



**Through the Lens of my
First Year in Ministry with CBOQ**

Looking back at Leanne's year in photos

CBOQ and Sponsorship

Compassion, Commitment, Changed Lives

**Renewed Life at
Kanata Baptist Church**

Whatever we plant, God will grow

The New Growth Garden

A cornerstone of community outreach



Unity in MISSION

“So Christ himself gave the *apostles*, the *prophets*, the *evangelists*, the *pastors* and *teachers*, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the *fullness of Christ*.”

– Ephesians 4:11-13

This issue of Canadian Baptist shares our collaboration and unity in our mission from God. As you read through the stories and experiences shared in these pages, we hope you will witness the remarkable work that God is accomplishing through His people, within our church families, and across our communities. We invite you to share your own stories of faith and fellowship with us—please reach out to communications@baptist.ca.



Table of Contents

<i>4</i>	Unity in Mission: Enhancing Support for Churches and Pastors at CBOQ
<i>6</i>	Through the Lens of My First Year in Ministry with CBOQ
<i>11</i>	What Camp is All About
<i>14</i>	Renewed Life at Kanata Baptist Church
<i>17</i>	Lionhearts
<i>20</i>	CBOQ and Sponsorship
<i>26</i>	Cultivating Collaboration
<i>28</i>	Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed
<i>30</i>	The New Growth Garden
<i>34</i>	One Beautiful Imperative
<i>36</i>	A Unique Privilege and Incredible Opportunity
<i>38</i>	Reflections on Assembly 2024: Witnessing God's Presence and Looking Forward to 2025

Unity in Mission: Enhancing Support for Churches and Pastors at CBOQ

By Rev. Dr. Ken Foo

DIRECTOR, CHURCH LIFE AND LEADERSHIP, CBOQ

As we navigate the evolving landscape of 2024, the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec (CBOQ) are poised for significant transformation. The introduction of Regional Associates marks a pivotal shift in how we engage with our churches and pastors, enhancing our ability to support and strengthen the bonds within our Baptist family. This change is not just an administrative adjustment; it's a strategic move designed to align with CBOQ's mission and vision, fostering deeper unity in mission and improving our collective capacity to serve.

At the heart of this transformation are the new Regional Associates, whose roles are designed to address the growing need for personalized and proactive support within our diverse congregations. These associates will conduct annual visits to churches, focusing on leadership, boards, congregations, and pastors. These visits are crucial for maintaining a relational connection with CBOQ. They provide an opportunity for CBOQ to listen to the needs of churches and discern effective ways to address both local and broader organizational concerns.

One of the key roles of the Regional Associates is to offer pastoral support to pastors, ministry leaders, and their families. This support aims to address the unique challenges and joys experienced in ministry, ensuring that leaders feel supported and valued. Regional Associates will also actively participate in association gatherings and meetings. This involvement is designed to bolster support for Area Associations, maintaining a strong relational connection with CBOQ and working collaboratively to address the needs and aspirations of the associations.

These changes reflect CBOQ's commitment to reinforcing the relational bonds within our family of churches. As a family, it's essential to keep our connections strong to effectively support one another. The Regional Associates' proactive approach helps bridge the gap between the central organization and local congregations, addressing the limitations of a more disconnected approach. Previously, CBOQ staff often waited for churches to reach out for assistance or resources. The introduction of Regional Associates changes this dynamic, placing staff in the field to actively engage with churches and associations. This proactive approach ensures that we are not merely waiting for needs to arise but are actively seeking to understand and meet them.

“It's a *strategic* move designed to align with CBOQ's mission and vision, fostering *deeper unity* in mission and improving our *collective* capacity to *serve*.”

One of the primary benefits of this new structure is improved communication and collaboration among churches and leaders. Regional Associates will be "boots on the ground," directly engaging with churches to understand their experiences and challenges.

“As a family, it's essential to keep our connections strong to effectively support one another.”

This direct engagement allows for a more nuanced understanding of each church's needs and facilitates more effective support. From the association perspective, Regional Associates will work closely with executive teams to support ministerial fellowships and encourage collaboration among pastors. By fostering these connections, associates will help create opportunities for churches to work together on projects like church planting, Vacation Bible Schools, or community events.

For churches, this approach offers the chance to collaborate on initiatives they might not be able to tackle alone. Whether partnering with a more experienced church for a new venture or coming together for a community event, Regional Associates will help facilitate these connections, enhancing the overall impact of our collective efforts.

In a rapidly changing church environment, marked by cultural shifts and evolving modes of communication, adaptability is essential. The addition of Regional Associates reflects CBOQ's commitment to being responsive and adaptable. As digital relationships become more prevalent, it's crucial for the church to remain a vibrant, relevant presence in the community. Regional Associates will play a key role in ensuring that CBOQ remains connected to its churches and responsive to their needs. By facilitating personal interactions and fostering a strong sense of community, they will help ensure that CBOQ continues to be a beacon of hope and support in a changing world.

Meet our
Regional Associates
and the
associations
they serve.



Rev. Karen Wong

- ▶ Quebec Association
- ▶ Ottawa Association
- ▶ Former Canada Central Association



Rev. Cid Latty

- ▶ Western Association
- ▶ Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association (ARMBA)
- ▶ Elgin Association
- ▶ Midwestern Association
- ▶ Middlesex-Lambton-Huron Association



Rev. Carl Walters

- ▶ Canadian Baptist of Norfolk
- ▶ Oxford-Brant Association
- ▶ Niagara-Hamilton Association
- ▶ South Central Association

Through the Lens of my First Year in Ministry with CBOQ

By Leanne Friesen

EXECUTIVE MINISTER, CBOQ

As a young adult, I was always that person with a camera trying to capture every memory in a photo that would last forever. These were the days of film cameras, and I had exactly 24 pictures on each roll. I had to make every picture count! I have shelves full of photo albums of all those photos.

Today, I'm still that person always taking photos, and this year, my first as Executive Minister, I took lots of them, with no limitations caused by a film camera. I took photos at Sunday morning worship services, association meetings, partner gatherings, and staff meetings. I took pictures of pastors preaching, choirs singing, and deacons serving. And cakes; I have so many pictures of anniversary cakes.

Even though I have a phone full of photos, for this article I thought it would be fun to share exactly 24 with you. This is my "one film roll" version of my first year as Executive Minister.



I had to start with this picture, taken after the vote when it was announced that I was ratified as your Executive Minister. What I love about this photo is the face of our CBOQ president for that year, Evelin Wharram, as she stands behind me. I can feel her support as I look at this picture, and I felt it all year long.

I had lots of chances to visit Camp Kwasind this year, allowing me to see God at work in this powerful ministry to the Next Generation. This is how worship looks at Kwasind. Teenagers wrap their arms around each other's shoulders as they worship God. Of course I had to sneak a picture!



Our CBOQ board gathers for meetings four times a year and takes part in a retreat together in September. At this year's retreat, we took time to "anoint" one another for ministry.

In September of 2023, Cid Latty gathered people who were involved with or interested in church planting for a retreat. I was encouraged by the number of people seeing innovative ways to share the Gospel at this gathering and honoured to be part of their prayer time.





This year, I visited 26 different churches during their Sunday services. This was one of my first stops – East Toronto Chinese Baptist Church. I love this picture that reminds me of the cultural diversity in our beautiful Baptist family.

In October, I loved getting to visit Friendship House, a community service ministry in Brantford. On Fridays, they meet for a worship time called “Church at the Table.” I was moved when Pastor Shawn handed me a ribbon and explained “we give ribbons so everyone can participate in worship, because not everyone here can read.” This picture reminds me of the power of inclusion.

*I attended about **1100 years** worth of anniversary services this year, and at Aylmer I got to cut the cake!*



This year, we hosted two gatherings for our New Pastor Orientation, with nearly 50 total participants. It fills my heart with hope to see people from around Ontario and the world joining us in ministry as part of CBOQ.

First Baptist Kingsville celebrated its 200th anniversary this year with a gala, where it felt totally appropriate to wear glittery clothes and give thanks to God!

Part of my role as EM involves connecting to our many ministry partners. I have absolutely loved connecting to our Canadian Baptist partners and dreaming together about how our partnerships can help us support each other. In this photo we have our Executive Ministers from Western Canada, Atlantic Canada, the French Union, and Canadian Baptist Ministries, as well as our two Baptist Women Group leaders.





