

CHRISTIAN LEADER

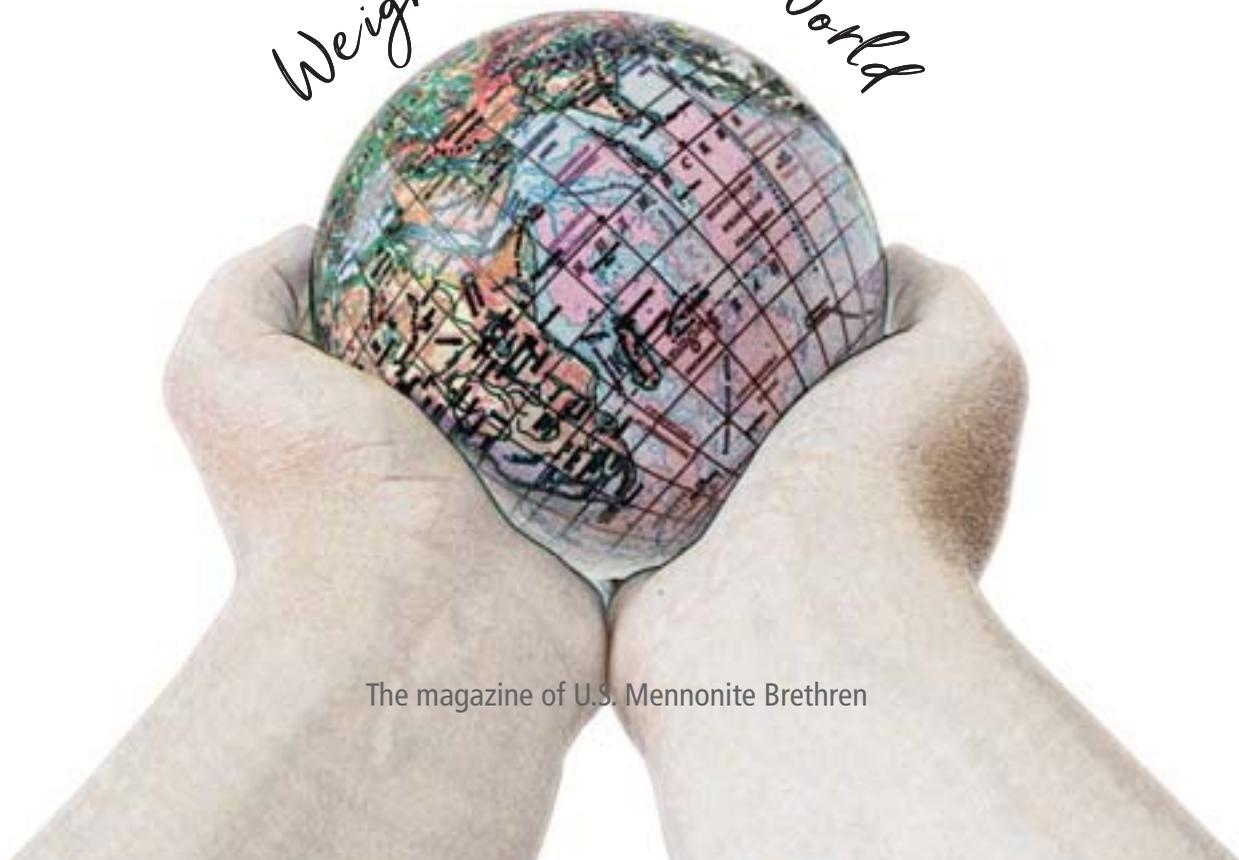
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Weight of the World



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Eyes opened

Border tour reveals complex situation

The theme of the March/April *Christian Leader* is contemporary issues in the church and world. In the pages that follow, you'll encounter weighty topics such as women in pastoral ministry, reaching out to the "Nones" and "Dones," human trafficking and technology.

Another contemporary issue facing our world is that of immigration. At the end of January, I had the opportunity to participate in a South Texas border tour with Mennonite Central Committee, where I collected stories that gave me a broader perspective on migration, and my eyes were opened to the complexities of the situation.

But where to begin?

Do I tell of the young mother from Mexico who shakes as she stands before the judge in federal court, her hands shackled with a large chain encircling her waist? She crossed the border to see her children in Brownsville, she says, and sobs as she leaves the room.

Do I tell of the child at the Catholic Charities RGV Humanitarian Respite Center for asylum seekers? A mask hangs loosely across her face, and mucus drains from her nose. She coughs uncontrollably, then vomits.

Do I tell of our visit to Reynosa—one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico, where drug trafficking and competition between cartels cause violence? Pastors there tell us of a young man who was fatally shot on his way to church, mistaken for someone else by gang members.

Do I tell of the price people pay? Cartels charge a fee for crossing their turf, and one person may pay as much as \$10,000 to hire a *coyote* smuggler to guide his or her journey. In a visit to the South Texas Human Rights Center, we hear about those who pay the ultimate price. In Brooks County alone, more than 750 migrant deaths have been recorded in the last 14 years.

And here I sit in the comfort of my apartment.

Is this a comprehensive list of stories? Certainly not. There are more layers to add. You can read more about the tour at www.christianleadermag.com. Prior to the trip, it was easy to dismiss the border situation as something happening "far away." But when a person goes and sees, putting faces and names to stories, it changes things. Now, at least, I desire to be more informed. I'm asking more questions: What drives people to leave their homes? What can we do about organized crime—both the fear of violence causing people to flee and the funding of cartels by migrants who cross cartel territory. What are the barriers to legal immigration? And what is my responsibility, now that I've seen?

More than anything, this trip caused me to see the humanitarian nature of a complex situation involving real people with names and stories. Everyone—from migrant to border patrol agent, federal judge to asylum seeker—is a person, loved by God. Do we have eyes to see and ears to hear?

And, as we listen, can we seek to understand where people are coming from—whether across borders, across neighborhoods or across the street—and work for the good of God's children everywhere? ■



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Women in pastoral ministry

After attending the Bible and Women in Pastoral Ministry Conference in Phoenix, January 14-16, I needed some time to process. Is it possible that our creator God is desiring to do something new in and through his people? Is it possible that the application of Scripture could once again change after 20 centuries of church life?

After reading testimony from women that are being called into teaching ministry from the pulpit in the recent CL (“The place God called me,” Jan/Feb 2019) and then going to Phoenix and hearing more testimony and conversing with some of these same called women, I have to ask myself these questions.

As I have looked at women in pastoral leadership over the recent years in other denominations, I have wondered where these churches are headed. This movement seemed to be in direct conflict with Scripture and headed for the judgment of God. After all, according to Scripture, the living God punishes disobedience. I am still waiting for judgment and the demise of these institutions. Could there possibly be room for exceptions in God’s Word? Are God’s people given some liberty beyond the essentials? Now I am asking myself, could I possibly be wrong in my convictions?

There is at least one congregation in the Mennonite Brethren family that has gone beyond the 1999 resolution. This church has senior and associate women pastoral leadership. Wow! What is going to happen now? Arriving at the study conference a little late and finding no open tables in the back, I had no choice but to move toward the front. As table discussion began, I found myself sitting beside a woman with a testimony of obedience to God’s calling on her life. After listening to more testimony on Tuesday evening, it was impossible for me not to affirm this woman in her calling to ministry.

I have now given up my last cord of conviction, at least for a time, and given it to the Lord. This is my whole tithe, given to God’s storehouse. And yes, I am putting God to the test, as he challenges me to do. During this time of testing, I

am now waiting for the “floodgates of heaven to be thrown open and see if God will not pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. May the Lord of the harvest send workers into his harvest fields.” Now I am leaning more on Jesus and a little less on the apostle Paul. Jesus said, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” To me, good fruit equates to obedience, and we all know that the living God blesses obedience. I shall see, and truth be told I am already seeing, something new. It is a little frightening, but I am getting used to a possible new revelation. It is the Lord who calls, not man.

*John Ratzlaff
Buhler, Kan.*

A letter to the MB family

I write as part of this family, a family I dearly love. The Mennonite Brethren community is both my church family and heritage, my home. My memory is filled with lovely people who cared for me as a girl, mentored me as a teenager and friends who have journeyed with me to adulthood. It was leaders from my MB church family who noticed my potential to be a leader, gave me opportunities to teach, and took me to leadership conferences, believing that God had gifted me in these areas. As a young girl I felt the possibilities for my life were endless, my dreams unstoppable, my potential uninhibited and I pursued ways to use my gifts and passions to see God’s kingdom come to earth.

