

**MR. MICHAEL SHEWBURG****Nominating Body**

South West Presbytery (Toronto Conference) and Kent Presbytery (London)

**Biographical Sketch**

No matter where life has taken me, my roots are in southern Ontario. It is where I began my formative years, growing up in Blenheim, and it is no surprise to me that I have settled back in the area living in Paris. I was always curious about the church—my grandmother tells a story of picking me up from Kenesserie Camp, and as we walked to the car, it is rumoured that I said, “One day I’m gonna run this place!”

It was a going home when God called me to serve as a Staff Associate in 2000 at the same camp I had called home for so many years. I served as the Director of Camping and Youth Ministry in Kent Presbytery for three years, with a break in 2003 to serve in South Africa and India on the Council for World Missions, Training in Mission Program. These years were formative to my understanding of the church’s role in community-building and faith formation.

In 2004 I moved to Toronto, and a year later was called to serve as the Minister to Youth at Islington United Church. Over the past 10 years, I have journeyed with the congregation and together we have grown the children, youth, and young adult programs. A significant part of my work has been the co-creation and development of The GO Project—a program that engages children, youth, and young adults in local mission and discernment: [www.thegoproject.ca](http://www.thegoproject.ca).

In 2012, The GO Project expanded enough for Islington to create a new position unique to the GO Project, and I continue to serve Islington in this capacity. GO has served over 675 children, youth, and young adults since 2007 at youth programs in Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver, St. John’s, Stratford, and Saskatoon; the Paris, Ontario, adult intentional community; and children’s programs across southern Ontario.

My ministry and life have been nourished by my ongoing studies—both formal and informal. I completed a diploma of Social Work through Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, and a few years later began studies at the University of Toronto and Emmanuel College, focusing primarily on theological studies. In 2011 I was recognized as a Designated Lay Minister.

I have often been called a “church geek” and have served in many ways at all levels of our church. Notably and most recently, I have been privileged to be part of the Moderator’s Advisory Committee and to act as the Ordered Ministry representative on the Executive of the General Council for Toronto Conference. Through this role, I serve the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry. I served on the General Council Youth Forum Design Team from 2000 to 2006, which allowed me to attend General Councils in Camrose, Toronto, and Thunder Bay. In 2011 I served on the initial leadership team for Rendez-vous, and in 2012 I attended General Council in Ottawa as a commissioner.

Lastly, and most importantly, I live with my partner Ryan and our four-year-old son Marshall at our farm in Paris, where we grow veggies for a small, local, community shared agriculture endeavour.

### **Statement**

We all know that the church is in a time of great change. There are many ways we are being boldly called into the future—one of these calls comes to us through the Comprehensive Review process. The Comprehensive Review report stirs my imagination and sparks my excitement for a church that will help us live into our calling of discipleship. If the report is accepted, our church will need a Moderator who can help ignite this vision by fanning the flames of hope and quelling the fears that will inevitably come with a remit process. Through many years of discernment, I feel called to offer unique gifts of leadership to a changing church, inspiring hope, excitement, and care into what the CRTG report offers.

Recently my partner and I adopted a little boy. This major transformation in our lives has caused me to reimagine many things, but my love and passion for the church have remained consistent and have even strengthened since becoming Marshall's dad. Even more now than ever, I feel called to play a major role as we co-create a church that is vibrant and authentic, that will be around for him and future generations. Their church will look different from the church as we currently know it, and it is our call to make space for this church to take form. I know that I can offer this care and vision to the church while offering deep care and love to my family.

Recently Moderator Gary Paterson said, "It used to be that the Moderator spoke for the church, but now the need is for the Moderator to speak to the church." I believe that this is true for this time in the life of the church. The church needs to be unburdened from the shackles of polity and procedures that have mired it deep in a bog; our tires now spin in an effort to keep the truck moving. It is time to leave the truck in the mud, put our hip waders or wellies on, or even risk our bare feet and wade out into the wilds. In our effort to keep the truck going, we have often forgotten our true calling as disciples in the world. It is my prayer that the CRTG report is adopted by the church as a first step toward getting out of the truck. The CRTG report will by no means save the church, as it can only be saved by the discipleship of its many and varied members.

I have the privilege of dining most Wednesday evenings at The GO Project Intentional Community meal in Paris, which draws together guests from all walks of life. It is a gathering of regular church folk and those who have not stepped inside a church in years or ever—guests from the mainstream of community and from the margins. The meal is truly an example of the Eucharist without the hampering of rules and regulations. Some call it worship, some call it church, and others call it a free meal with fun people. I see it as bread being broken in a broken world; I see it as sharing bread among strangers who become community; I see it as bread being broken in order that our own brokenness can be restored. When I think of who might have gathered around the table with Jesus—the temple crowd and the outsider—this meal becomes a true glimpse into walking as Christ walked. At the heart of my vision for the church is the deep conviction that the church is at its best when we break bread together.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of walking with a teenager and her family through her journey with cancer. I found myself in places that no formal training could prepare me for. I trembled as she asked me to be the one to hold her feet in comfort as an MRI machine loudly scanned her body, I rejoiced in the car while singing “Bohemian Rhapsody” together at the top of our lungs, and I felt honoured to be called to late-night emergency-room pastoral care visits with tired parents. She taught me that Christian community is about deep prayer and trust in a Creator who yearns for each of us. The church is at its best when we care and are cared for by one another.

When I was a teenager, my home church gave me a key to the building because I was in leadership with youth people and was a visiting elder to the nursing home. I guess it made sense to them to give me a key. Little did they know that I was wrestling with my identity and trying to figure out who I was. In the sanctuary there is a beautiful stained-glass window of Jesus, holding a lantern and knocking at the door, that is backlit because it was covered over by an addition many years ago. On hard days I would go to the church at night, let myself in, turn on the light behind the window, and lie down in the darkness to look up at this window and pray to God. You can see every detail of the glasswork, and it is magnificent—I felt so safe in that place. The church is at its best when we create space to find safety and trust our young with its legacy.

I believe that it is time to give the keys of the church to our youth, to entrust our buildings, systems, and institution to the young prophets and seek to understand their wisdom. We need to practise listening before we speak, we need to trust much more before we judge, and we need to invest before reducing. These are the convictions and the hope that I bring to my nomination for Moderator.