This year also involved lots of visits to Ministerials, like this one at Midwestern. It was such a lovely day. I told my family I'd be home by 3 or 4 pm. Dear reader, I got home at 8 pm; there was just so much to talk about!



Being part of the ways our staff support our churches is another special privilege. This year, that included being in our Advent candle lighting videos. This was when Josh and I had to get creative when we discovered lighting candles outside a mall on a windy day in winter is not actually an easy thing. This picture makes me laugh, as well as feel grateful for our faithful staff!

When I visited Belfountain in January I felt a little extra hint of being at home, not only because Pastor Fred is from Newfoundland but because he has somehow made the church service feel like you're walking into a kitchen for a cup of tea with friends. Can't you tell?



A highlight of my year was being invited to this ministerial gathering with the ARMBBA and Western Associations. These two groups had experienced a racial divide in the 1800s, leading to separate associations. For several years, leaders have been working towards healing and on a snowy day in March of this year, the two ministerials gathered for the first time in living memory. What a great God we serve!



Some weeks I am at a country church of 20 and some weeks I am at Scarborough Chinese with 1500 people. This Sunday, red décor filled the building as the congregation prepared for Chinese New Year. They also served me special Chinese New Year's treats I had never had before.

It's very cool to get to see the different and creative ways people are doing ministry. At Edmison Heights in Peterborough, they've taken out the pews and replaced them with tables for a discussion-based sermon.



At their anniversary in May, Logos Baptist invited everyone to write messages of thanks. I once again was moved by the mix of languages represented, all giving thanks to God.





A highlight of this year was a tour of our Northern Association. I was told that Kipling Baptist Church had the "best view" in CBOQ, and they weren't wrong. One week after a worship surrounded by high-rises, this was quite a contrast.



I smile at this picture of Pastor Peter welcoming us to Tower Street, a small church in Kirkland Lake that is committed to being a church where all feel safe and welcome – the church even looks like a home, doesn't it?

I could share a million pictures of our pastors here, but this one brings me special joy. I had no idea that we had a pastor in Englehart, Pastor Rudy, pictured here, who is serving FULLTIME at 88 years old! Later, I discovered he is not the oldest – the oldest is our pastor at Zion Baptist Church, who is 90. Thank God for our faithful pastors of all ages!



Speaking of people for whom I'm thankful, I couldn't have gotten through this year without these two women, who took on the combined role of being my Administrative Assistants this year while Emma was on Maternity leave. Thank you Sheila and Kristi!



This is the gathering of our Past Presidents at Assembly. This year, I came to appreciate the incredible commitment required to be CBOQ president. I am thankful for their influence and impact on CBOQ, and felt truly humbled to eat with this group of saints.

I was behind the stage when we gave out these flags for everyone to wave in worship on Friday night of Assembly. I wondered if people would be willing to wave flags in worship at a Baptist event, and when I stuck my head out, there they were, waving high!



After the service ended, I was wrapped into a photo with this group from Mount Dennis Baptist Church. And then we danced and praised God together!

I hope these images give you a glimpse not just into my year in a job, but into the reason why I feel full of hope as I look to the future of CBOQ. God is at work all over our Baptist family. To show you all the stories, I'd need a hundred magazines. I look forward to a year with more pictures to be taken and stories to be told.





NEW!

MASTER OF ARTS

Theology & Ministry

NEW!

MASTER OF ARTS

Counselling & Spiritual Care

NEW!

MASTER OF ARTS

Global Christianity

Discover our new professional MA programs



McMaster Divinity College is introducing three new professional MA programs to our program offering. Scan the QR code or visit mcmasterdivinity.ca/newMA to learn more about each program. Apply now and start as early as January!

What Camp is All About

By Shirley Gleadall

PASTOR, FIRST ONEIDA BAPTIST CHURCH (MIDDLESEX-LAMBTON-HURON ASSOCIATION)

For several years prior to Covid, First Oneida Baptist Church was blessed to partner with churches in the GTA to offer camps here at the Oneida settlement*. Everyone loved the camp and so it was a great success. We will always be thankful to Lorne Park Baptist Church for paving the way and to Yorkminster Park and the Bridle Trail Baptist Churches for coming alongside. And then there was Covid, and everything changed. Oneida was closed for seventeen months and during that time there was no programming at all. No groups were allowed in and there were no community events.

It was time to begin again!

First Lobo contacted us in early 2024. Under the leadership of their pastor Doug Watson, First Lobo operates a summer day camp for the community. They were wondering if we were interested in having them partner with us. What an answer to our prayer!



Even after four years we were still getting calls from community members asking us if there would be camp again. There were youth who had been part of the program who were now adults checking in. Camp has the opportunity to make a powerful impact on the lives of children and youth. Of course, we said “Yes.” Some of the barriers one might expect when bringing a camp to Oneida did not exist. Lobo is close to Oneida and camp staff were able to drive daily. This camp would be three half days and that meant it would not be necessary to plan and prepare meals.

“Camp has the opportunity to make a *powerful impact* on the lives of children and youth.”

(*Note, this is independent of Camp Oneida)

“And we prayed! *We prayed a lot!*”

Posters went out and our Facebook page became my best friend at getting the word out. And we prayed! We prayed a lot! It had been four years and in the past couple of years the community has added some terrific summer opportunities to their youth programming as well. I thought about our first camp a long time ago and remembered that it started out small and over ten years grew and grew! As a church we trusted that God would bring us the children who needed to be there. Preparing for camp had its own set of challenges. The most difficult was space. We hoped to be able to find another space to hold camp because of issues we have with our building. Space is at a premium however and that was not to be.

As a church we prayed and we discussed the situation and decided that we could make it work. The church basement, our kitchen and programming area are not usable because of flooding that is ongoing and water damage. In fact, one hundred gallons of water were removed from the basement on the Sunday before camp and Pastor Doug shovelled water out of the basement on Tuesday morning. One of our members contacted the band for extra drinking water, the upstairs was prepped, and camp was ready to go.



Brian is the pastor at Poplar Hill Baptist Church. We have a small Kids Club there and realized that this was another terrific opportunity! We opened up camp for our Poplar Hill kids and four of them joined us. It was a great cross-cultural opportunity; it gave the kids from both communities the opportunity to grow and learn from each other. It also opens the door to perhaps creating more opportunities to partner with a larger church like First Lobo.

“It was amazing to watch this group of kids as they learned about *God’s love* and what it meant to know Him *personally*.”

Finally, it was time for camp! Running the camp were three amazing staff from First Lobo, Susy, Kenzie and Josh, and great volunteers Pastor Brian Gleadall, Pastor Doug Watson, Dean and Brenda Dolbear, and Aaron Harwood. Torrential rains did damp spirits and our first six campers arrived. Cup stacking, bracelet making, and art filled the morning. Then it was time for the Bible! It was amazing to watch this group of kids as they learned about God’s love and what it meant to know Him personally. We sang “Jesus Loves” and with the help of our kids I had the opportunity to teach our friends from First Lobo the Oneida words for the song! It was a great way to share our cultures with each other. By the end of the morning the sun came out and we ended the day with some sports outside. By Wednesday the numbers doubled, and they grew again on Thursday. What an amazing blessing. The bonus was Thursday being a full day with lunch at McDonalds and an afternoon at the Strathroy Aquatic Center.

“For some, it is their *first time* inside a church and what a great way to *introduce* our little faith *community*.”

The kids had so much fun, and so did I, although I did not win the giant cup stacking game! Did I mention that I lost to a four-year-old? One of the great things about camp is it allows the kids to see who we are as a church. For some it is their first time inside a church and what a great way to introduce our little faith community. It also provides this wonderful opportunity for the kids to build relationships with our friends from First Lobo and we are praying that this is a connection that will continue.

“We want to be seen *living out* Christ’s love. We do that by filling our sanctuary with hula hoops, stacking cups, slime, and love.”