And this is where I become confused. This is where my heart aches, filled with a burden I do not understand. You, dear family, encouraged me and invited me to pursue my God given gifts of leadership and teaching when I was young. But now that I am a woman I am told my opportunities to use those gifts are limited because of my gender. The voice that burns in my heart to be heard is made quiet.

Now, I know there are many who are much more academic than I. I am no

theologian. All I have is my heart, a heart that dearly loves Jesus and cares deeply about spending time listening to his Holy Spirit. And as I have spent time at the feet of Jesus I am left with a question. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NLT). I have read this verse so many times in my life, delighting in the fact that I am created in the image of God. I, *Melanie*, am created in the image of *God!*

Now, here is my question: If the Bible says that both *male* and *female* are created in the image of God, then must it also be true that God, the almighty creator of the universe, bears the image of both *man* and *woman*? And if this is true, do we believe that part of the image of God is less competent, less capable, less valuable? Do we believe that this female part of God’s image should be limited, restricted? Oh, how this broken, hurting world misses out when it does not experience the fullness of God’s image released and empowered to be and do all it was created by God to do!

I long for our world to experience the fullness of God’s image, without limitations, without restrictions. Don’t you?

*Melanie (Suess) Smith
Fresno, Calif.*

Thinking about patriotism

Has patriotism become an idol in our churches? Test the spirits and see. If America is a nation “under God” then put a Christian flag above America’s on the pole and watch what happens. Try removing the U.S. flag from your sanctuary to indicate the separation of church and state. If patriotism does not demand human sacrifices like an idol, why are people who kneel during the national anthem accused of dishonoring those who “died for their country?” Aren’t Christians supposed to be longing for a better country as aliens of all nations and citizens of heaven first?

The patriotic slogans “God and Country” or “America First” constantly go unchallenged as contradictions of the

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Senior adult conference set for September

Celebrate 2019, MB Foundation's third gathering for empty nesters, builders and boomers is scheduled for September 27–29, in Omaha, Neb., at Embassy Suites Old Market. It will feature music, encouragement and fellowship in keeping with the theme "Living with Purpose."

"We are privileged to serve this generation, and we are praying this gathering will inspire many to live with purpose through all stages of life," says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation.

Speaker Dr. Ray Pritchard, president of Keep Believing Ministries, will unpack the theme as he leads the group through God's Word. Magician David Garrard will kick off Celebrate 2019 on Friday evening and musical entertainment Saturday evening will feature The Foto Sisters, showcasing a blend of sacred, classical and worship music.

Registration information and other event details will be made available at www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2019 as they develop. For more information, contact MB Foundation at 800.551.1547. —MBF

YouthCon focuses on togetherness

In just a few weeks, more than 650 youth will gather together at Glorieta, N.M. for YouthCon 2019. The every-four-year rotation means that most high school students will attend this event one time in their lives.

The planning committee has heard stories from today's church leaders, reminiscing about the excitement they felt at the convention and coming home ready to put their new knowledge to work. While some of the activities have changed, the point of the ministry is the same. YouthCon brings young people together to encourage them to take the next step in their faith. While being together may not seem like a radical thought, togetherness for today's youth is almost a

foreign concept. They spend their lives in very singular ways. They are comfortable alone at home for dinner by themselves, being an anonymous voice on social media and thinking of themselves as individuals. Being with others—together—that's uncomfortable!

YouthCon speakers and activities will expose attendees to the idea that being together can be freeing and uplifting. The planning committee hopes that attendees come away with a better understanding of God's desire for humans to be in community, and that he created the church to help facilitate this need.

YouthCon attendees will also be challenged to discover how their gifts can contribute to the greater community. The committee has a similar challenge for leadership: create a better connection between generations in our churches. As the youth in MB churches prepare to go to Glorieta, what can their leaders do to encourage this spark and help youth engage in their community in new ways when they return?

Just as today's leaders returned from their youth convention experience energized and ready to put their new understanding into practice, the planning committee hopes the next generation will come away with the same excitement and thirst for involvement. —USMB Youth

Youth attend SDJHYC in Hays

Almost 200 youth and sponsors gathered Jan. 26 at North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan., for the Southern District Junior High Youth Conference (JHYC). The theme of the conference was "Mighty Warriors." Chandelle Claassen from Koerner Heights Church in Newton, Kan., spoke about God being a mighty warrior, God's love for his children and how students can be mighty warriors for God.

Kevin Larson served as the Youth Commission's JHYC director, while North Oak youth pastor Jeff Neher was the host church director. Joe Weaver, worship pastor at Cross Timbers Church

in Edmond, Okla., led a worship team comprised of junior high and high school students and adults.

A number of teens and young adults were involved in leadership and organization of JHYC. The logo was designed by a high school student, and North Oak high schoolers planned and organized free-time activities, including a nerf battle, nine-square in the air, escape rooms, painting, a photo booth and a photo scavenger hunt. Emcees were college students. —CL

J.L. Martin hired as USMB social media coordinator

USMB has contracted with J.L. Martin, Hesston, Kan., to help promote USMB through social media and email marketing. Martin began work Jan. 4. As the part-time social media coordinator, Martin is responsible for enhancing and managing USMB's social media presence on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and helping develop additional marketing strategies to facilitate online community among USMB members.



Martin serves as the pastor of children and family at Hesston MB Church, a position he has held since 2008. He manages social media for the church's page and also contributes to his blog, daddy4ms.blogspot.com

Martin can be contacted at socialmedia@usmb.org. —USMB

LAMB holds convention

The Latin America Mennonite Brethren Conference (LAMB) held its convention and worship during two days in January and February.

Seventy-two people representing nine churches gathered for the business por-

5 minutes with...

tion of its convention Jan. 19, 2019, at Mission (Texas) MB Church. Delegates voted unanimously to amend the conference constitution's policy regarding the buying and selling of church property. The change requires churches to receive approval from the conference executive board before buying or selling church property to ensure compliance with federal regulations.

Moises Tagle gave a report regarding The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), and delegates heard success stories from students of the program. TUMI is the national training arm of World Impact and offers seminary-level training to ministry leaders.

In other business, delegates passed a budget of \$9,500, including funding for TUMI, funding for a two-night retreat for pastors and their wives in October, funding for conference representatives and funding for life insurance for pastors.

Delegates elected Lucila Mireles as MCC representative and Melissa Gutierrez as Tabor board representative.

The Mission MB youth group led worship at the event.

"Here at the LAMB conference, we're excited," says conference chair Joaquin Gutierrez. "We had a good year, working with the pastors so we can unite together and work together for his kingdom. Pray for us as we continue the process of uniting pastors and churches. May God guide us in everything that we do."

LAMB gathered a second time for a worship conference Feb. 1 at La Joya (Texas) MB Church, where the La Joya worship team led attendees in singing. Joaquin Gutierrez welcomed attendees and praised God for the opportunity to have fellowship together. Vice-chairman Logee Salazar prayed and led the offering.

Josue Contreras, pastor at La Joya, was the speaker. His message, "You can help to build the church," was based on Eph. 4:13-16. He emphasized the importance of everyone using their gifts in the church.

Jesse Hernandez, pastor of Iglesia Nueva Vida in Palmview, Texas, served communion. Pastor Rafael Nunez of Mission MB prayed for members of the LAMB governing board, and refreshments were served. —CL



Sue Frantz and Nancy Enns

Sue Frantz and Nancy Enns of Shafter (Calif.) MB Church are the two longest-serving volunteers at the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center (BPC) in Bakersfield, Calif. For over 25 years, they have served the nonprofit ministry that offers pregnancy tests, ultrasounds and other services related to pregnancy and pregnancy options. Sue shares some highlights from their work at the center.

What roles do each of you have as volunteers?

Nancy is the receptionist on Friday mornings, the first face women see when they come to the center. My shift is Thursday morning as a client advocate, trained to meet clients and use our info sheet to find out what she needs and how we can help.

How did you become involved with BPC?

After we had our first child I felt really convinced about the preciousness of life. I went to a couple of Right to Life meetings but wanted to do something more hands on rather than the political side.

How have the center's services changed over the years?

Having the ultrasound has been a huge improvement. I get to go in sometimes as a witness to the ultrasound. It's kind of like going to the Holy of Holies. There's just a presence there.

How has the experience of volunteering changed you?

