

NEW MEMBERS' STORIES

March 16, 2025

Leonard:

Leonard comes from Cameroon and arrived in Canada in 2024. Suffering the loss of both parents at a young age, Leonard found loving support and a “steadfast anchor” in his local church. This church was a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. As a film maker at a time of government corruption and growing violence against minority English-speaking Cameroonians, Leonard became a threat like many have become in the film and journalism worlds. For safety among other reasons he has come to Canada seeking refuge. He is thrilled to have been introduced to the Armour Heights church family where he seeks to make a spiritual home.



Christabell:



Like Leonard, Christabell also comes to us from Cameroon. She was baptized into the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon in 1997 and confirmed in 2007. She became involved with the Presbyterian Christian Youth Fellowship and continued to stay connected with the church even as the political and social climate within the country was worsening. With a background in social work, finance and as a chef, Christabell brings many gifts with an eagerness to develop her skills further. She arrived in Canada last year and is in the process of a refugee claim process. Christabell feels honoured to join the Armour Heights church community formally as a member and seeks ways to serve her new church home.

Michael:

Michael also comes to us from Cameroon and arrived in 2023. During his final year in university trouble erupted as government forces attacked English-speaking villages in the south. Michael had to leave school to return home to help his family and community. Suffering various hardships over the last few years he was fortunate to survive and make his way to Canada, where he found the hospitality at 101 Wilson and the congregation of Armour Heights. As he continues to study and work toward full citizenship, he is grateful to have found a church home which can provide a spiritual foundation to support his journey.



Kingsley:

2023 was also the year Kingsley came to Canada from Cameroon. In his home country, Kingsley was a film maker and also worked for an NGO supporting the elderly. He was also a member of a congregation of the Presbyterian church and one that his father has been instrumental in establishing. The political situation combined with Kingsley's profession made his ongoing safety precarious. He managed to escape in search of a better future in a new land. Currently Kingsley is in the process of completing his Ontario credentials as a PSW.



Phyllis:

Phyllis grew up exposed to various Protestant and religious communities including: Baptist, Unitarian, Baha'i, Quaker and United Church. As an adult she was a member of a United Church. But after steady decline of the congregation and an amalgamation along with various ministers coming and going, Phyllis felt a spiritual vacuum and a lack of community. Through the pandemic she attended worship online at various churches and found Armour Heights. The worship service moved Phyllis deeply, and once she began attending in person, she felt welcome and at home. She is grateful for the community that is Armour Heights, the wonderful worship, the values of the congregation and the online spiritual content that is deepening her spiritual growth. She is grateful for the opportunity to become a member.



Barbara:

Over the years and with family connections, Barbara attended and enjoyed several Christmas Eve Services at Armour Heights, plus her grandson's (Caydon) baptism at Armour Heights some years ago now. Three years ago, Barbara and her husband moved from Mississauga to a Senior's Village in Whitby, to be closer to family. After their move, she began to worship at Armour Heights online every Sunday. The excellent and thoughtful sermons, the beautiful music and the friendliness of the worship team has now convinced her that she would like to become a member. She is delighted that this is an option and she looks forward to ways she can strengthen her connections with the congregation.



Ruth:



Born and raised in Timmins Ontario, Ruth came to Toronto in the 1960s to train and work as a nurse, and later in business and accounting. Eventually she found her way to working for what was then called: “The Board of World Mission” at PCC head office. She met the Rev. Rodger Talbot and became an active member of Gateway Community Church in the Flemingdon Park area of Toronto, where Rodger was also a minister. Raising her two sons and later grandchildren too, Ruth was deeply involved in her community – at Gateway church and in Flemingdon Park

working with others in the development of programs and services to support those in need and newcomers to Canada. When Gateway Community church closed Ruth sought out a new church home. She had known the Rev. Bill at Armour Heights and also knew the Talbots were worshipping here. Upon arriving, she felt very much at home, and now, 10 years later, finds herself ready to embrace membership more formally.