One of the really exciting benefits is the opportunity to chat with the campers and provide them with the opportunity to talk about what type of programming and connection they might like to see happen. Of course they would love to see another camp; three days were great; half-days were fine. For the kids it is a chance to be together and have some fun. The other conversation we had was about a desire to see some special programming for girls from grade four and up. It has been in our heart for some time, and this is definitely confirmation that this is something needed in the community. Camp is also a great opportunity to connect with families. Drop off and pick up are great times for conversation and relationship building.

“We have a *heart for the children* in our community.”



In a small church where funds are always in short supply, camp does not happen without support. First Lobo provided the food, the ‘person power’ and the enthusiasm to be doing mission in a First Nations community. The Middlesex-Lambton-Huron Association provided financial support and First Oneida Baptist provided the space and the liaison. It was a great team effort.

At First Oneida we have a heart for the children in our community. We want to provide safe and caring opportunities for them. We want them to see our church as a positive, caring, and inclusive family that welcomes everyone. We want to be seen living out Christ’s love. We do that by filling our sanctuary with hula hoops, stacking cups, slime, and love. We do it by providing opportunities for other churches to come alongside to learn what it means to be in our First Nations community. We do it by being salt and light in a community that truly needs to see Christ’s love in action. That is what camp is all about.



Renewed Life at Kanata Baptist Church

By Bob Davies

PASTORAL TEAM LEADER, KANATA BAPTIST CHURCH
(OTTAWA ASSOCIATION)

“Whatever you plant will grow, Bob.”

Those were the words given to me by a friend following a joint mentoring session with my Church Renewal group.

At our session, I shared something the Lord had whispered in my devotionals in November of 2022. I’d been on the train from Ottawa to Scarborough, and the Lord had me look out the window at the fields north of Brockville. It was the first snow, the fields all as dirt, but with their rows clear signs of last year’s work highlighted by the fresh fall.

As I looked at the markings of past work on the frozen ground, what I felt the Lord saying was that the template for our future work was all in place.

It was timely; 2022 marked significant changes for our congregation. Of course, Covid had us wondering about all kinds of community questions, including what ministries would re-emerge. The night before my train ride we honoured the retirement of one of our Pastors after 38 years of faithful ministry, and just a few months before that, my Chief Administrator gave me the first head’s up that she thought her retirement, after more than 30 years of service, would come in two years’ time.

At the end of 2022, I knew significant change was at hand.

“God told him to tell me that
whatever we planted would grow.”

Before Covid I could articulate the rhythms of our church life. I knew who was connected with the local Kanata Food Cupboard, and which small groups helped there. I knew who went down into Ottawa's core to help with Ottawa Inner-City Ministries and their street work. I knew when programs were starting, which small groups were meeting, and what projects our Missions council or other teams were cooking up.

During Covid, key volunteers and staff worked feverishly under strain: our Missions council adjusted our First Nations 'Walking Together' Conference so that it was online; our monthly Open Table meal for the community totally adjusted its work to provide take-out meals; our staff rearranged and reinvented all our practices for Youth and Children's Ministries and our seven week annual Summer Camp so we could manage the restrictions – right down to pool noodles spread like helicopter blades from hats to ensure social distancing.

“It was like digging in *frozen* dirt.

All that work went on amidst evaporating volunteer engagement. In 2015, we had 319 volunteers doing some 784 volunteer tasks. In 2019 we counted 352 volunteers. But by mid 2022, I had nowhere near the courage to even ask; I think we were under 100. My staff and key leaders hauled weight to keep basic things running.

Covid drove us all into irregular rhythms of both exertion and stalling. On the one hand, being home and masked meant there was less of what filled our days before. But on the other hand, as organizational leaders – and so, also as organizations – everything took exponentially more stretch to get anything done or moving. It was like digging in frozen dirt.

I was not alone in a way, as I shared with my mentoring group my sense of what God had said on the train. But then my friend caught me afterwards and said that as he was praying for me, God told him to tell me that whatever we planted would grow. Feeling the post-Covid exhaustion, I asked if that meant that if I didn't plant things, nothing would grow, and he was quick to laugh and say, “No Bob; it wasn't a rebuke or warning. God says whatever you plant will grow.”

It was a good message of hope.

“The *renewal of life* must come from something *deeper*, something *rooted* and well *nourished*.”

In February of 2023, I met with our senior leadership. Throughout the fall I'd worked with a business consultant at our church to develop a longer-term strategic plan for our staff transitions, but we needed more than a plan for staff configuration.

Our active missional life at KBC, long before Covid, arose from a deep sense that all of us are called to be missionaries in a post-Christian society: a people blessed in order to be a blessing, and working for the good of the city to which we are sent. But, even before Covid, I'd had a conversation with a man at our church who had been very actively involved, but who came to me amidst the realization that he was really a “baby Christian”: very active in church, but without really understanding what he was getting involved with.

We needed more than a resurgence of activity at KBC; the renewal of life must come from something deeper, something rooted and well nourished. I produced a draft document for our leadership called “Renewed Life at Kanata Baptist Church,” naming the need for us to facilitate rootedness and depth as preliminary to the facilitating of flowering missional life. Whatever we plant will grow.

Theologically, we know from Paul that it is God who makes things grow. We take that seriously. But we experience it most wonderfully in concert with our work towards rootedness. Since a 2012 NCD (Natural Church Development) survey we'd known that focusing on passionate spirituality, especially the experience of God's presence in our everyday lives, was critical for us. Before and through Covid we pressed heavily on learning to hear God's voice, not merely in sermons, but by creating spiritual formation retreats introducing different styles of prayer, by adopting Church Renewal's Hearing God seminar for our context, and by allowing my pastoral ministry to include conversations about deeper inner needs and exploring prayer focused on inner healing. Those are things we'd been planting.

In April of 2023, 36 months after lockdowns were first initiated, the ground began to thaw. I needed a prayer team to give us cover for a "Set Free" Retreat weekend, an event rather like Neil Anderson's Bondage Breakers that I like to think of as "raiding the dungeon." With volunteer return stubbornly slow, I felt the tension between pressing forward and waiting for life to emerge naturally under God's guiding and life-giving hand.

Within two days of my email invitation to join our prayer team, I had 13 people agree to pray faithfully. Before, during, and after the retreat, that prayer team hit it out of the park. In shifts through the event, they gathered in my office to pray, and then take turns to walk the building.

Whatever we plant will grow.

"In May, our staff did a new census of our volunteer life: we counted 257 volunteers with 487 different tasks."

Growth continued. Since November 2023, we've had 16 baptisms plus 8 new members, and by the start of 2024 I saw further signs of a gentle and cautious volunteer return. Our Fairy Godmother prom dress ministry here in Ottawa was led by our KBC volunteer leaders in 2022 and 23, but with very few others from KBC to assist; this year more stepped up including new people who've joined us at KBC. In May, our staff did a new census of our volunteer life: we counted 257 volunteers with 487 different tasks

Whatever we plant will grow.

Over the past couple of months, since our census, I've had volunteers come, not merely interested in helping out, but with the inspiration and gas under the hood to initiate and lead new ministry ideas including a bereavement support group, a group praying for teachers and schools, a Bible-Quizzing chapter, and someone with a dream which God has inspired, and is beginning to clarify. Our KBC Baseball Team is facing off against churches from around town. Summer Camp is filling our halls with the sounds of children laughing, followed by parents making sure their children recite for me the Bible verses they've been learning. And preparations for our fall Dinner Theatre program are underway with actors spending the summer going over the script: the first since Covid, and the first script we used in the very first year of that KBC ministry years ago.

These are unquestionably the signs of new life.

Whatever we plant will grow, indeed.

Lionhearts

By Rob Sellitto

SENIOR PASTOR, BROMLEY ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH (OTTAWA ASSOCIATION)

It all started with strawberries.

Well, 800 pounds of strawberries, actually.

Travis Blackmore was a professional touring musician and was just coming off a recent tour. With a young son at home, he knew that the touring life would not be a sustainable life with his growing family.

In his search for what to do next, a friend of his who worked at Costco shared about how they sometimes threw out good food because it couldn't be sold. One morning, he called Travis to tell him they had some strawberries that were going to be thrown out, and if he wanted to pick them up, he could.

Travis jumped at the opportunity.