At first, I was focused on helping save the babies, but I soon realized

it's really the woman who needs to be helped and respected.

Tell us a story that motivates you in your volunteering.

A while back, a very abortion-minded client came in to get a test and an ultrasound to know how far along she was. She wanted the information so she would know what to expect with an abortion. The nurse put the doppler on her for the ultrasound and it was like God put a spotlight on the heart. It just glowed. It changed everything for her. Later she brought the baby in to visit.

What can Christians learn from people who work in this field?

Sometimes it's easy for us as Jesus-followers to see that abortion is wrong—to want to see laws change. Instead of being so much against something, we need to be there to help—to listen to these women and understand what is going on with them. We share the hope that Jesus gives and believe that when she is presented with truthful information and sees what's inside her, a woman will make a decision for life.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Celebrating our year of Jubilee

Omaha congregation spends year focusing on Leviticus 25

Our little church near downtown Omaha, Neb., was started 50 years ago. That alone is a good accomplishment; not all urban churches survive for 50 years. In Leviticus 25, the Bible makes a big deal out of the Jubilee year, and our church leaders knew this. In fact, they began meeting well before our Jubilee began to discuss creative ways to make the year special.

One of our teenagers made a 3-foot by 18-foot banner that said “50 Year Anniversary: Come see what God has done,” and it hung outside of the building above the front doors. We planned special events, including a celebration weekend in early June for the whole church, offered special memory items, collected historic photos and researched our records for important dates in our history.

Before our anniversary year began, while spending time with God deep in nearby Fontenelle Forest, I, too, began to think about our Jubilee. The year of Jubilee was the 50th year for the Israelites of great trust in God, great care for one another and great focus and holy fear on the almighty God. And it was as if God was saying, “Why not make the whole year of preaching centered on the Jubilee year from Leviticus 25?” And so, we did.

We focused on seven words and considered a question for each theme:

- **Rest:** Physical, spiritual and emotional rest (Lev. 25:4-5). What looks like real rest to you?
- **Freedom:** We are free in Christ indeed! (Lev. 25:10-11). In what way would you like to truly live free?
- **Reverence:** Having a holy fear and respect of God for how great he is (Lev. 25:17). How might God be inviting you into a deeper reverence for him?

- **Trust:** Relying on God to provide in all the many aspects of life (Lev. 25:21-22). In what ways would you like to grow in trust?
 - **Remember:** Reflecting back on what God has done, thanking him and learning from the past (Lev. 25:38). In what ways could remembering the past give life to your future?
 - **Generosity:** Sharing our finances, resources, time and skills (Lev. 25:35). How might God be calling you toward increased generosity?
 - **Knowing God:** Understanding more and more who God is (Lev. 25:25). How would you like to really know God?

The congregation responded well to the sermon series. It was a fun learning time for us all. To help the congregation learn to trust God, we took no offerings all year long. Instead, we placed a secure box in the back in which people could drop their offerings, and it worked just fine. It is a practice we are continuing.

During the year we also held an outdoor service on the church’s front lawn, the musical group “Reconciled” came and presented the Sunday morning service, we spent a Saturday together at the lake and we delivered special gifts to our church neighbors. We ended the year with four months focusing on knowing Christ which included a reflection on eight of the names of God.

A reality for many in the church though is that our 2018 Jubilee felt like anything but a jubilee. Many suffered through intense problems, even some deaths. The good news is that because of Jesus Christ the Old Testament power of the Jubilee of rest, freedom, reverence, trust, remembering, generosity and knowing God can now be lived out every day for the rest of our lives, regardless of all the hurt and pain. ▀



Steven Stout is a graduate of Grace University in Omaha, Neb., and has served as pastor of Faith Bible Church in Omaha for the last four years, although he and his wife, Jane, and their family have attended the church for 27 years. He enjoys many outdoor activities, especially the cold and snow. Stout says he visited the same spot in Fontenelle Forest every week September through December this past year. He describes the 19 miles of trails as a “get-away sanctuary” that for the past 10 years has regularly provided a place for him to be still and alone and to meet with God. “I really need these get-away times,” he says.

Preparing for his purpose

Farmer knows God saved him from electrocution

I think of myself as a former athlete but not a long-distance runner. However, my wife, Ashley, has always wanted to train for a half marathon, and, for whatever reason, last fall I agreed to train with her. We began training, and eight weeks into the training I endured a farming accident. As I reflect back on the endless miles my wife and I spent running on the dirt roads, I can clearly see that God was preparing us to endure a different kind of marathon, one that would test my physical endurance and Ashley's emotional endurance.

It was a beautiful fall day, and we were in the middle of corn harvest. I'd left the combine and was headed home to pick up lunch for everyone in the field. On my way I stopped to start an irrigation pivot that we use to water our soybean crop. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but as I worked to start the pivot I was electrocuted by 480 volts. I can remember all that I was thinking, hearing and feeling as the electricity took hold of my body.

With that high of voltage and current going through my body, my muscles froze. I had no control over my body. I couldn't pull away from the electricity. At that point I realized there was nothing I could do to save myself. I remember clearly thinking this was probably it—my life was over.

Eventually I passed out and woke up about 20 minutes later to my phone ringing on the ground in front of me. Ashley was calling, worried because I hadn't shown up to pick up the lunch. I explained to her what had happened and where I was so she could come and get me. She rushed me to the local hospital, and from there I was airlifted to the nearest burn unit.

The electricity had entered through my right hand on my index finger then exited through my thumb, wrist and the left side of my chest right above my heart. The doctors were amazed that I was still alive. I

had irregular heart rhythms and a few other internal issues, but they quickly resolved. Doctors were not able to save my thumb and index finger, and I had to go through seven surgeries and many hours of occupational therapy.

In the following weeks I had conversations with my doctor as I was trying to understand how I was still alive. He told me something that I will never forget: "Dustin, there are some things that you cannot explain. You had bruises on your bicep and shoulder. I truly believe they were from God's hand pulling you away from the electricity."

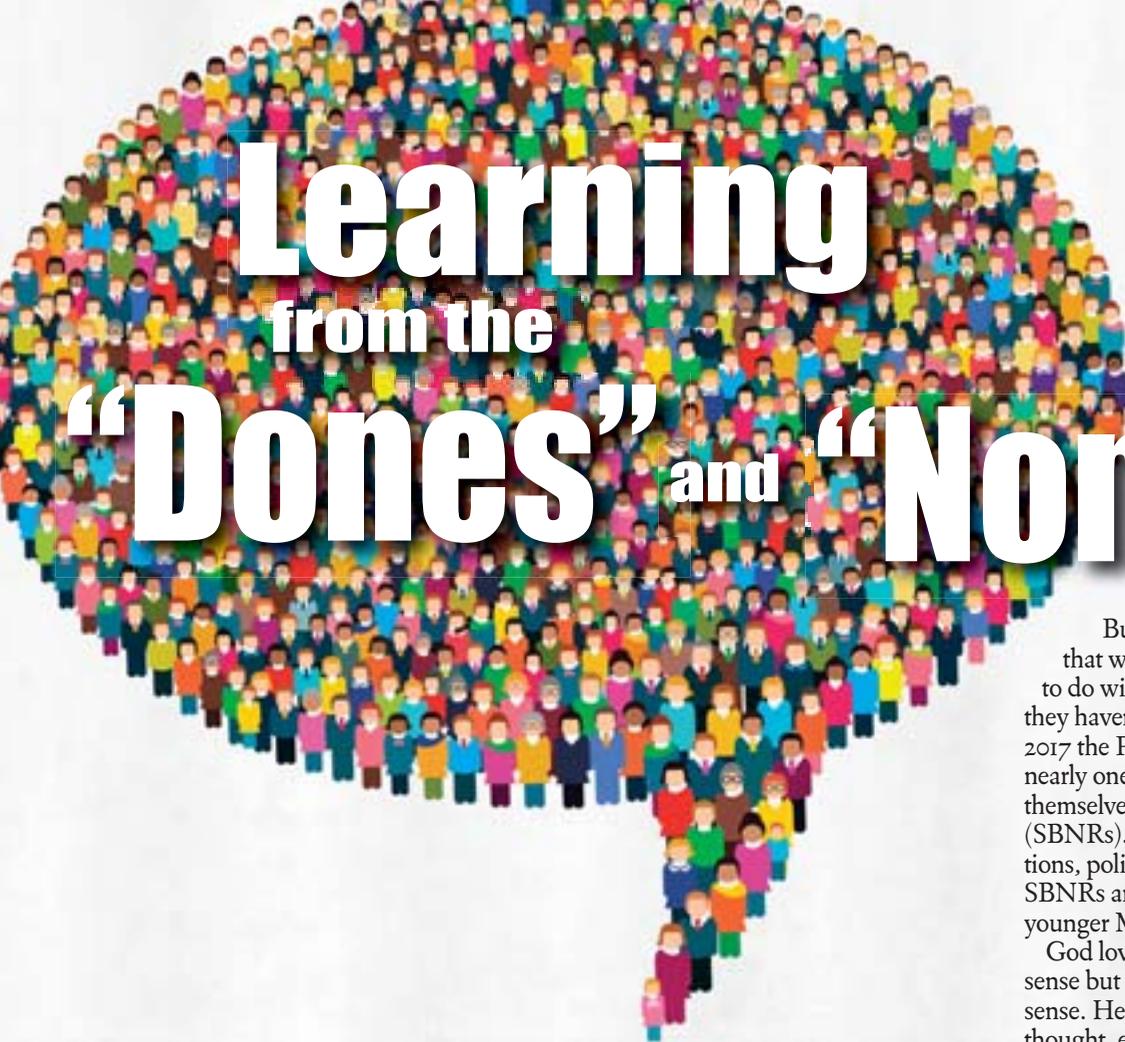
Hearing this reassured me of what I already believed: God had saved me. This gives me so much confidence as I continue to prepare myself for the purpose God has for me. God always sees the bigger picture. In life we are always striving and preparing for things like the half marathon, but God can use our preparations in ways we can't even fathom.

