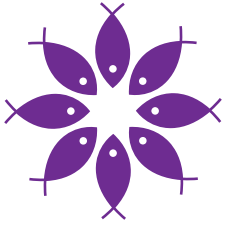


Stories of Mission

LIVING FAITH





Connecting with Community

Erskine Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ontario, has been sharing God's love for 150 years. With support from Presbyterians Sharing, through the Presbytery of Hamilton's Replanting Ministry, Erskine went through a discerning process in 2018 and is working to create a wellness hub for the wellbeing of their community.



While God's message of love, hope, faith and peace stays the same, the way we do ministry may change. Change isn't easy, especially for a congregation with 150 years of history. But recognizing that God was calling them to do something new in their neighbourhood, the congregation at Erskine Presbyterian Church spent 2018 engaged in an intentional process of discernment. They worked and prayed diligently through monthly workshops, discernment meetings and consultations with neighbours until they had a firm vision of who they were called to be: "A healthy, loving family for each and every neighbour."

In 2019, Erskine called the Rev. Mike Aldred as their new minister. Seeing how the community around them had changed, and asking how they could best serve that community, they decided they wanted to become a wellness hub: a safe and welcoming space where people from the community could gather and local organizations could offer services and support to promote wellbeing.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and the plan of creating the hub had to be put on hold, Erskine held fast to their vision. They still wanted to connect with their community.

When it became evident that many people in the area were in extra need of help because of the pandemic, the leaders at Erskine decided to contact their local city councillor. They asked her, "What would you do if you had volunteers, money and a strong desire to help others at this time?" She put them in touch with the Strathcona Community Care Response—

a grassroots group of people in the neighbourhood who were rallying together to offer care and support to their community in response to COVID-19.

Erskine discovered that the Strathcona group had already been fundraising, bringing groceries and supplies to those struggling financially, and engaging in friendly phone calls with people who were isolated for several weeks. Their volunteers were tired, but it was obvious that the needs were still great, and the pandemic was not going to be over anytime soon. The leaders at Erskine told the hardworking group of volunteers that they were there to help in any way they could.

More funds were needed, so Erskine spent a month fundraising. More volunteers were needed, so people from Erskine started helping with grocery pickup and delivery. More food was needed, so congregation members helped to restock the community pantry. More phone calls were needed, so Erskine participated in calling people who were lonely in their neighbourhood.

"The timing of when we joined the Strathcona Community Care Response seemed God-ordained," said the Rev. Aldred. "When they were getting to the end of their rope, Erskine was able to inject generosity, time and energy into the project so that it could continue for a month longer than expected." The experience of serving alongside their neighbours confirmed for Erskine what God had been leading them to in their visioning process: that being a faithful member of a neighbourhood family means looking to see where God is already at work and being willing to join in.



Read: Acts 16: 11–15

Reflect

One of the major themes of the Book of Acts is the Holy Spirit sending people out to share the gospel. In Acts 16, Paul and Barnabas have been joined by Timothy on their second missionary journey. Their plan was to enter Asia, but “the Holy Spirit blocked that route” (16:6). Instead, the Holy Spirit sent them to Macedonia (modern day Greece) by giving Paul a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come.

When the three missionaries arrived in Greece, they made their way to Philippi. Just outside the city gates, down by the river, they met a woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God and dealer of purple cloth. Although not much is known about Lydia, Acts clearly demonstrates that the relationship she developed with the missionaries was mutually beneficial. God opened Lydia’s heart to hear Paul’s message, and she and her household were soon baptized. In turn, she invited the traveling missionaries to come and stay at her home, which became the site of the church in Philippi.

Like the travelling missionaries in Acts, the leaders at Erskine listened when the Holy Spirit took them in a new direction. They held fast to their vision but adapted to the circumstances in which they found themselves. Like Paul, Barnabas and Timothy, who went down to the river on the sabbath to find worshippers of God because there wasn’t an official synagogue in Philippi, the leaders of Erskine went out into their neighbourhood when their official place of worship was no longer open for gathering. The Spirit sent them out to meet the people running the Strathcona Community Care Response—the “Lydias” through whom God was already working in their neighbourhood. The partnership that Erskine developed with Strathcona Community Care Response can best be described as a gift from the Holy Spirit meant to bless the community during a difficult time.

Discuss

- 1) Paul, Barnabas and Timothy were prevented by the Holy Spirit from going in a certain direction and then sent in another. Have you ever experienced God closing one path and opening another one? What was that like? What did that teach you about how God moves in our lives?

- 2) The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians today as powerfully as the Spirit was during the missionary journeys described in Acts. Reflecting on your past, can you name a time when it felt like the Holy Spirit was guiding you? What helped you discern the Spirit’s presence? How might the Spirit be speaking to you in your life today?
- 3) Where might God be calling your congregation to connect with your community?
- 4) Look for people and organizations in your neighbourhood who are working for the community and might align with your goals. How might God be calling you or your church to contribute to their efforts? What does it mean when we work with others on a common goal—even if they aren’t Christian?

Sing

404 – O Spirit come, our hearts inspire

489 – Help us to help each other, Lord

755 – Go ye, go ye into the world

Prayer Focus

Please pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide Erskine as they pursue the vision they’ve been given, and that their relationships with community members will continue to grow as they transform their space into a wellness hub. Pray that the eyes and hearts of all congregations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be opened so that they might discern where God is calling them in their communities.

Pray

May your wisdom and power, O Holy Spirit of God, descend on all congregations discerning and moving forward with new visions. Help them to trust you as their guide. Draw them nearer to their neighbours, so that your love will be made known in every neighbourhood. Ready their ears to hear the good news of Christ so that they will come to see their work as part of your kingdom building. Trusting in you, we place all future plans in your hands and give ourselves over to your guidance.

In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.



Mission in Canada

Through Presbyterians Sharing we support mission in Canada in many ways. Together we help congregations meet local needs in their communities and work to make the Gospel relatable and relevant to people of all ages. We support ministries that help meet the needs of people living in at-risk urban communities. We walk with staff and volunteers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as they work together to meet people's physical and spiritual needs through ministries that operate in and with Indigenous communities in Canada. Together we live out our faith, sharing God's love and igniting transformation.