Equipped with his minivan he arrived at the loading dock of Costco. The "some" strawberries turned out to be an 800-pound pallet of strawberries, much more than he and his minivan imagined! But he made it work and brought the strawberries to his church's basement in Kingston and started calling everyone he knew to see if they wanted strawberries, giving them away one pound at a time. That day the dream of Lionhearts was born, but it grew from there to be not just a food and goods rescue, but to work in helping the unhoused find shelter, meal provision for the marginalized and much more. I got to know Travis about 8 years after the great strawberry rescue.

“...a simple act of picking up bread could have such an *incredible impact.*”



Lionhearts in Ottawa was still a relatively new organization and primarily focused on rescuing food from the COBS bread bakeries in Ottawa. I joined Travis on a “rescue mission” in the east end of the city one night and saw how a team of volunteers picked up, packaged and redistributed the bread to front line organizations working with marginalized people. What I walked away with most that night was how a simple act of picking up bread could have such an incredible impact. Not just for the front-line agencies who were serving and feeding people, but also for the volunteers. As the group gathered to bag bread in a church kitchen, they were experiencing community and fellowship at a deep level that can be hard to find.

As Travis and I talked, he shared with me that there was a new COBS opening near to our church, Bromley Road Baptist Church in Ottawa. I jumped at the opportunity for us to become a site for the work of Lionhearts.

Only a few months prior to this, we had begun meeting regularly in person after the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many pastors, I found it a great struggle to get people connecting again. While Zoom and online services were helpful, we missed and lacked the embodied presence of each other in church. Like many churches, as we began to meet in person, we explored how to help people become reconnected. And the most effective thing we did was partner with Lionhearts.



I can wholeheartedly say that this initiative helped our church to grow when many churches were struggling to meet. It helped us not just to help people who called Bromley home reconnect with each other after Covid, but also connect with new people, many of whom had no church affiliation. This act of service helped people connect and get to know each other in the context of serving a good purpose for the community.

We had started picking up two nights a week, but currently are picking up from COBS bread six days a week, with another church from the community picking up the one night we don't. More than 50 people from Bromley are involved in some way with this work, ranging from children who join their parents to sort bread to some of our most senior church family who find it difficult sometimes to know how they can contribute in service. Together we have been rescuing around 500 pounds of food a week for two years to redistribute to local food banks.

As Lionhearts was growing and they had new opportunities to pick up food rescues, I reached out to Pastor Josiah at Longfield's Community Church in Barrhaven to see if they wanted to take part. Longfield's began picking up one night a week from a local COBS bread and they too have seen the benefit of participating in this good work. It has helped them open doors to connect with their community and local agencies. They are beginning to see the fruit of serving their community in this way.

“Too often we try to do things on our own, but we can have a better and greater impact together.”

Over the last two years, Lionhearts has grown immensely, and Bromley has been privileged to partner in the great work they do in Ottawa. Currently, Lionhearts are exploring opportunities to expand their work in London, Ontario as well as to continue to grow in Ottawa and Kingston. Partnering with a good organization like Lionhearts is a mutually beneficial relationship which I cannot recommend enough for a church to consider. Too often we try to do things on our own, but we can have a better and greater impact together. Too often we look to build our personal empires to gain recognition for what we do, but in partnering with others we are working together to build a kingdom whose King is the hope of the world. And I firmly believe, in part because I have been experiencing it, that in these types of partnerships people will come to know the hope of Jesus in ways we never expected.



Learn more about Lionhearts
at lionhearts.ca



CANADIAN BAPTISTS

Together in Mission



**Celebrating the legacy we have made together.
Shaping the one to come.**

Since 1874, Canadian Baptists have worked together to bring the Good News to a broken world. We have sought to be a faithful presence and witness to hope and healing through word and deed.

Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
were foundational in the creation of what is known today as
Canadian Baptist Ministries.



Visit CABA150.CA as the celebration continues. Each month we are publishing reflections from global leaders, along with a celebration song, stories, greetings, and more resources to move us forward into the next 150 years.



CBOQ and Sponsorship

By Tristan Lee

MEMBER, SPRING GARDEN CHURCH (TORONTO ASSOCIATION)

“According to international law set by the UN 1951 Convention, a refugee is someone who has fled violent *conflicts* or *persecution* and was *forced to flee* their country of origin.”

The reason for their persecution must fall under one of the following 5 categories: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

In Canada, the process of sponsoring refugees involves a complex journey of compassion, paperwork, and life-changing outcomes. Overseeing this delicate process are dedicated individuals like Kevin Long, whose 15-year tenure as a Refugee Liaison with CBOQ has immersed him in hundreds of unique sponsorship cases, each as fulfilling as the first.

Kevin’s role revolves around meticulously proofreading applications and navigating the many queries that arise during sponsorship. With around 15-20 cases annually, accuracy is paramount to prevent rejections from government authorities. Despite the bureaucratic challenges, Kevin finds solace in the understanding and supportive church communities he collaborates with, and in knowing God is using him to make a difference in the world.

The path to Canada for sponsored refugees is filled with hurdles—background checks, medical screenings, and bureaucratic procedures that often span years. Once arrived, sponsored families face an adjustment period. Challenges range from linguistic and cultural differences to navigating technological advancements, compounded by the isolation of being in a foreign land. Many have also left loved ones behind and are here filled with feelings of guilt and loneliness.

However, the support provided by sponsoring churches extends beyond paperwork. It offers a lifeline for refugees, providing community, acceptance, and stability during their initial year in Canada. This nurturing environment helps integrate newcomers into society, fostering bonds that often endure for generations.

“The support provided by sponsoring churches extends beyond paperwork. It offers a *lifeline* for refugees, providing community, acceptance, and stability...”

The relationship between a church and the refugees it sponsors goes both ways; when Kevin hears reports from the churches, they are almost exclusively positive. The refugees become integral parts of the community, and many go on to help the church sponsor family members and friends who are stuck in refugee camps or other countries where they are still in danger.

Julaine Palmer of Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church exemplifies the transformative impact of refugee sponsorship. Since 1987, Julaine and her husband have welcomed numerous refugees into their home and community, facilitating remarkable journeys of resilience and success. From Iraqi refugees finding careers in healthcare and design to reuniting Vietnamese siblings separated by war, each story shows the profound impact of compassion and support. She shared with us a glimpse of the lives of some of the people she has helped.

In January of 1988, Julaine and her husband opened their home to three Vietnamese children coming from a refugee camp in Malaysia whom they believed to be orphans. They learned their parents as well as their three siblings were still alive back in Vietnam, and so the oldest brother was able to sponsor their coming to Canada, allowing their family to be reunited.



In 2015, after selling their parsonage, Gilmour Memorial decided to use 10% of the money for mission work. The first people they sponsored were an Iraqi woman they later found out was Christian and a Shia Muslim mother—also from Iraq—with her twin daughters. One of the daughters is now an x-ray technician at a hospital and the other works in graphic design.



In December of 2018, Gilmour Memorial sponsored a mother and her four children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been living in a refugee camp in Kenya for years. The youngest of the four boys, who was in Grade 7 upon coming to Canada, received a prestigious full scholarship from Lakefield College School for Grades 10, 11, and 12.

Recently, they sponsored a Christian family coming from Afghanistan who escaped through Iran and Turkey, then travelled by boat to Greece. They are now looking to go back to Greece to do missionary work, helping others who went through similar experiences within Greece’s Farsi-speaking community.



Gilmour Memorial is also expecting a family of four from Kenya who are relatives of the previously mentioned refugees from the DRC. The family from the Congo was able to raise enough money to assist in sponsoring them, one of many cases where a refugee is able to help bring their family to Canada where they can reunite.

To see the extent of a difference sponsorship can make, you don't need to look further than Rolan Hdad, a Syrian refugee whose harrowing journey to Canada via the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was filled with uncertainty and hardship. His perseverance amidst losing his job and bureaucratic delays is a testament to the resilience of those seeking refuge. Rolan's eventual arrival in Canada, greeted warmly by Julaine and her community, marked the end of a turbulent chapter and the beginning of a hopeful new life.

Rolan is originally from Syria, but he travelled to the United Arab Emirates in 2009 to work. Then, in 2011, war broke out in Syria, and it was unsafe for him to return, as Christians such as himself were being persecuted. His family lost their house and had to move from city to city, constantly running from the war, eventually ending up in Lebanon. Rolan lived in constant fear of losing his job, for if he was fired his company would rescind his visa, and within a month he would be forced to go back to a war-torn Syria.