The peace and hope that we can receive from God can truly get us through anything. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God has prepared a purpose for us, and the trials and experiences we go through prepare us to complete those good works for God.

Earlier I said that I am not a runner, and I don't enjoy running just to run. But I found that when I gave myself the goal of completing the half marathon I suddenly had a purpose for running. That extra motivation was all I needed to train hard and even enjoy it. As you read this, I pray that you can be motivated to prepare for the purpose God has for your life, and while you prepare, rest assured that he has gone before you. Through this we can have the hope that God promises us through his Word. ▀



Dustin Jost and his wife, Ashley, have three children, Graysen (7), Kinley (5) and Sage (2). They live and work on the family farm near Hillsboro, Kan., where they raise corn, soybeans and wheat. Jost enjoys doing things with his kids, usually outdoors playing sports or hunting and fishing. They attend Hillsboro MB Church and are active as youth group sponsors and enjoy leading a weekly life group.



Learning

from the

“Dones” and “Nones”

By Darren Duerksen and John Richardson

What can those who are done with church—but not with spirituality—teach us?

In the early 2000s, Adam was the star quarterback at his local high school. That notoriety—combined with using his older brother’s ID to purchase alcohol—led him to a life of addiction. Three years ago, his life fell completely apart. As a result, he connected with Alcoholics Anonymous and tried some local churches. But he felt a disconnect between the two.

“Why do I leave AA meetings filled with hope and inspiration but leave church feeling beat up and judged?” he thought. “Why does the spirituality in the room at AA seem much more real and authentic than the church?”

Last January Adam shared his story with me (John) over coffee. I was blown away at the supernatural change in Adam as he reiterated again and again how much Jesus had changed his life. But Adam also didn’t want to be religious or “one of those guys.” He loved Jesus but wanted to keep his distance from church, religiosity and the hypocrisy he’s seen in others.

Adam is not unique. As the Pew Research Center and others have shown in the last few years, an increasing number of young people identify as religious “Dones” or “Nones.” These are people who have left churches and are done with religion or had no religious affiliation to begin with.

But studies, and our experience, show that while many of these don’t want much to do with organized church or religion, they haven’t left God or spirituality. In fact, in 2017 the Pew Research Center reported that nearly one-fourth of Americans identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNRs). And while they cross denominations, political ideology and age groups, SBNRs are prominent and rising among the younger Millennial generation.

God loves young SBNRs, not in a “general” sense but in a deeply personal, heartbroken sense. He knows each name, each heart, each thought, each person through and through and longs for relationship with them. God listens to the cries of their hearts—both spoken and unspoken. Can we hear their hearts as well?

Many churches have taken notice and want to help this group of people fall in love with Jesus. And the understandable response of many churches has been to ask, what can we do to reach young SBNRs and bring them back to Christian faith and church?

But maybe that is the wrong question. Theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin says, “I do not suggest that the church go into the world as the body with nothing to receive and everything to give.” What if the key to reaching SBNRs is not “What can we do?” but rather “What can we learn?”

If SBNRs were to speak to our faith and churches—as they do when invited—what might they say? Could listening to them help us connect with the disconnected? Here’s some of what we hear young SBNRs saying.

Honesty and authenticity are crucial. Young SBNRs have an innate sense of whether the person speaking really believes what he or she is saying. If you’re not being honest, or if you’re not really buying what you’re selling, neither are they. In our teaching and pastoring we see again and again how most people, particularly young SBNRs, appreciate

personal stories that show how Jesus shaped and continues to shape and correct us. Perhaps this is why the AA meetings were so spiritually fulfilling for Adam; he was surrounded and led by people who were broken and regularly shared honest stories of heartache and breakthrough. Young SBNRs want to hear our raw, honest, God-infused stories, not polished lectures or elegant prose.

Spirituality is dynamic. In some of my (Darren's) classes I ask, "What comes to mind when I say the word 'religion'?" Invariably students say things like "guidelines," "morals," "traditions" and related words. "Spirituality," on the other hand, feels for them personal, interesting and relevant. Many of these students go to church but supplement what they learn with spiritual ideas from friends, music and the Internet.

One student, Rachel, attends her family's evangelical church but explores Buddhism, other religions and artists to satisfy her spiritual interests. Rachel's approach reminds me (Darren) of the experiences of some African missionary churches. When these church leaders told their people not to worry about curses and spirits, the people responded by going to church to worship God and then going to the village shaman to protect them from curses.

These churches had to learn to take seriously the spiritual questions and concerns of the people and address them biblically. If they didn't, the people would go elsewhere to deal with their concerns. What if Rachel's church took seriously her interest in Buddhism and spirituality, listened to her sympathetically and explored how the Bible addresses those same concerns with a focus on Christ?

Salvation is a journey, not a moment. Young SBNRs are comfortable not having all the right spiritual answers and are skeptical of those who claim to have them. For them the spiritual life is better seen as a journey with God and others, not a set of beliefs that lead to a once-in-a-lifetime conversion or baptism. These can be important, but equally important are all the spiritual experiences and practices that make up the spiritual journey.

This doesn't mean that churches should minimize conversion or baptism. These are profoundly biblical and important. But the Bible is filled with narrative, not theological equations, and it's the stories that inspire young SBNRs (and us!) Sharing and showing how we are the continuation of God's redemptive work in the world are key in reaching the SBNRs.

We belong before we believe. Churches have often emphasized that a person believe the right things before being allowed to join and belong. But young SBNRs are concerned less with spiritual and theological "fit" and are more interested in finding a group that accepts them—*really* accepts them. The question, "Do you really love me or do you 'love' me to get me to think like you?" is always in the peripheral vision of SBNRs.

Though the gospel should always challenge and change us, we also agree with SBNRs that Jesus most often calls and accepts people well before reshaping them. We see that acceptance can lead to transformation. Unfortunately, our churches often withhold acceptance because we want to make our disagreements with outsiders clear. But we do not see the two as

mutually exclusive. We can disagree while at the same time accepting people in love.

Spirituality is personal but not personalistic. Young SBNRs value spirituality that is relevant to their lives, but it does not remain there. When they hear "God so loved the world," they certainly hear that God loves individuals. But they also hear that God is interested in the *whole* world, including relationships between people and between people and the environment. As such they want to be a part of social justice and improving relationships between people. They are less concerned about a church's belief statements on abstract doctrines and more concerned about how the church treats them and friends they care about, including those from marginalized ethnic, racial or LGBTQ communities.

