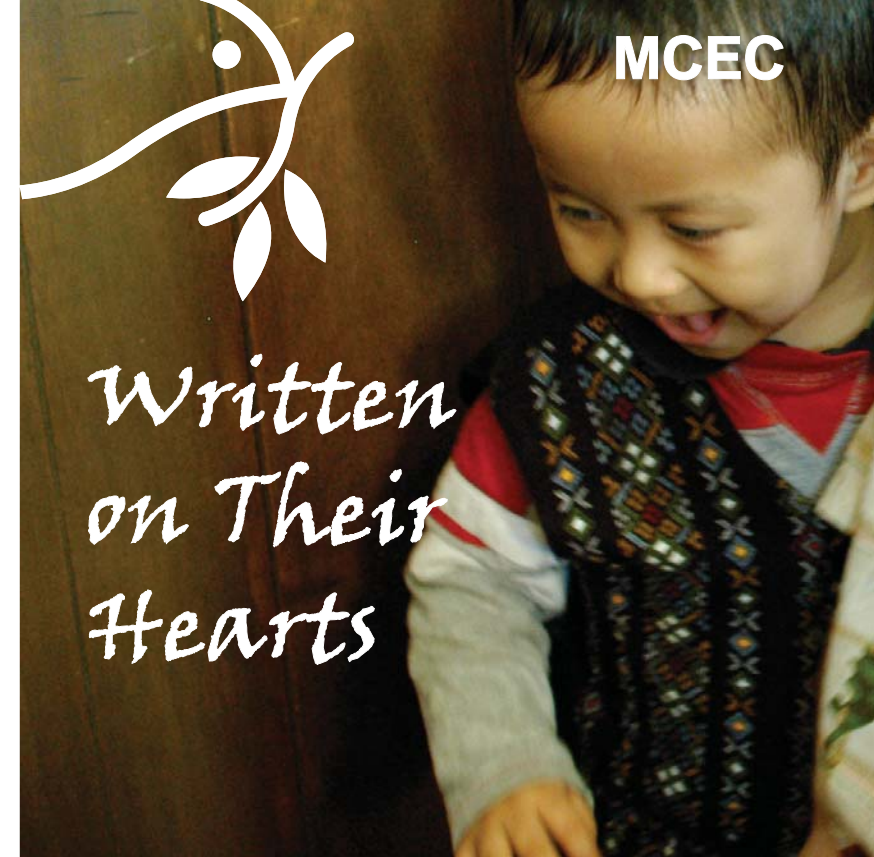
*Continue  
the  
Conversation...*

Please contact Jeff Steckley at [jsteckley@mcec.ca](mailto:jsteckley@mcec.ca) with additional questions, insights, and further ideas.



MCEC  
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Mennonite Church  
Eastern Canada  
Église Mennonite  
de l'Est du Canada



*Written  
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**Continue the Conversation**  
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## Faith Formation Challenges

➡ Congregations are becoming increasingly more aware of limitations and challenges as they seek to shape and tend faith in today's context.

1. Irregular Sunday attendance makes it challenging to sustain interest, to use Christian education curriculum well, and for community to be formed.
2. As a culture we no longer observe Sabbath, thus there are many more choices as to what to do on Sundays. Families experience conflict as to how and where they spend time. It is increasingly challenging to balance commitments to church faith formation activities and commitments to the broader community.
3. Parents struggle to take primary responsibility for the faith formation of their children.
4. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to identify and equip congregational faith formation leaders.
5. Children and youth of first generation Anabaptist congregations are well engaged in Canadian culture. Parents must mediate between culture of origin and Canadian culture as they form the faith of their children and youth.
6. We struggle to nurture the relational opportunities across and among generations, for faith to be formed, and for God to transform.
7. We struggle to find language that feels authentic and resonates with our experiences of faith.

## Signs of God's Presence and Care

➡ God continues to be active and present among us. In the face of many challenges, stories of formation, and transformation give us hope for the future. The following themes emerged from the telling of these stories.

1. Congregational celebrations of relationships and life milestones offer profound opportunities for faith formation and transformation.
2. Music continues to be a significant means through which God is experienced.
3. Sharing of personal, life-transforming stories continues to be very significant. Personal storytelling breaks down barriers across generations and cultures.
4. People are asking questions of faith, reflecting a longing for God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and relationship with Jesus.
5. Many still see church communities as having a vital role in exploring questions of faith, while others are discovering support, fellowship, and a place to explore questions of faith outside the church. God is active both within and outside the institutional church.
6. A variety of forms of mentoring or companioning relationships provide significant connection to faith communities. These relationships are often the places where faith is being formed.
7. Service and learning trips provide opportunities for faith to be embodied as people "do first, then listen, and hear."
8. A spiritual sensitivity is being observed in children as they pray for and with one another and readily pose questions of faith to each other and to adults.

## Discerning and Sharing Wisdom

➡ At the conclusion of each regional conversation, we spent time in prayer and stillness before God. The following was offered as wisdom emerging from our conversations and time spent "practicing the presence of God."

1. There is not one specific approach to faith formation that will serve all of us well. One size no longer fits all of our particular contexts.
2. We need to be daring and to risk trying new approaches to faith formation. The faith formation program efforts of some congregations have faltered to a point where there is nothing to lose in exploring new approaches. It appears that God is grafting something new into, and onto, the church.
3. We require both roots and wings; grounded, yet open to try new ways of forming faith. One participant named this dynamic in the following way, "Be both wild and strong together!"
4. Our call is to attend to the transforming activity of God, rather than focusing on the challenges.
5. Let God be in control and tend to us, trusting that God will work with and through us. Try to see and hear what God thinks is important, as opposed to what we think is important.
6. Pray, wait, reflect, and slow down. Listen, observe, and pay attention to what God is doing.
7. Nurture and strengthen connections. We need each other's care, help, and mentoring.
8. Be open to new intergenerational faith formation ideas and possibilities, remembering that faith continues to be formed throughout all of life.
9. Remember that God is already at work, inviting us to join along. God will inspire us and show us a way forward that we do not ultimately control.

Continue the Conversation . . .

For Further Reflection (back)

## Written on Their Hearts

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