“Nights and days were spent praying, asking God for help in a situation which seemed *impossible*.”

For years, Rolan spent each day praying that he would not lose his job, never able to consider his future since every tomorrow was an uncertainty.

He continued on this way until 2019, when his aunt came to Canada through Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church and he got in contact with her, trying to find his own way to Canada. Julaine got in touch with Rolan, then spoke with Gilmour Memorial's pastor about sponsoring him. Things seemed to be going alright until COVID struck, and the whole world was brought to a halt. Rolan was fired from the restaurant he worked at in the summer of 2020, and the company wanted to take away his work visa.

He did everything he could to avoid signing the visa cancellation papers they wanted him to sign. For six months he had no job, leaving him unable to pay even the rent for his small room, which held a kitchen, a washroom, and a sofa on which to sleep. At one point, his landlord had even turned off his hydro and water, forcing him to sleep in his car. He borrowed money where he could and asked friends for help, all in the hopes that he could last until he found a new job or a spot became available in Canada. Nights and days were spent praying, asking God for help in a situation which seemed impossible. Then, in late 2020, the government got back to the church and told them there was a spot for him.

The blessings kept on coming, as in January of 2021 his old company offered him another job, and though it paid less than his previous one, all he needed was time until he could be brought to Canada, and that is something this job gave him. It was now a matter

“As soon as he landed, he felt as if a rock had been lifted from his chest; he knew that the *struggle was over*.”

of keeping his visa until the time came for the Canadian embassy to interview him and ensure that he was honest on his application. They contacted him in May of 2022, and asked him all about what he wrote over a one-and-a-half-hour interview. In the end, they found him to be a good fit for Canada, and the officer doing the interview welcomed him, saying he will always have a place in Canada. At this Rolan began to cry tears of joy.

After a few medical tests to ensure he was in good health, a flight was scheduled for September, and he arrived in Canada on the 21st, greeted upon landing by Julaine and his aunt. As soon as he landed, he felt as if a rock had been lifted from his chest; he knew that the struggle was over. Of course there were still going to be some difficulties in Canada, but they were simply incomparable. He knew that he wouldn't be persecuted for his Christianity, he wouldn't be enlisted in the army against his will, and he wouldn't have to live in fear of being kicked out of his home to be forced back to a war-torn country. Once more he shed tears of joy and relief, thankful to God, knowing that he would never be forsaken.



“When a refugee is brought to Canada, they are not only given a new *home*, but a new *life* and a *hope* for a *real future*.”

He was brought to Julaine's house, where he found a place that he truly felt was a home. She helped him with everything he needed, be it paperwork or getting his driver's license or his English skills. He felt

that Julaine and her husband treated him as they would their own son, making sure he knew that he was loved and accepted. They also introduced him to the rest of the congregants of Gilmour Memorial, who had been eagerly awaiting his arrival after hearing constant updates on his progress from the team working on his sponsorship case. In a month or so, once his English was up to par, he started to work at a grocery store in Bridgenorth.

Today, Rolan works in customer service at Lufthansa Airlines, actively participates in church activities, and eagerly awaits the arrival of his family from Lebanon, which Gilmour Memorial is sponsoring. His story reflects the enduring bonds forged through sponsorship, where refugees become integral members of their new communities, contributing to Canada's cultural richness

and diversity. He says that when a refugee is brought to Canada, they are not only given a new home, but a new life and a hope for a real future.

“Your *support* could be the *catalyst* for another refugee's journey from *hardship* to *hope* in Canada.”



The impact of refugee sponsorship extends far beyond paperwork and processes—it's about transforming lives and building inclusive communities. If you're inspired to get involved, consider how your church or organization can participate in this vital humanitarian effort. Your support could be the catalyst for another refugee's journey from hardship to hope in Canada. This is something we cannot do alone, something which requires coordination and collaboration at all levels, and so we all must work together to spread hope and generosity in the name of God.

Koon Wah Leung, CBOQ's Senior Director of Operations and liaison with the sponsorship program said about it, "I'm so thankful that CBOQ can support member churches to welcome and care for refugee families through the sponsorship program. My own church has welcomed our third refugee family, helping them to adjust to Canada and providing multi-faceted support." She also had something to say about the people who made it possible for this program to flourish: "I want to recognize Carol Gouveia's leadership in building the refugee sponsorship program to what it is today. It's also been a joy learning from Kevin Long and our Atlantic and Western Baptist partners, as we navigate new standards, systems and situations together."

At CBOQ, we are deeply grateful to be part of this transformative outreach ministry. Through our decades as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder and our collective efforts in refugee sponsorship, we have witnessed countless lives enriched and futures renewed. The commitment and compassion shown by volunteers like Kevin Long and Julaine Palmer exemplifies the best of community's values—generosity, empathy, and solidarity. Together, we continue to open doors and hearts to those in need, forging bonds of friendship and support that transcend borders and cultures.

As we extend our hands in welcome to new refugees, may we also continue to uphold them in prayer. We pray for those who arrive, often leaving behind beloved family members and facing daunting challenges in their new homeland. As a Baptist family, we lift them up in prayer, asking for strength and resilience in their journey ahead. May they find comfort in their new community, and may God's goodness be revealed through the kindness and hospitality they encounter. We pray for their good health, for their emotional well-being, and for the success of their endeavors as they rebuild their lives in the safety and security of our great country.

"Through our decades as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder and our *collective efforts* in refugee sponsorship, we have witnessed *countless lives* enriched and futures renewed. The *commitment* and *compassion* shown by volunteers like Kevin Long and Julaine Palmer exemplifies the best of community's values—generosity, empathy, and solidarity."



To learn more about the refugee sponsorship program, contact us at sponsorship@baptist.ca or go to rstp.ca.



DID YOU KNOW?
CBOQ Next Gen. Ministries has just launched the "Young Leaders Collective," which will network 50+ young leaders (ages 15-18) from our churches. The program aims to establish a firm Christian faith foundation, develop executive leadership skill sets for either ministry or marketplace roles, and enable participants to be part of a peer leadership community that amplifies the voice of the Next Generation to the Church. Plus, participants will have the opportunity to earn a Grade 11 High School Course Credit!



Empowering Young Christian Leaders to make a Collective Kingdom Impact



SHARE YOUR STORY!
No matter what chapter you find yourself in.

We'd love to hear what God is doing in your church and community.

Our communications team would be glad to help you share it.

Please reach out to us at communications@baptist.ca to start a conversation.

Cultivating Collaboration

By Hannah Fairbanks

YOUTH AND FAMILY PASTOR, IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
(TORONTO ASSOCIATION)

Collaboration—what does it look like for those of us serving in ministries and churches? I have always found that I gravitated towards collaborating with others, as I think it makes ministry easier and more fun; it becomes not just a job but something I look forward to! Besides being fun though, ministry collaboration has also helped me grow as a leader, brought a richness to the ministries I serve,

and has even been the answer to some of the problems I have faced over the years. For the last few years, Immanuel Baptist Church has partnered with several churches in our area, fostering relationships with others from several denominations. Through this I have seen the beauty that comes from working together: when the Church is unified in pursuing God’s Kingdom as one, we end up seeing the heart of God more clearly and living it out more readily. It is a real blessing to not only serve others, but to do so alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ.



“When the Church is *unified* in pursuing God’s Kingdom as one, we end up seeing the *heart of God* more clearly and living it out more readily.”

These partnerships have blossomed from the seed of friendship. Many times my fellow pastors and I would come together and share our ministry needs, our hearts, and pray for/support each other. From these conversations we began desiring to help one another. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “Though one may

be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” We are stronger together! So, why not pool resources and serve with friends? Sharing our skills, time, contacts, leaders, etc., and having that kingdom building mentality (that we are all one in Christ), has helped each of our ministries to thrive. In the end, our collaboration ended up becoming the creative solution to some of the challenges we each faced!