We aren't saying that every SBNR will say these things but many are; this is not a uniform group. And though we don't agree with every posture or theological leaning of SBNRs, we do wonder: Does God's Spirit want to speak to us through them? If so, how should we respond? Do we, like a stubborn child, put our fingers in our ears and

“ God listens to the cries of their hearts—both spoken and unspoken. Can we hear their hearts as well? ”

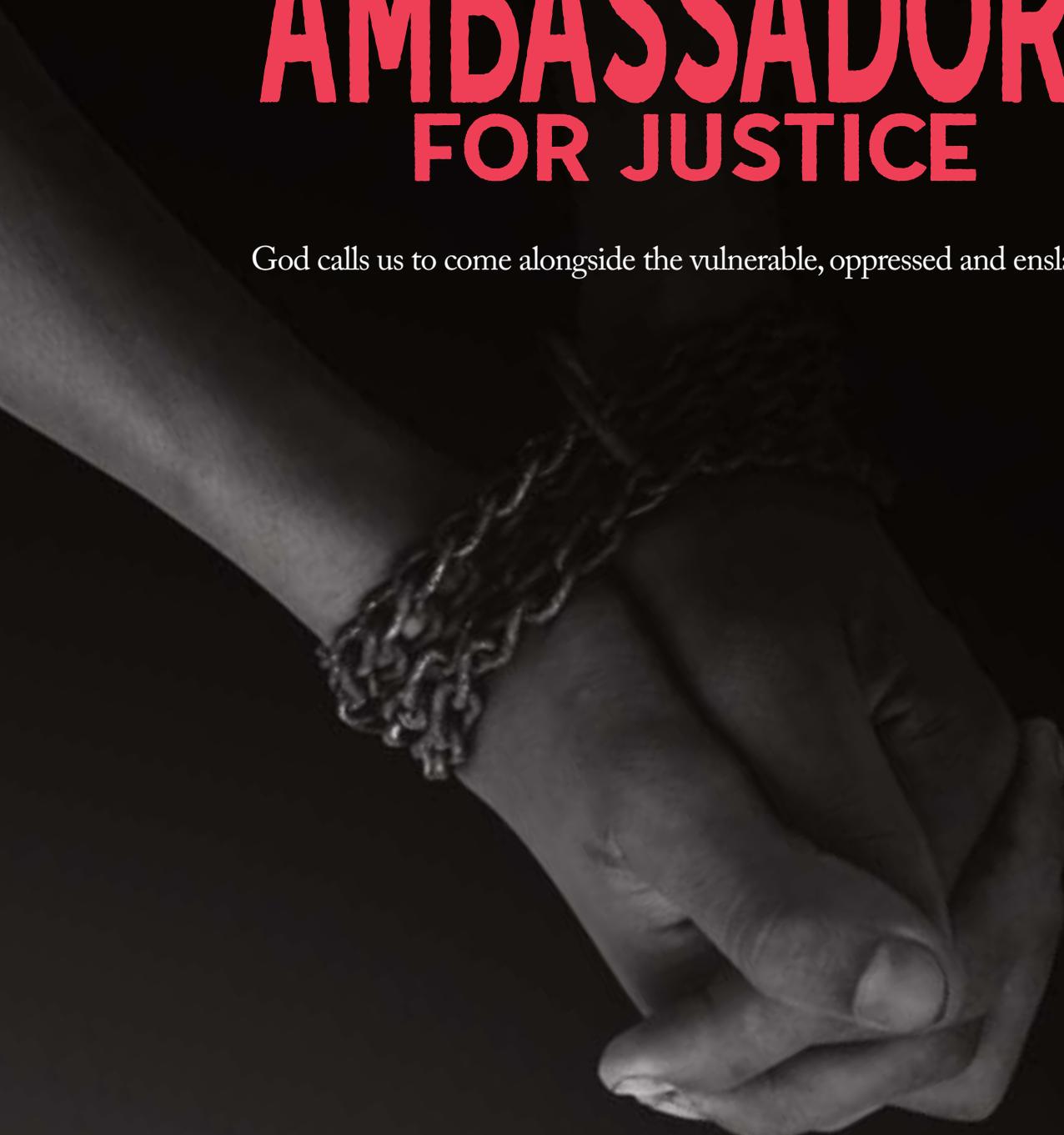
say, "I'm not listening!" Or, like God's challenge in Revelation 2-3, can we hear what the Spirit may be saying to the churches? If we only learn from other Christians, we may miss out on much more than just new converts.

Adam, from the opening story, began attending our church last January. He was baptized last summer, he and his fiancé volunteer at our church and they just became parents to a beautiful baby girl. Adam loves Jesus and is growing closer to him every day, and Jesus is helping him become a better man, a better husband and a better father. He's learned a ton at our church over this past year. But we have learned from him as well. We can all learn from the SBNRs around us. And maybe, just maybe, that's the key in pointing them to Jesus. ▮

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WE ARE GOD'S AMBASSADORS FOR JUSTICE

God calls us to come alongside the vulnerable, oppressed and enslaved



It was less than a decade ago that I sat across the table from Debra. She was a mother but not an ideal one. She used harsh language with her children and with adults. Her clothes were less than modest, effortlessly revealing her obscene tattoos and much more. She was a drug addict and had been in and out of jail. But that wasn't her whole story. I didn't know it at the time, but Debra was also a victim of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of an individual. In all cases, force, fraud and/or coercion—which can include physical, emotional and economic abuse, threats and isolation—are utilized to control victims, forcing them to engage in a commercial sex act or to perform labor or services against their will. Victims of trafficking become trapped and often fear escape because of trauma, shame, emotional attachment and/or threat of harm against themselves or their families.

The prevalence of human trafficking worldwide is astounding. According to Polaris, a nonprofit organization and leader in the global fight against human trafficking, there are more than 40.3 million global victims of human trafficking, with 75 percent of those being women and girls. In the United States alone, over 8,000 domestic cases were reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2017. Of those cases, more than 6,000 involved sex trafficking and around 1,200 were reported as labor trafficking.

Beyond the numbers

While the numbers are staggering and may even surprise you, if we only look at facts and statistics, we won't see the whole picture. The numbers alone don't reveal the injustice and dehumanization of human trafficking. We need to go beyond the numbers. We need to see the victims.

She is a 16-year old lured to meet an online "friend" in real life. He is given a "job" to pay for his way in this country but never gets out of debt. She is romanced by a man who seems to love her generously and provides for her extravagantly but at a cost. He is a runaway who is desperate for food, shelter and medical care. She is the daughter of a drug addict who sells her for a fix. He is a straight-A high school student approached at the mall by someone claiming to be a modeling agent or film producer. She is taken from her home or while on the way to work, beaten and in fear of her life.

He is your son, nephew or the child of your best friend. She is your daughter, granddaughter, niece or neighbor.

No two faces of human trafficking look the same. No two stories are alike. For one, the bruises may be visible. For another, the scars may come in the form of internal, emotional chaos, hidden because of fear, shame or doubt. What they all have in common is that it wasn't their choice. They were trafficked.

Human trafficking is often referred to as modern day slavery. Slavery has been a part of our history since the beginning of time. God's people were enslaved for hundreds of years by the Egyptians. Then were tempted to be slaveholders themselves, capturing and then imposing forced labor on their enemies. These injustices may have been permissible by cultural standards but not by God's. Slavery was not a part of God's original plan. His heart has never been for bondage, burden or oppression. It has always been for justice, freedom and rescue.

Partnering with God

When I first heard about human trafficking in the fall of 2014, I was compelled to learn more, to read books and do online research. The more I learned, the more I felt the urging of the Holy Spirit to act, to do something about this horrible injustice. But what could I do? This was too big!

Then, Debra came back into my life. The unkept and ill-mannered woman who had sat across the table from me was now a changed woman handing me her business card. She was a survivor and had started an organization whose goal was to provide hope, healing and restoration to survivors of human trafficking. And she wanted me to help. What a beautiful picture of God's rescue and redemption. Not just for her but for me as well.

As God's ambassadors, we have been given the message of reconciliation and the gifts of the Spirit to help us bring that message to others. God is making his appeal for justice through us. Compelled by the love of Christ, it is our responsibility to use the power that we have been given to come alongside those who are vulnerable, oppressed and enslaved and lead them to the true rescuer.

Brothers and sisters, I am not just giving you information. This is an invitation for you to partner with God in his work of justice. Here are some things you can do:

Choose empathy and compassion over judgment. Allow the love of Christ to compel you. Jesus saw those in need of rescue as people not as projects or problems. He saw himself in them. Helping these victims is not about making them more like us. It is about helping them live into their identity as image bearers, to be who God created them to be.

Don't assume that this is not your problem or that trafficking can't touch you.

Be informed. Use this article as the beginning, not the end of your knowledge of human trafficking. What does this look like in your area? What local organizations are there? How can you serve?

