

A warm welcome inspires Rohan to give back and create connections

It's like listening to a love letter.

When Rohan speaks about moving to Goderich, his words pulse with admiration.

"I really felt, and still feel, very welcome. Even though I'm miles and miles away from my hometown, I feel a sense of community here with its warmth and love," says Rohan, who originates from the province of Kerala, in south India.

A church pastor, Rohan remembers arriving in Canada in 2025 and being greeted by members of his congregation at the airport.

After being driven, Rohan, his wife and young son arrived in this lakeside community on a wintery January evening. Two days later, the congregation organized a welcoming party.

"It was my birthday weekend when we arrived. And the church organized a meet and greet event. Most of the members of the congregation were present for that event; it was fun. We were getting to know each other, and the expectation of the congregation waiting to see their new minister was evident in everyone's face. Someone brought rice, chicken and a beautiful birthday cake. I never expected that. It was such a lovely gesture," Rohan remembers.

Similar acts of generosity abounded in those first few months. Church members took Rohan and his family on trips to the grocery stores and other shops in town. Others helped get Rohan's son enrolled in school. There were driving lessons and trips to purchase a vehicle offered by people who soon became friends. One congregant lent the family her car for a couple of months to help them get around.

"Many people, many faces are going through my mind as I think about that time. They helped us feel like we belonged, like we were part of this community," Rohan remembers. "Many people were around us to offer support, either through their wisdom or through being there for us."

With nearly a decade of experience as a minister in southern India,

Rohan spent his life witnessing the commitment it takes to be a pastor from his father, who is also a church minister. He also learned from his mother, a high school teacher who taught history and geography. Rohan also has a younger brother, a lawyer in India.

"I'm really fortunate to have had wonderful teachers all through my educational journey. I got wonderful, wonderful teachers. I always remember them with gratitude," Rohan reflects.

After completing his secondary studies in India, Rohan pursued four degrees: a Master's degree in English Language and Literature; another Bachelor's degree in Divinity; a Master's degree in Theology and a Master's degree in German Language and Literature.

"I have a passion towards learning languages, so I joined a post-graduate course in German language and literature," Rohan says. He continues to read, understand and write in German as a hobby, but adds he could benefit from a German conversational partner to brush up on speaking the language. "Yesterday I went to the library and picked up a German book just to brush up."

After completing his studies, Rohan and his wife were married, then volunteered at a school in remote India, teaching English to students in Grades 1 to 10.

After volunteering, Rohan was offered the opportunity to study abroad in Denmark on a three-month exchange program. When he returned to India, he became an ordained minister.

Rohan was a minister in the largest Protestant church in India, the Church of South India, which he describes as inspiring.

"The church is an important part of everyone's shared life and identity. Given the relatively large proportion of young people within Indian churches, there is considerable work to organize programs and initiatives that address their needs, aspirations, and challenges, while nurturing and supporting the life and faith of the upcoming generations," Rohan describes.

After learning about the United Church of Canada, Rohan became excited about the denomination's commitment to openness, inclusivity and welcoming spirit. He says those values aligned with his personal values.

"I believe this is a message the Church is called to embody in a world where people are increasingly tempted to choose, exclude, and define who belongs and who does not. Every person is precious and valuable, and that truth must be reflected in the way we live, worship, and engage with one another," Rohan says.

Like their time volunteering in remote India, Rohan and his wife were interested in living abroad, to experience life in another context.

"I have a passion for learning languages as well as learning about new cultures and history. That's my area of interest. I thought I would give it a try to be part of a church in Canada. It started in 2022 when I first reached out. I finally got a response two years later, in 2024. And then it took another year to get everything organized and to meet all the requirements," Rohan says.

Three years after their initial inquiry, Rohan's family arrived and was greeted by an enthusiastic congregation.

Within a short time, Rohan fell into the rhythm of being a small-town minister. There were Sunday services to prepare for, visits to people who were sick or going through a hard time, outreach trips to people living in long-term care and retirement homes, and committee meetings to take part in.

Yet Rohan and his family weren't just the recipients of kindness. Rohan quickly became embedded into the community as a volunteer and thoughtful leader.

Rohan joined the Goderich Rotary Club, the Huron County Immigration Partnership's Immigrant Advisory committee, made connections at the retirement homes, served a Christmas Day breakfast with No Hate In Huron and other local newcomers. He walked with a team at the Coldest Night of the Year, and supports the Fishes and Loaves community takeaway meal program. He's also made sure that his church responds to local homelessness issues.

He was also concerned that several other newcomers to Canada from India were working locally in the health care sector and may feel isolated. To help people from that community build connections, Rohan organized an Easter dinner and a badminton group that meets weekly in the church basement.

"It's not just about playing badminton. It's about coming together and chatting. It's about releasing some of the stress," Rohan explains.

With a network of new friends, Rohan, his wife and son are proud to call Goderich home.

"We love the beach, we love hiking. We just look up spots on Google maps or watch videos on Instagram and find out where new trails are. We really enjoy the Menestung Bridge and the G to G trail. We really love it," Rohan says.

Rohan's contributions have left the community impressed. When nominations for the I Am Huron award opened in 2026, a program that celebrates immigrants and newcomers to Canada who make a difference in Huron County, eight separate people nominated him.

"Rohan is a compassionate spiritual leader, community builder and advocate for inclusion. Through the Church he works to strengthen connections among people of different backgrounds, generations and experiences," wrote Dr. Rekha Lal, one of the nominators. "He is deeply committed to the social wellbeing of Huron County."

Advising other immigrants who might be considering moving to Huron County, Rohan encourages people to get involved in the community's life.

"You will find a number of people willing to help you and to offer your support. There are lots of ways you can contribute; you can use your gifts in whatever capacity you have. You have so many spots you can get involved. If you just want to be inside your house, it will take forever to feel like you belong," Rohan says.

In summarizing his experience moving from India to Goderich, Rohan says, "this place is a piece of paradise. The town is beautiful. And the people you come across in Goderich are willing to help. It's really paradise."

The I Am Huron awards celebrate the contributions immigrants and newcomers to Canada make in Huron County's communities. Nominations are received from the community, reviewed by a committee with lived experience of immigration, and awarded at a ceremony.

The project is funded with support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

For more about this campaign, visit: <https://www.huroncounty.ca/i-am-huron/>