Our church has specifically partnered, even cross-denominationally, with Warden Full Gospel Assembly, Spring Garden Church, and The Peoples Church by bringing our youth ministries together for events, youth group, retreats, and camps. We have seen our kids connect with each other and become good friends in the process. We also have seen how it has opened their eyes to many different styles of worship and ways of encountering God. It has led them to ask deeper, more engaging questions from hearing different Christian perspectives on issues and has further developed their leadership skills in how they are able to better collaborate and plan with others.

“Working together with other faith communities brings *all of us together* and inspires us to grow in significant ways not only personally but in our faith too. “

There will always be challenges along the way (e.g., conflict schedules, initial engagement, vision differences, etc.) but being open minded to collaborating and sticking it out has brought about some truly amazing things in our churches. A highlight of this year was when six of our teens at Immanuel made the decision to get baptised because they experienced God in a tangible and meaningful way at Bethel Park Youth Camp, where several different churches of different denominations came together to pour into our youth (Warden Full Gospel Assembly and The Peoples Church being two of those!). From this experience we were all inspired to form an inter-church youth group basketball league, where once a month our teens would come together to play ball and do youth group together. It has been awesome to see their passion for basketball, their new friendships, and their relationships with God come to life from this fun collaboration. God is moving in our ministries and in our churches!



It's not only with youth ministry, but we have also partnered with other churches for our young adults ministries too. We have partnered with The Peoples Church for the past two years in a monthly worship night for young adults. These nights have become something our young adults look forward to, and it has been inspiring to see them worship and pray together. It also has inspired and challenged our young adults to do a mission trip by hearing how The Peoples Church has sent their young adults to serve in different parts of the world. One of our young adults, Jennifer, says this about those nights: "Worship nights are a very significant part of my month. It is a time when I can set aside the events of the week and focus on God, worshipping Him and praying. It's also a great place to meet new people, connect with friends, and make fun new memories. On these nights, I can always ensure that I will feel closer to God and have a great end to my week." Working together with other faith communities brings all of us together and inspires us to grow in significant ways not only personally but in our faith too.

“Even just a brief message or *invitation* to coffee can help sow that first seed of *friendship!*”

My advice to other churches who are looking to have similar partnerships is JUST DO IT!!! Why not work together? Why not combine your Alphas? Why not have a worship night with other young adult groups? Why not share resources? Why not help one another? Because God will surprise you when you do: you will see Him at work in your ministries and communities. Jesus commands us in John 13:34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this

everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." What would it look like if we lived in a manner that loves others and works together? I challenge those of you reading this to reach out to other churches in your neighbourhood and start connecting with the pastors or staff there. Even just a brief message or invitation to coffee can help sow that first seed of friendship! And if you do have pastor friends, explore going to an event or helping out in the community together. So how are you going to reach out, connect, and cultivate friendships with other local churches and ministries? Be intentional, network, and dream about how you will impact your neighbourhood and city together. Cultivate collaboration!

Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed

By Sara Rust

CHAIRPERSON, OUTREACH COMMITTEE,
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH PETROLIA
(MIDDLESEX-LAMBTON-HURON ASSOCIATION)

At First Baptist Church in Petrolia we are having a full summer with three Bible Camp opportunities for children. We are a small congregation (35 to 40 people), almost exclusively comprised of seniors. On a Sunday morning we hear preaching faithful to God's Word, yet most weeks the absence of children, teens and young adults is quite noticeable. So how is it we are offering not one, not two, but three Bible Camps this summer?

Significantly, we have a core of faithful, committed, generous believers. We know we will live forever with our Lord, but recognize our time on earth is limited. As recently as early-2023, looking at the future of our church with human understanding seemed bleak.

Our journey started when our deacons set out to hire two summer interns, with a possible expense of thousands of dollars agreed upon at our February 2023 business meeting. These interns were to begin in May 2023, lead a Bible Camp, and determine the feasibility of continuing children's ministry at First Baptist Church on into the future. No one in all of North America applied.

Our leaders, having faith and working alongside our outreach committee set out to seek another way to host some sort of Bible Camp for children in our community. In May 2023 contact was made with Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) and that door opened. We scrambled to get our police checks in order, and the Lord was faithful. CEF sent us two capable teen missionaries to lead the Bible stories and much of the half-day program. Even with minimal last-minute promotion, the Lord brought 20 kids through our church doors. Most of them lived nearby and walked to our church. Parents were happy to have a fun, free activity for their kids to participate in.

After the camp we were left with a dilemma. We had nothing more to offer these families and their children, not

“Only God could have coordinated these two programs and their content so well.”

even a weekly junior church program. Our outreach committee prayed and sought potential outside help from local Christian ministries working with children.

“The *generation* the world cannot change, is the generation that will *change the world*.”

Out of this, partnerships were formed. A local missionary from BCM International (Bible Centered Ministries), who leads Key Bible Clubs in several County elementary schools during the school year, offered to lead a PA day children’s event in April 2024. Three children attended our half-day event. Considering it was the same day as the eclipse, having three children was reason for rejoicing. This same missionary offered to lead a Bible Camp for us in July: “Adventures with Jesus” with Bible stories from the gospels and memory verses from the gospel of John on the “I AM” statements of Jesus.

CEF listened to our feedback and offered a program this year that was more suitable to the community children we were reaching: “Himalayan Expedition: A journey in trusting Jesus” with Bible stories from the gospels and Proverbs 3:5-7 as the memory verses. Only God could have coordinated these two programs and their content so well. Once again, the Lord sent us two capable teen missionaries to help lead us. The kids were attentive and engaged. Two-thirds of the children who attended our first Bible Camp this July returned two weeks later for our second camp with CEF.

One of the girls, who came every day to both Bible Camps, accepted a free Bible from our church at the Thursday lunch-time family BBQ after the morning program. The last day of camp she brought her new Bible with her, read it a little during some down time, and asked for prayers that she would keep reading it.

Between these two July Bible Camps, the Lord once again brought 20 kids through our doors. We launched both years not knowing ahead of time whether we would have enough volunteers or kids. God faithfully supplied all our needs.

Another partnership formed over the past year with U-Turn Ministries, a ministry based out of the neighbouring County, dedicated to reaching children and teens of this generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They already hosted a fruitful week of Bible Camp in their hometown of Wallaceburg with 150 kids in July. Their four full-day “Generation Alpha” Camp is set for August at our church. It will likely be much smaller than the Wallaceburg Camp, as this is the first time U-Turn has expanded their ministry into Petrolia, but we have faith that it will be another fruitful week. Some of the kids who attended our July Bible Camps are signed up already. These words on their promotional poster catch my attention: “The generation the world cannot change, is the generation that will change the world.”

The vision of U-Turn is bigger than just an isolated Petrolia Bible Camp for children. Their “Underground” teen ministry is set to expand into Petrolia in the upcoming school year. In 22 years of operation they have mentored numerous teens to growth in the Lord and leadership in ministry. As the U-Turn team has come alongside our church, their vision is to raise up Petrolia teens whom they will train in children’s ministry. These teens will then be equipped to assist us in running a regular school-year program for elementary school kids. Perhaps after a couple of years, U-Turn will move on to build up a struggling church in a different community for long-term ministry.

The Lord has renewed the hope of our church to be involved in the work of His Kingdom on into the future. It started with a core group of believers with faith in Him the size of a mustard seed; focusing on Him rather than on our circumstances.

“For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a *mustard seed*, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and *nothing* will be *impossible* for you.” -Matthew 17:20-21

The New Growth Garden

By Esther MacDonald Vidal

GARDEN COORDINATOR, GREEN RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
(QUEBEC ASSOCIATION)

The New Growth Garden at Green Ridge Baptist Church (Sherbrooke, Quebec) has been a cornerstone of community outreach since its inception in 2014. Initiated by Steve and Francine Lilford, who were attending Green Ridge at the time, the garden was inspired by Foundations for Farming (FfF), a Christian ministry started by Brian Oldrieve in Zimbabwe in 1982. FfF specializes in training small-scale farmers to adopt simple, manageable, applicable, long-lasting (SMALL) soil conservation practices that result in high yields. New Growth Garden, based on FfF techniques, became the first such garden in Canada.



In 2016, when Steve and Francine could no longer lead the initiative, they entrusted the garden to Esther MacDonald Vidal, her mother Helen MacDonald, and her aunt Shirley Rublee. The primary goal of New Growth Garden was to provide fresh garden produce to the community while sharing the Gospel and the love of Christ.

