

FORMING LEADERS AT OUR MCEC SCHOOLS

Educating and nurturing leadership in our young people in the context of faith formation is a focus of the schools, camps, and college of MCEC. Since 1945 Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener and the United Mennonite Educational Institute in Leamington have played an important role in shaping Mennonite young people. In the early 1960's Mennonite leaders from three conferences took the bold step of creating a Mennonite college on the campus of the newly founded University of Waterloo.

The following three vignettes illustrate the impact of these schools.

1 Mom was a bit tentative as she talked to me about sending her son to UMEI. First of all, they lived 25 km distant and secondly, her son had specific learning disabilities. Nevertheless, she was a Christian, and she wanted for her children what our school offered. And so, she registered her son...

...Seven years later, how did it all work out? Her son's education was a challenge, but graduation happened. Her two younger children are currently enrolled. The children are leaders in the school. Mom is secretary to the Board of Directors of UMEI. The family now attends a local Mennonite church, and is actively involved in the spring relief sale. We've all been educated in what Mennonite education can lead to.

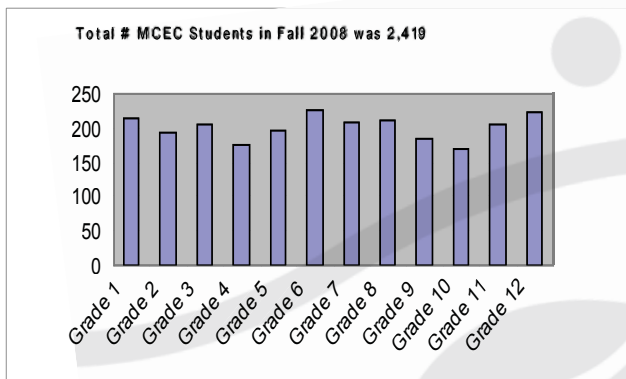
2 For Elizabeth, Rockway was not her choice of school. Her parents "forced" her to attend Grade 9 and she was not very happy about it, as all her friends were going to the public high school. She was convinced that Rockway would be just like Sunday School every day. This was not her idea of what high school should be about. What Elizabeth found was that she made great friends with so many students, not just from her own grade but from all grades. Her new friends were active in their church groups and invited her along to participate in their events, creating an even larger community for her.

She also was surprised to experience teachers who really took the time to get to know her, and was so excited to find music played a big part of her everyday school experience. She loved the debate and the opportunity to ask important questions in Religious Studies classes, and that students were encouraged to seek for answers, not just told what they should think. Elizabeth graduated from Rockway several years ago but even after many twists and turns in her own faith life, she has continued to know the power of a Christian education in shaping her life experience.

3 If you look at leadership positions in your congregation you will find Grebel alumni in various roles, from treasurers to Sunday School teachers to Church council chairs. Our broader church institutions are led by alumni like Rick Cober Bauman (MCCO), Nick Driedger (MSCU), John Neufeld (House of Friendship), and Wanda Wagler Martin (Shalom Counseling Services). Many pastors have been at Grebel either as undergraduates or as part of our Graduate Theological Studies program. In fact over 30 MCEC congregations have a "Grebelite" in their pulpit.

Barb Smith-Morrison at Bloomingdale Mennonite is one example. "I am, among other things, a Mennonite pastor. When I showed up at Conrad Grebel University College, I was neither a Mennonite nor on the path to church leadership. Through both its undergraduate and graduate academic programs, as well as its residence program, Grebel gave me a faith home, a concrete community within which I explored, practiced, and tested my sense of vocational calling, and a multitude of mentors and friends who surrounded me with love, challenge, nurture, and inspiration. My 'Grebel experience' played a powerful role in my becoming who I believe God is calling me to be. I am so very grateful."

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Discussion Questions

1. What are your concerns about young people maintaining ties to the Mennonite church as they grow up? Do you see the schools, camps and College playing a role in strengthening those ties?
2. Could your congregation do more to encourage participation in the schools, camps and College? Should it? Are there things your congregation does currently? (e.g., Student Aid, camp sponsorship, informational events, etc.)
3. Should MCEC have a role in supporting and overseeing the schools, camps and College? Please explain. If so, how should it fulfill that role?

We welcome you to come to the displays to chat with representatives from Rockway, UMEI and Grebel. Sign a card there if you are interested on further developments on youth initiatives and the future of the church.