Talk about it. Slavery, in any context is wrong. Yet, it still exists. Tell people about this article, about the statistics, about the faces of the victims. Awareness is the first step in making change.

Pray that the Lord would bring rescue and redemption. For the victims and the perpetrators. For every life touched by the injustice of trafficking.

If you believe you have identified a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text "help" to Be Free (233733).

As Christ-followers, God has called us to pursue justice and to partner with him to set others free. Who better to provide hope than those who don't just hope for, but put their hope in a faithful and loving God whose plan has always been for rescue? Let's proclaim the ministry of Jesus by joining the fight for the flourishing, wellness and justice of our neighbors. Let's be a part of God's plan for rescue and redemption. **D**

Sybil Kolbert has a background in educational psychology and currently facilitates weekly courses for survivors of human trafficking. She attends Bethany Church in Fresno, Calif.

Talking TECHNOLOGY

Rick Bartlett, Tabor College director of theological education and assistant professor of ministry; Dave Buller, associate pastor at North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan.; and Kyle Goings, youth pastor at First MB

Church in Wichita, Kan., presented a thought-provoking workshop on technology at the 2018 USMB National Convention and National Pastors' Conference. The CL editors talked with the trio about this topic.

CL: What prompted the three of you to put together a workshop on technology?

Rick Bartlett: Dave and I have had a semi-regular Facebook conversation highlighting technological and innovative articles we find on the Web. We've had great conversations about transhumanism—the belief that technology can and will be used to enhance and transform humans—and artificial intelligence (AI). We agree that issues of transhumanism, AI and the widespread adoption of technology need to be discussed by the wider church and by church leaders in particular. This led us to consider offering a seminar at the USMB convention this past summer. Kyle had already been asked to speak on technology, so Dave and I connected with Kyle and we agreed to work together.

Dave Buller: One impetus was the conviction that technology is and will increasingly be a factor in spiritual development, for good or for evil. We all love the church and believe that Christians should (1) be aware of the impact of technology, (2) establish discipleship and protocols to avoid temptation and evil and (3) strategically implement technology for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Kyle Goings: Since I work with teenagers, I'm constantly seeing the effect technology has on people. The younger generation has never lived in a world without cell phones, social media and the Internet. This can be overwhelming to ministry leaders, so I want to help equip and give some context on the use of technology in ministry.

CL: In the context of this discussion, what is meant by technology?

Rick Bartlett: Technology is anything created after a person was born. For example, not many of us think about the technology of a pen. But for those who wrote with a quill, to be able to have ink come out of a pen without dipping in an inkwell—that's technology. For the purpose of this conversation, technology refers to the wide-ranging items we use to connect with people on a daily basis including computers, smartphones, AI and social media.

Dave Buller: In his book, *From the Garden to the City*, John Dyer defines technology as “the human activity of using tools to transform God's creation for practical pur-

poses.” Tools used to be garden shovels and cooking pots. But in our day, Snapchat, smartphones and sermons streamed over the Internet are transforming the people God creates, which means we should now call these apps and circuits tools.

CL: How is technology impacting our daily lives?

Dave Buller: You probably carry technology most places with you. These words are typed on it, and there is a high probability that you are reading this article via tech. Many people come home after work each day and turn it on in their living room. From Alexa to Siri to Google, we speak to it, and we anxiously listen for its response. A recent study indicates that in the United Kingdom people spend an average of 24 hours a week on a smartphone. That leaves only six days in a week—and this phenomenon has become our new reality in just 10 short years.

Kyle Goings: One unique aspect of Generation Z, anyone born after 1995, is they have never lived in a world without the Internet, cable and—for most of them—cell phones and social media. They are forming their identity at a much faster and broader pace than generations before. They not only hear who they are from their parents, friends and church, they hear it from the whole world. When they post something, all social media platforms are designed to get a response. So, this next generation has to filter what everyone says about them, not just their close circle of influence. And the church is falling behind in identity shaping methods, messages and training.

The church has become one voice in the millions of voices that this generation hears. With things like the YouVersion Bible app, we have access to God's Word more than we ever have in human history and yet biblical literacy, particularly in modern countries, has spiraled to an all-time low. We can no longer assume people will trust the Bible simply because we say so. A new, more in-depth, Spirit-filled, practical equipping teaching method is needed.

CL: What are some examples of ways in which technology is helpful and useful?

Rick Bartlett: When it comes to technology, I'm a glass-half-full guy. I love the advances and benefits technology is bringing. If I had the money, I'd be an early adopter of

new tech gadgets. When my wife, Karen, and I moved to the United Kingdom as missionaries in 1993, we communicated with our families through airmail letters, occasional (and expensive) phone calls and a fax if it was urgent. I remember our amazement of near instant communication when email came out.

Compare the isolation we experienced with the level of connection technology provides today. I can see my friend's photos from Poland uploaded onto Facebook as he posts them. I can have an instant message conversation in real time with a friend in Australia or Africa through Messenger or Whats-App. Or I can FaceTime my son who is away at college. One very useful part of technology is the communication it provides.

For personal and spiritual growth, I have been trying to take more time to pray at different points in the day. I have found the "breathe" app on the Apple Watch to be very helpful at reminding me to stop, breathe and pray. Technology has helped me grow in an area in which I had been stuck.

At home we use Alexa to turn on lights, play music, get the weather and news and add items to my calendar. It's a convenience all in our house appreciate.

I work at Tabor College in Wichita where all our programs have moved online. If it wasn't for technology, we wouldn't be able to offer our courses to students all over the country.

Kyle Goings: We first have to think of technology not just as the latest app but anything that was built or invented by humankind. In modern countries, life expectancy has increased over the past 50 years. We can communicate with more people and travel faster than we ever have before.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ can be presented, shared and shown more easily to more people groups than ever before. We have God's Word translated into more languages than the number of languages we even knew existed 100 years ago. We have apps that provide help for our spiritual growth. These apps range from prayer journals to evangelism maps to accountability software and even help for ministry budgeting. It's a very exciting time for ministry if you know what to look for.

CL: What are the concerns we should be aware of when it comes to technology?

Rick Bartlett: I have a friend who has worked in Web design since the mid-1990s. We were talking about the way programs like Facebook and items like Alexa or Google Home are spying on us. Specifically, he's concerned Amazon is collecting vast quantities of data from the random things we say in our home, even when we don't use the "Alexa" command. I keep reminding myself that for these large companies, profit is the goal and not just the profit from selling me their device but from what they are collecting about me when using the device. I think churches should be talking about privacy and the issues that arise with our use of our connected apps and devices.

Dave Buller: A recent study showed more than one-third of respondents felt stressed and "cut off" without their phones and 29 percent felt "lost without it," while one in 10 said that giving up their phone was "liberating" or made them more productive. But people treasure their smartphone more than any other device. My guess is that some treasure their smartphone more than anything. Period.

There is a future scenario of technology that also warrants our attention. What once was considered unfathomable is coming closer to reality. Scientists are fervently seeking ways to bypass the phone. Imagine if you didn't have to carry a phone, charge the battery and be careful with it so that the screen didn't break. What if you could have access to everything your smartphone can do without the hassle of the phone itself? Mega-companies, neuroscientists and tech engineers are investing heavily in ways to connect directly to the brain. Talk about pros and cons! The church needs to be prepared to speak into this.

Kyle Goings: The extreme dangers come from our inability to develop boundaries based on what other people think of us. Thirty years ago, a teenager could get bullied at school, go home and have a break from it. Now, there is never a moment without anxiety and fear because thanks to the Internet, one can be bullied 24/7. Children are no longer trained to "shut out the negative voices," and so they are missing the crucial aspect of deciding who is their friend and who is not.

“ We need to think prayerfully and creatively about how we can use technology to make disciples with Jesus at the center. ”

This is connected to the fact that the word “friend” is now synonymous with “follower,” as in how many followers you have in your social media world. The number of likes and followers has even become a source of currency and influence. Our phones are our biggest source of anxiety, fear and depression, and yet we cannot shut them off for the fear of missing out and being left behind. Being “in the know” is more important than “what you know” in today’s society.

CL: If everyone is glued to a screen, what are the implications for how we worship? What are ways we can helpfully engage technology in our churches?

Rick Bartlett: I’m a big fan of seeking ways to use technology in our worship services. When I preached with my wife, Karen, we put a cell number on the screen and encouraged people to text their questions as we went through the message. It was easier because there were two of us; when we switched off throughout the sermon the other person would check the phone and either interrupt the person speaking at that moment to address the question or would bring out the answer when it was that person’s turn in the message. We had a lot of good feedback afterwards. I know others do something similar using Twitter.