Upon taking over, Esther, Helen, and Shirley proposed their plan to the deacons board, which they approved. With the church budget covering soil amendments, mulch, seeds, and some equipment, they divided the garden into 10 common rows and 8 individual rows. The common rows, planted with peas, beans, carrots, lettuce, kale, squash, and more, were open for anyone to work on and harvest from. Those in charge of individual rows, though not charged a fee, were expected to help with garden workdays and maintain their plots.



One of the early challenges was the poor quality of the soil, which had begun as hard clay. Through Steve and Francine's efforts to improve the soil, along with the FfF techniques, eventually resulted in high-quality soil. Promoting the garden's existence was another hurdle, addressed by distributing flyers, creating a Facebook page, and even going as far as participating in local parades. Pest control remains an ongoing challenge, with the garden facing environmental invasions from deer, woodchucks, and various beetles, mitigated by fences and safe repellents.

The garden's main community outreach is the Wednesday tea event, held every Wednesday morning in July and August. These gatherings offer a time for work, fellowship, and delicious homemade goodies crafted by the members of the community.



“The garden acts not only as a place for people to *gather* and *collaborate*, but as a *community resource*.”

The atmosphere of these events is furthered by the fact that Green Ridge’s large, shaded property provides a perfect and picturesque environment for these events. Past summers have included children’s activities that connected nature and gardening to God’s love, with rock painting, studying Monarch butterflies, and making salves from plantains, among other things.

The local community responded well to these events, with families and individuals from various churches and the wider community participating. Some of those who had originally come for the garden even began attending church services. Inevitably, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily reduced the number of unchurched attendees, but church members and other local congregations continued to enjoy the fellowship, albeit with some restrictions. Recently, the community around the garden has begun to grow back to its former size with international students from a local university joining the teas, thanks to promotion by local ISMC missionaries Randy and Myriam Janzen.

Each spring they hold a pair of workdays to prepare and plant the garden, well-attended by church and community members; faithful volunteers help weed and harvest on Wednesdays, while others bake the treats served at the teas. Some church members donate equipment or manure, and community businesses offer discounts on compost, seeds, and plants. A local Christian school even dedicated a day to work in the garden last summer. The Sunday School children also have their own dedicated row, which they plant and harvest themselves, enjoying the fruits of their labor each Sunday after church.

The garden acts not only as a place for people to gather and collaborate, but as a community resource. Excess produce from the garden is shared with local organizations like food banks and Community Aide, which provides meals-on-wheels to seniors. The garden’s flowers have been used at church funerals and given as bouquets to bring cheer to those who need it. The garden has also contributed to a pair of community fridges, with Sunday School children preparing produce baggies to be used by whoever needs them. Socially, New Growth Garden has become a place for informal fellowship, introducing people to a community that models Christ and is founded on the Gospel.





“...see community gardens as a *practical way* to reach out in love and build a *stronger* church community while *alleviating* some of the stress caused by high food prices.”

As the ministry moves forward, Esther and her team are seeking God’s guidance on how it will evolve. They hope to involve younger volunteers with fresh ideas and a love for the Lord. The current workload can be exhausting for the few dedicated workers, so new help is always welcome. They also aim to expand their outreach in the local community, helping more people learn about God’s love.

For Esther, seeing God’s provision through the garden has been incredibly rewarding. Despite the occasionally overwhelming workload and various setbacks, God’s timely support has been evident. Reflecting on the ministry’s impact – both physically through produce and spiritually through fellowship – is always humbling.

Esther advises other churches to embark on similar projects with a dedicated team ready for hard work and prepared for whatever obstacles may appear. Gardening offers many analogies to the Christian walk, such as overcoming challenges and staying rooted in faith. She encourages churches to see community gardens as a practical way to reach out in love and build a stronger church community while alleviating some of the stress caused by high food prices. A community garden is a fantastic way to be the hands and feet of Christ within a neighborhood.



Dining Hall



Cabins



Meeting Spaces



Waterfront & Activities



Affordable Weekend Rate \$115/person

CAMP KWASIND

kwasind.com/retreats

**HAVE
YOU
BOOKED
YOUR
GROUP
YET?**

Weekend Retreats. School Groups. Church Gatherings. Midweek Events.



A **practical** and **intuitive** 10-week study that can help your church thrive.

Get your copy of the small group study guide and **begin a revitalization journey** with your church today!

baptist.ca/revitalizingchurch



One Beautiful Imperative

By Isaac Kenny

YOUTH MEMBER, QUEENSWAY BAPTIST CHURCH (OXFORD-BRANT ASSOCIATION)

The church is bigger than ever before with 2.4 billion lives committed to Christ Jesus. Christians of all ages, all ethnicities, all tongues, all capabilities; it is a global faith, across all of time, no one left out of God's love. However, 70% of all humanity has yet to accept Jesus into their lives, and God's love is for everyone.

You and I have the privilege of being immersed in the love of Christ right now, and we know there is no going back, not even a desire to go back. But not everyone has come running into the father's arms, not everyone has accepted the eternity of goodness laid out before them. Lately I've been asking myself, "How can I stay in the bountiful goodness of our saviour and not share it with everyone I know?" Love isn't portioned out, a little for me and a little for you, God's love is fully there for everyone, in all its goodness. I want to take the love that fills me, and let it overflow into the lives of those around me.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak at our assembly with two other wonderful speakers, Lola and George. Both are far more experienced in ministry than I am (being a mere 16-year-old), and it showed. Even still, we all found our place in the service. All three of us had unique messages to share. Three people from different generations and different upbringings but working towards one mission.

As I thought about this, I realised that this concept applies to the church as a whole. What Lola, George and I experienced was on a relatively small scale, but God's plans for the CBOQ and the greater Church beyond it aren't so little. Jesus gave the Church a mission, to lead and direct our lives for all of this age, until he comes again. A great mission. A great endeavour. A great commission.

"All He asks is for us to go and *share the good news*.
God will do the rest."

When I was 14, I went to an Ignite event nearby. Here we (I and a good size group of other believers) learned about relational evangelism and proceeded to go out into the immediate community and share the good news doing street evangelism. Boy was it hard. Not only was it hard to spit out the words, but people were actively avoiding us, passively answering our inquiries, and often openly stating no interest in whatever we had to say without even giving us a chance to speak! I left that day somewhat downcast, as I felt that I hadn't accomplished anything and that the spiritual state of everyone I encountered was just as it was before. But as I think back on that day, remembering all the things I saw, re-experiencing all the feelings and emotions, I think back to the great commission. What was the great commission? To go and make disciples of all nations. Here I began to understand that Jesus was not commanding us to change lives, to redeem lost souls or to dramatically shift the belief system of a person built over decades of experience, all He asks is for us to go and share the good news. God will do the rest.

Now, as I came to this revelation, I was instantly hit by several doubts. What about all those times we were rejected? Isn't God omnipotent? Why would he send me out on a mission I would view as a failure? Isn't God omniscient? These are real doubts, real issues. Ultimately, however, I felt God's spirit tell me that these are not things for us to know, for if they were, we would know them. We simply must accept the goodness of God's plan. After all, what is faith if there isn't room for doubt?



The more I think about my part in fulfilling the Great Commission, I realise that it isn't just about actively going from house to house preaching the word, but it impacts my everyday life; my actions, my conversations, my priorities, all directly related to the Great Commission.

"A tree is known by its fruit" as Jesus puts it in Matthew 12, "The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (v. 35). We are to be set apart from the rest of humanity. In the Old Testament, this was done by a physical difference, consecration. Today, I finally realise, this is achieved by love. As I thought about it, things started to fall together.

We are called to put others first, humble in all our works. Think of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, Prince of Peace, Lord of Creation, a humble servant. We are called to guard our tongue. In several places the Bible warns of the power of the spoken word: "I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37) and "but no human can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God." (James 3:8-9) to name a few. Goodness, all of creation came about by the power of the spoken word!

We are called to keep our priorities straight. Jesus clearly states the Greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second as well, to love your neighbour as yourself. The Great Commission is a reflection of both of these, and these are to be above all else in our lives.

"So why struggle alone?
Come *together*, as a Church,
as a *family*, and *fulfill* the
Great Commission as one."