Zahra (Shadi), Nima, Mitra:

Mitra



Mitra, her son Nima, and daughter-in-law Shadi, are in the process of becoming permanent residents and eventual citizens of Canada. They come from Iran, and each, in their own way, have suffered within a regime where women experience abuse, severe restrictions, surveillance and more. Men, too, are forced to conform to various restrictions and are surveilled in many of their activities with penalties imposed for every infraction. All three were also part of

Nima



Zahra (Shadi)



an underground Christian church in Iran as Christianity exposed them to a form of religion that centered on love rather than judgement and the heart free to choose rather than rules to be obeyed on threat of punishment. As each had known their own abuse and humiliation as persons in their society, they were also targeted by the morality police for religious violations and their home was raided. They escaped and made it to Canada. In addition to engaging in the process of refugee claims and immigration, they sought to find Christian community. Here at Armour Heights they have felt welcomed even as they continue to grow in their learning of the faith and healing of their traumas. Becoming baptized into the body of Christ will be an epic event in their lives.

Anahita:

Anahita has not been in Canada long and is living with her mother (a doctor) while her father (a university professor) is still in Iran. While her plan was not initially to claim refugee status in Canada as neither of her parents have done so, things have now changed for her. Back in Iran the form of religion she was exposed to and the social constraints imposed on women became so unbearable Anahita experienced major mental distress. Once in Canada to get away from it all, she discovered Christianity and experienced a deep connection with the person at the heart of Christianity – the figure of Jesus. She began sharing her thoughts, and once her family back in Iran got wind of this, things became difficult. Her mother here in Canada has fully supported her journey of exploration, and once she did a search online for churches, she found us at Armour Heights. After taking in some online worship services and checking out our website some more, Anahita made her way in person to us last summer. She immersed herself in worship and service, getting involved with our children's program and youth group, as well as helping out during coffee hour. She is very eager to receive baptism and formalize her membership into the body of Christ here at AHPC. Her faith and her identity as a Christian is also part of her journey to freedom and flourishing as a woman and as a human being.



Ebad:

Ebad has not been in Canada long and is still learning English. Having grown up in a strict Islamic context in Iran, he became disillusioned with the version of Islam he was taught which he felt was all about “war and sadness”. Over the years he experienced various forms of harassment for non-conformity and nonparticipation. He lost people he cared about, including a fiancé, friends and family support. At the same time Ebad met Christians who were underground, and this opened his heart to the kind of religion that was freely embraced and emphasized love rather than duty to be obeyed under threat. Over time, this led to great personal difficulty for Ebad with his family, and eventually, the morality police.



Once in Canada on a visit, Ebad was informed by close friends that his home back in Iran was raided. Leaving behind a business and other connections, Ebad has had to start all over. But he never regrets having surrendered his heart to Christ and embracing a faith that is all about love. He has felt such love and welcome here at Armour Heights. Wherever Ebad ends up on his journey tomorrow, today he is deeply thankful to be entering the body of Christ and membership through baptism.

Ahmad:



Ahmad also comes from Iran and has had to make the difficult decision to leave behind his business as an engineer and his wife and child still in Iran. Ahmad grew up in a devout religious family who were Sunni (as opposed to Shia, which is the official version of Islam in Iran). As a result he experienced much discrimination throughout his growing years. Once in university he explored various forms of Islam, including its rich theological and spiritual heritage. After graduate studies Ahmad also began teaching at the university. But he found the context highly discriminatory when it came to any questioning or exploring of alternative faiths. Over time several things happened to Ahmad. He met Christians who not only introduced him to Christianity, but exemplified a compassion and care he had never before encountered.