Dave Buller: The stories of the Bible were originally handed down orally—people sitting around sharing these stories. Then during the time of Moses these stories were written down. I wonder if people began to be concerned by this new reality. Maybe they said something like: “You know, we just don’t have those good old campfire story times anymore. Now people just look down at their books.”

We too live in a new age. I believe God can redeem technology and use it for his purposes. We need to think prayerfully and creatively about how we can use technology to make disciples with Jesus at the center. We are tasked with doing theology and mission in a new cultural context.

CL: What precautionary practices should we have in place when dealing with technology in our homes? In our churches?

Dave Buller: Here is a “techie” answer. If you have WiFi at your home or church, I would recommend OpenDNS Family Shield as a good starting place for filtering (<https://www.opendns.com/home-internet-security/>). Another consideration would be a router in which you can set time limits when the Internet is on in your home. We really like the TP-Link Archer C2300. If you have older kids in your home, have a conversation with your family about what limits should be set.

Kyle Goings: “How do I deal with phones/technology with my teenager?” is the number one question I get asked as a youth pastor. My first response: Your teenager does not deserve privacy when it comes to social media. You, as the parent, need to not just follow or friend your child’s social media accounts but have the password to their account. Social media is not a private journal. It is a public platform, so as a parent you have the right and the responsibility to have complete access until they leave your home.

As a parent, when you give your car keys to your teenager don’t you ask them where they are going? Our digital lives should be watched just as much. Younger teenagers particularly don’t have the boundaries or ability to handle the full effects of social media, so they need you to guide them. And if you eliminate social media altogether, once they leave your household your children will not have the skills to handle the ocean of information that will be coming their way.

For churches, cybersecurity needs to be brought to the forefront. How you collect, store and use your congregation’s personal information is vital. We have video cameras to protect our equipment, why not cybersecurity to protect our information. There are many good data management software programs that the church should invest in to properly store people’s information. The days of storing giving records and personal information in a filing cabinet are gone. Someone could break in and steal that information easier than hacking a data management software. Then people’s identities could be easily stolen.

CL: Any closing comments?

Rick Bartlett: I hope pastors and churches will take on these questions and take the time to reflect on the benefits and costs of our dependence on technology. With AI growing into numerous sectors of society, I think our family of churches should hold a study conference to consider questions on what it means to be human.

Dave Buller: God gave Noah instructions for a new kind of tech—a boat that would save the human race. “This is how you are to build it...” (Genesis 6:14-15). God is not opposed to technology, but he seems to prefer watching humans create things. At times God participates with humans in doing technology (Moses and the tabernacle). In fact, God even uses tech that was created for wicked and cruel intentions to bring his salvation (the Roman cross). How is he going to use technology to bring his kingdom 20 years from now? Could it be that he will use someone from one of our churches to create it? ■

U.S. MB resume discussing women in pastoral ministry

Study conference includes presentations, stories, conversation

No decisions were made when more than 140 Mennonite Brethren gathered in Phoenix, Arizona, Jan. 14-16, 2019, for the U.S. Board of Faith and Life (BFL) study conference on “The Bible and Women in Pastoral Ministry.” That’s because the purpose of the study conference was not to take action but after a 20-year hiatus to resume conversation around women in pastoral ministry.

When U.S. Mennonite Brethren last discussed the issue in 1999, they passed a resolution that women be encouraged to “minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate” and that women be invited “to exercise leadership on conference boards, in pastoral staff positions and in our congregations, institutions and agencies...as gifted, called and affirmed.”

At the time, the resolution was a concession, with some people viewing the language as too restrictive and others as not restrictive enough. It became apparent during the 2019 study conference that not much has changed. U.S. Mennonite Brethren remain as divided on the issue in 2019 as they were two decades ago.

The study conference featured seven presentations. Three guest speakers summarized the biblical case for the two primary approaches: complementarian and egalitarian. The fourth presented an alternative approach to thinking about church leadership. These speakers, recognized authors and scholars, were given the daunting task of condensing



Following each presentation, study conference participants talked as table groups. Many participants expressed appreciation for the variety of ideas and good discussion during these follow-up discussions. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

the biblical basis for their perspective into a 45-minute presentation.

Three perspectives

James R. Beck, senior professor of counseling at Denver Seminary, provided an overview of the two most common perspectives. Beck described complementarians as holding that Scripture requires one or more restrictions on ministry for women while egalitarians hold Scripture doesn’t call for restrictions on ministry for women.

“One side should not accuse the other of being wrong or of heresy or of taking us down a slippery slope,” Beck said. “Each side can build their case on the basis of Scripture.”

Dan Doriani, professor of theology at Covenant Seminary, presented the complementarian perspective. While he affirmed the ministry of women, he noted that in Scripture, women do many things but not everything. Doriani emphasized that Jesus chose 12 male apostles and that cannot be ignored.

“Jesus violated cultural conventions when he knew it was necessary to do so, so we cannot dismiss his choices of male apostles as mere cultural accommoda-

tion,” Doriani said. “This position is unpopular; aspects of biblical teaching always are.... But cultural views are not normative.”

Craig S. Keener, professor of biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, presented the egalitarian perspective. He highlighted women in prominent biblical roles and spoke of the importance of reading Scripture in light of its cultural context.

“We have explicit commands of Scripture, and we look for principles and how they apply to our situations,” Keener said. “If we don’t take into account the ancient culture, we are effectively making our own culture the arbiter of the text.”

Michelle Lee-Barnewell, associate professor of New Testament at Biola University, presented an approach that she hoped would “make complementarians better complementarians and egalitarians better egalitarians.” She emphasized asking different questions about leadership, unity as opposed to equality, the authority of Christ, what ministry in the body of Christ looks like and what it looks like to be a man or woman in the body of Christ.

“One of the tactics of the enemy is to turn us against each other in the gender debate,” said Lee-Barnes. “What if we approached this from the perspective of being one body in Christ rather than about rights and positions? I think the conversation has been too much focused on a power model rather than a relational model.”

MB history, early church case study

The study conference began Monday evening with an historical overview of women in Mennonite Brethren church ministry presented by Valerie Rempel, interim vice president of Fresno Pacific Biblical seminary and J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology. She highlighted the important role women have played on the mission field, the organization of women’s mission societies and the conversations that began in the early 1970s about the role of women in the church.

“We stand in a long line of men and women who throughout the centuries and around the globe have struggled to understand and respond to God’s call on their lives and how to be faithful to Scripture,” she said.

Rempel’s presentation was followed

by a study of Acts 15 led by Larry Martens, former Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary president and faculty member. He framed the study as a case study for how the first century church dealt with controversy.

“There will always be issues that threaten our unity,” Martens said. “Dealing with controversial issues in the church today calls for us to examine the Scriptures once again in our contemporary context to define clearly the biblical and theological truths that keep us centered, to reaffirm ourselves to that truth, to the nature of the gospel and how we understand that being fleshed out in our circles and in our midst and to say an unambiguous ‘yes’ to that truth.”

A global context

The formal presentations concluded Tuesday evening with a look at how the global Mennonite Brethren church is responding to women in ministry. Doug Heidebrecht, on staff with Multiply and director of global training at MB Biblical Seminary, presented his research on the global Mennonite Brethren views on women in ministry, noting a wide spectrum along which various MB conferences fall.

Heidebrecht gave specific attention to the process by which the Canadian Conference of MB Churches arrived at their decision in 2006 to approve a model in which the decision on women in pastoral ministry would be left to the individual congregations, based on their local context.

“Decisions made around the globe regarding women in pastoral roles are at least partly shaped by the historical backgrounds and the cultural contexts of those conferences,” he said. “This calls us to reflect critically on how our experience in a certain cultural context influences and shapes our interpretation of Scripture.”

Table talks, sharing stories

Participants did more than listen during the study conference. After each presentation, participants asked questions of the speakers, talked around their tables and then reported on their table conversation during an open mic time. Table groups were encouraged to provide a written summary of their discussion and to turn in those notes to members of the Listening Committee who reported at the closing session.

The study conference culminated in stories and sharing.

For an hour Tuesday night, seven women responded to the invitation to tell their stories. A recurring theme revolved around these women sensing a call from God, being affirmed for their pastoral and teaching gifts by the Holy Spirit and others and the hurt and uncertainty experienced as a result of being restricted from serving in the church.