But it's hard, and as I'm sure many of us know – most more than I – that on your own it may seem impossible. Well from what I've been reading in the Bible, it is impossible. Alone, man is incapable of holding fast to commandments, and God knows that. We are meant to be together. Fellowship, community, companionship, laughter, friendship; these are aspects central

to the human life, and that is as it was meant to be. Even worship, especially worship, is designed to be experienced together. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20).

So why struggle alone? Come together, as a Church, as a family, and fulfil the Great Commission as one. "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Sometimes it will be hard. We will win some battles and lose others. Some will accept the spirit with open arms and others will spit at our feet and curse the name of Christ. But with each other to support us, and our God actively working in our hearts to fill us with joy and push us onwards, there is only one thing to do.

Everything I have thought about, struggled with, and wrestled through has helped me to understand just a little bit more of this one beautiful imperative. Go, and go together.

A Unique Privilege and Incredible Opportunity

By Sergio Espinoza

PASTOR, HARMONY/PORT COLBORNE BAPTIST CHURCHES
(NIAGARA-HAMILTON ASSOCIATION)



Hello, my name is Sergio, and I have the unique privilege of serving as the pastor of family ministries at Harmony Baptist Church in Hamilton and as the solo pastor at Port Colborne Baptist Church in Port Colborne. This dual role, while uncommon, has provided me with a deeply fulfilling and enriching experience.

I was a pastor at Harmony Baptist Church before I came into my position in Port Colborne about 2 years ago, and I felt that as I got older, there was more pressure on me to take on a new role, perhaps as a lead pastor, though that would likely require me to move to a different church, since Next Gen ministry is often seen as something for the young. The thought of being able to preach every week was appealing, as I love to give sermons and speak, but at the same time, I still enjoyed doing youth and children's ministry; I still loved to do the work that I felt had such a strong and tangible impact on the future of our faith. Besides, when I was feeling old, seeing and hearing the joy of the youth and children made me feel that I was young again. Then I heard that Port Colborne was looking for a part-time solo pastor.

Weeks went by, then months, and I couldn't shake the feeling that I had made a mistake in turning away from the opportunity. Sleepless nights went by one after another, and I could feel that my heart was not at peace, so I spoke with my friends in the hope that they could offer me advice. One of them asked why I hadn't called them back if I believed that I made a mistake, and I realized that in a way, it was that simple. If the position was gone, there was nothing I could do about it, so there would be no doubts left in my mind.



“The level of *cooperation* I’ve seen from both churches is *inspiring*, and I can tell that they both truly *care* about *supporting* each other and fulfilling each of their needs.”

I called Port Colborne asking whether they were still searching for a pastor, and it turned out they were, so we went through the same process before I asked Harmony Baptist Church whether they thought it could work. It took some working out, and many conversations were had, but in the end we figured out an arrangement that satisfied everyone involved.

It has worked out better than I could have hoped. The boards of both churches have been very understanding and helped provide me with the necessary flexibility to do my job at both churches. Even at the time I am writing this, I am running a summer camp with Harmony Baptist Church which takes up the whole of my time during the week, and for these 5 weeks while the camp is running, Port Colborne has agreed to have me doing work for them only on Sundays, when I give my sermon. The level of cooperation I’ve seen from both churches is inspiring, and I can tell that they both truly care about supporting each other and fulfilling each of their needs.

On the topic of cooperation, we have also been doing some joint Next Gen events to great success. The opportunity to meet other people from outside of their normal circles is great for teaching the kids the benefits of working together and helps them see a wider extent of our Christian family. We’ve also been doing larger events involving several of the churches in our association, for example a dodgeball tournament we hosted. Many of these events have four or five churches participating in them with 80 or so kids in total, and though some churches are hesitant to participate, I feel that we’re slowly breaking down the walls that keep us separate.

While I may eventually have to choose between the two roles, the current opportunity to work with children and preach weekly has been a profound blessing. This arrangement would not have been possible without the collaboration and support of both Harmony Baptist Church and Port Colborne Baptist Church. I thank God daily for this incredible opportunity and am deeply grateful to both congregations for their willingness to embrace this unique ministry setup.



Reflections on Assembly 2024: Witnessing God’s Presence and Looking Forward to 2025

By Cathy Millar

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS, CBOG

Organizing our 2024 Assembly was an experience that never got old, even with over 25 years of event planning under my belt. There is a unique joy that comes with seeing a plan come together, especially when it culminates in a gathering that is so much more than just an event. It’s a testament to God working among us, a visible and palpable sense of His presence.

From the moment delegates began to arrive at the Hilton Mississauga/ Meadowvale, there was an air of anticipation and excitement. This year, we had over five hundred attendees, creating a beautiful reunion of our Baptist family. Meeting these individuals, putting faces to names, and reconnecting with old friends was a joy that words can hardly express. It was heartwarming to welcome first-timers and see their nervousness melt away as they started their incredible journey with us. I loved chatting with them, helping them feel at home, and seeing their excitement grow.

This year brought many firsts and new ideas, thanks to our innovative staff. One such idea was the “treat phone” and first-time badges, which turned out to be even more delightful than I had imagined. We also introduced a completely digital registration system, eliminating the need for pen and paper. Watching this smooth, efficient process unfold was gratifying. I would be remiss if I did not say a huge thank you to the staff for their diligence in making this work. For those of you who worked tirelessly with our churches to cross every t and dot every i, thank you. Their dedication and hard work were the backbone of this event. And our volunteers—what incredible people! They generously gave their time and energy to ensure everything ran smoothly. Seeing people hug, pray, and worship together was a feeling like no other. In those moments, you know God is here. He has been with us all along, and I see it and feel it deeply.

The nautical theme of the Assembly held personal meaning for me. Incorporating those elements into the event was a labor of love, bringing both joy and nostalgia; decorating the hotel felt like preparing for a grand voyage. The photo booth was a special highlight. Watching Dennis and his family get a family portrait done or seeing my two staff, Bethany and Kristina, having fun with the “test shots” brought a smile to my face.





“Each Assembly is a *unique opportunity to witness God’s work in our communities.*”

Even as Covid reminded us of its lingering presence, the spirit of togetherness remained strong. Seeing God’s people worshipping, doing business

together, and praying for one another reaffirmed my excitement to do it all over again, June 5-7, 2025. If you were there with us this year, you know exactly what I’m talking about. If you missed it, I hope you can join us next year.

As we look forward to Assembly 2025, we face some practical challenges. The cost of a hotel venue has become a significant concern, making it clear that we may need to seek alternatives. However, the venue is not what makes our gathering special. The true essence of our Assembly lies in coming together as the CBOQ family to worship, pray, conduct business, and be together in fellowship.

One scripture that comes to mind as we reflect on these gatherings is Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” This verse captures the spirit of our Assemblies, that I am so grateful to be part of. They are not just about the logistics or the venue but about encouraging one another, growing together in faith, and collectively advancing God’s mission.

Each Assembly is a unique opportunity to witness God’s work in our communities. It is a time to celebrate your achievements, address challenges, and envision our future together. The feedback we receive from attendees is invaluable, helping us refine and enhance our gatherings. We are committed to creating spaces where people feel welcomed, valued, and inspired.

As we close the chapter on Assembly 2024 and turn our eyes toward 2025, I am filled with gratitude for everyone who contributed to this year’s success. I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead and the ways we will continue to see God working among us.

Please feel free to share your comments about the Assembly with me. Your feedback is invaluable as we continue to create these meaningful gatherings. Together, we can ensure that our future Assemblies continue to be a testament to God’s presence and a celebration of our collective mission. As we journey forward, let us keep our eyes fixed on the true purpose of our gatherings. It is not the venue or the logistics that define us but our unity in Christ and our shared mission to spread His love and grace. Here’s to another year of witnessing God’s work and coming together as an entire family once again next June.

NEWS! Assembly 2025 will be June 5-7 at Brock University in St. Catherines.



*A Family of Churches
Transformed by Christ
Revealing God's Kingdom*



5 INTERNATIONAL BLVD.
ETOBICOKE ON, M9W 6H3
(416) 622-8600 | info@baptist.ca



Follow @CBOQ
baptist.ca