Ahmad was also diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery. It was the Christian friends, as opposed to family relatives, who were there for him. Under a cloud of darkness, having lost hope, Ahmad reached out in prayer to God in Christ. He came through and is now, miraculously it seems, cancer free. He attributes much of this to his newfound faith which grounded him spiritually through some tough times. While in Canada authorities found cause to call him in for questioning, and his further move into Christianity has made him subject to arrest. Here at Armour Heights he has felt some of the same warmth of compassion and welcome he encountered with Christian friends in the underground world within Iran. He is so thankful to have come to this moment in his life where he can be baptized and publicly declare his faith without fear.

Ali:

Ali grew up in a deeply religious household and throughout his growing year was dutiful in all his religious obligations. Only years later did he come to realize that much of this devotion was about pleasing his elders and the authorities rather than an expression of his heart. Also, after devoting many years to learning the faith, Ali witnessed hypocrisy among his religious teachers and compulsion in matters of faith, and this only deepened a growing disillusion in him. Upon meeting some Christians, however, his faith was ignited again and he sought ways to grow in his learning of Christianity, although having to do so in secret.



Like other men who have sought freedom from tyranny in Iran, Ali has not only experienced oppressive religious impositions, but also an arranged marriage and other pressures in working life. The desire for freedom comes at the cost of leaving much behind and having

to start over again in a new country and having to learn a new language. But the hope is of a new life of freedom. For Ali, this also includes in a central way his Christian faith. Baptism and membership at Armour Heights is a public declaration of faith without fear of reprisal, a freedom to embrace the love of God and to experience such love in community.

Behnaz, Iliya, Liyouza:

Behnaz, her son Iliya and more recently her daughter Liyouza, have been worshipping with us at Armour Heights for a while now. Behnaz grew up in a religious family with her father being a cleric. This meant a very strict religious upbringing, with times where improper behaviour (e.g. not wearing her hijab properly) was severely punished. Marriage, however, was fortunate in Behnaz' case as her husband was openminded and encouraged religious exploration. This led to Behnaz continuing to believe in God in some form but rejecting the tyrannical version of God she had grown up with. It was her son Iliya that introduced her and Liyouza to Christianity. Through school friends here in Canada Iliya discovered Christianity and became enticed. He did research and found us at Armour Heights. Behnaz

Behnaz



Iliya



Liyouza



accompanied him for support without thought of converting to Christianity herself. But this changed as she was exposed to the warmth of our community and Iliya's enthusiasm. In time, Liyouza also began attending our worship services and opened her heart to embrace immersion into the body of Christ through baptism. Baptism is a big step for Behnaz, Iliya and Liyouza. It is an epic moment on their spiritual journey. It is a wonderful opportunity for us at Armour Heights too and a reason to celebrate what the wind of the Spirit is doing among us.

Sousan, Sonia, Arvin:

This family representing three generations have each made their journey into Christianity and now together through the worship and fellowship at Armour Heights. Sousan had been exposed to Christianity through friends before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. After that, Christianity for Iranians was forbidden and she set it aside. But daughter Sonia was raised in an open and permissive environment at home, even though publicly and through school, strict religious observance and behaviour for women was mandated, with regular punishment for failings. Sonia continued to live this

Sousan



dual reality. She went to university and completed graduate studies in nutrition. But university was also an opportunity to explore other ways of seeing the world and spirituality too. Sonia also became involved in anti-government resistance and protests against gender oppression. She was brought in and charged, and after punitive measures against her were taken, was warned to cease and desist.

Sonia



After graduation, however, Sonia discovered her anti-government history followed her wherever she went and she found it hard to find work or start up her own

business. In the meantime there were secret exposures to Christianity and this represented a wonderful spiritual alternative focussed on love and freedom to believe from the heart without restrictive rules and misogynistic requirements. Once in Canada on visits and with family, it became clear that there was no worthwhile future in Iran and things would only become more unlivable. Sonia's son Arvin would also not have a future, nor a faith that could grow with him from the heart. All three have come to the important conviction that they belong to Christ

Arvin



and would like to formally embrace such belonging through baptism. Armour Heights provides a wonderful expression of what the love of Christ can look like in community. We welcome them.