“For those of you who affirmed and challenged me, thank you,” said Joanna Chapa, Rio Grande City, Texas, currently a missionary in Peru. “I encourage you to continue to be a family that affirms your daughters and wives to be the people God wants them to be. Release them, empower them, learn from them.”

Saying she could not ignore the Holy Spirit’s prompting to serve, Whitney Douglas, associate pastor of youth and outreach at Willow Avenue Mennonite



Desirae Robinson and Pam Burket shared their experiences in local church ministry during the Wednesday morning discussion. Both women spoke of the affirmation they receive in their complementarian congregations. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

Church in Clovis, Calif., said, “If I stand before Jesus one day and learn I was wrong to serve in certain capacities, I think there will be space for me in the kingdom.”

Kimberly Kliewer Becker said that although she grew up as a Mennonite Brethren and graduated from MB Biblical Seminary, she has found her voice as a pastor in Mennonite Church USA serving Immanuel Mennonite Church in Lauderdale, Minn.

“I’m in a Mennonite church, and I’m a Mennonite Brethren and I feel displaced, not fully fitting there, not fully fitting here,” Kliewer Becker said. “I think that’s a shame, because this is my people, and it shouldn’t be this way.”

Some two-dozen people spoke during the Wednesday morning open-mic sharing. Women shared of their joyful ministry as complementarians in the church under the leadership of men, saying they did not feel restricted. Others, speaking from an egalitarian perspective, talked of their desire to follow God’s call on their lives.

“I’m OK with this (1999) compromise,” said Helene Wedel, Yale, S.D. “Although for me personally, the only thing left for a true complementarian to compromise on is the lead pastoral role. As a complementarian woman, that would be the threshold that I could not compromise.”

Marci Berntalotto, Fresno, Calif., said, “Nobody walks with Jesus because they want to do it wrong. On either side, we are truly desiring to know Jesus Christ and be faithful to him. It is not an egalitarian or complementarian thing. This is a sense of call about what God has asked us to do.”

Some speakers, representing their constituency, offered words of caution regarding change while others affirmed lifting current restrictions.

“There is a deep-seated division among us,” said John Langer, moderator of the Central District Conference (CDC). Langer cautioned against moving in the direction of the Canadian conference. “We have a lot of people in our district who have said they are not



The Wednesday morning prayer time lead by Dina Gonzales-Piña concluded with the group circling the meeting room as a symbol of their willingness to submit to each other and to see God in one another. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

going to stay if it goes to local choice,” he said.

Xavier Peña of Hanford, California, Pacific District Conference Hispanic Council chair, said the council is publicly declaring its affirmation of women in pastoral leadership.

Some shared that their perspective was broadened during the study conference. Many spoke about the need to demonstrate love for one another as discussion continues.

“I’ve never been denied a voice,” said Aaron Wiens, Fresno, Calif. “What I’ve heard here is that there are voices who haven’t been heard. I am ready to learn from and see the Holy Spirit work through women.”

Dwight Carter, Inman, Kan., said, “I vowed to listen this week and to be humble. As a complementarian, I’m sorry that the words of complementarians have hurt women and limited their expressions of faith. Can we agree to use theology as a guide to love rather than a disruptive tool?”

Roy Burket, Huron, S.D., called for equality of people but diversity of roles. He urged that the key to moving forward is to pray for and encourage one another. “We must speak the truth in love so the Word of God is not marred.”

Chris Douglas, from Boise, Idaho, who serves with Multiply, commended

the respectfulness and love shown by both sides and pointed to common ground. He said, “While this is important, and we need to come to some sort of agreement, we’ll probably have to agree to disagree. But at the same time, we can agree that there are lost people who need to know Jesus.”

Representatives from the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite World Conference were invited guests and were given an opportunity Wednesday morning to speak.

The study conference also included times of prayer, morning devotionals and singing. It concluded with a communion service led by Valerie Rempel and Larry Martens.

What’s next?

In a Jan. 29 follow-up email to participants, the U.S. BFL outlined what can be expected from the board moving forward. The board invites the USMB family to share comments and thoughts with the board at faithandlife@usmb.org as they “consider what God might lead us to do next.” The U.S. BFL will meet March 27-28 but does not plan to “formulate a proposal or conclusion at that meeting.” —*Connie Faber*



2S2S volunteers stand ready to feed the crowd at their December breakfast served at the local elementary school. *Photo by 2S2S*

Volunteers serve Saturday mornings

2S2S shows God's love to community

Whether it's preparing freezer meals for families, organizing a free community pancake feed or collecting coats and shoes for elementary school children, Krista Heinrichs and other 2nd Saturday 2 Serve (2S2S) volunteers are committed to serving their Hillsboro, Kan., community.

"We're a group of people committed to show God's love, and we do that through community service," Heinrichs says. "It doesn't matter who you are, your age or your income level, everybody wants to make a difference. What we're trying to do is provide an avenue for that."

Heinrichs was prompted to act as the result of a Sunday school class at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, where she is a member. So, Heinrichs and some service-minded friends—who originally connected through a small group—planned an April 2018 event to make freezer meals at their own expense for families in need. That Saturday morning, 2S2S was born.

"We were studying about (doing) what the Lord calls us to do," she says. "This has been on my heart for a long time, and I thought, 'We've just got to try it and see what happens.'"

Held the morning of the second Saturday each month, 2S2S projects have included helping with landscaping at Tabor College in preparation for graduation ceremonies held on campus; exterior yard and landscape work; painting at Parkside Homes, a senior living community; Smiles and Soles for Jesus, for which people donated shoes, socks and toothbrushes for

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kids at Hillsboro Elementary School; a free community Christmas pancake feed attended by about 130 people; a coat drive; and helping at a local women's IF:Gathering.

Participants have also made freezer meals a couple times—as many as 80 meals—with food purchased from the local grocery store, which gave 2S2S a discount.

On any given second Saturday, participation has ranged from seven to 20 people. Heinrichs welcomes community-wide participation, regardless of church affiliation or attendance. She says she would like to see more families, and men in particular, get involved.

“My dream is that we have all kinds of people serving, just so we can serve each other and show God's love in small ways that can grow to big ways hopefully,” she says.

The group advertises upcoming projects on its Facebook page, “2nd Saturday 2 Serve – 2S2S.” Heinrichs says she is never sure how many people will show up to serve.

“There are some unknowns every second Saturday, so that's been part of the growth and part of the fun to see that God provides always,” she says. “There are always special things that we never expected (to) happen.”

2S2S projects are self-funded. As people hear about 2S2S, some have donated to the cause. Heinrichs says she received a \$100 donation from a friend at a wedding, which she used to help fund the pancake feed.

Service projects are not limited to Hillsboro, Heinrichs says, adding that the group is open to helping meet needs across Marion County.

Heinrichs is committed to long-term involvement in 2S2S and would like to see it grow into a community-wide event.

“I have dreams of glorious things happening, but it's God's work and we're just taking it with the light he has on each step,” she says. “I think it's a good thing for me in my journey, and as long as I can come up with ideas and facilitate something, I think people will show up.” —*Janae Rempel*



Axiom Church members partner with the Peoria police department to offer fire alarm inspection and free installation of new devices where needed. *Photo by Axiom Church*

Arizona congregation looks for creative ways to serve

Axiom Church cultivates relationships through outreach

For a small church in the West Valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area, local outreach comes in many different forms.

Axiom Church is a Mennonite Brethren church plant in Peoria, Ariz. that got its start about five years ago, when members of several small groups began gathering together to worship. What began as nine people committed

to furthering God's kingdom in Peoria grew to become a group of about 200 believers.

While Axiom Church has evolved over the past five years, the focus of its members continues to be on deepening relationships with Jesus while remaining mission-minded and serving the people of Peoria.

Pastor Gavin Linderman says that many churches in the area are moving out due to social and economic challenges. “With that comes a lot of outreach opportunities,” he says. “Jesus is still very much interested in the people here.”

Linderman estimates that about 60 percent of the congregation participates in “Axiom communities,” small groups that gather to study Scripture and cele-

body life

brate life together, but also to reach out to those in need in the area.

“Each group becomes a discerning body for ways to serve, bless and be sent to a local people or place,” he says.

This spring, Axiom is planning a “give and grab” barbecue. The event will take place after a Sunday service and involve bounce houses and a free meal. This effort gives the people of Peoria an opportunity to bless their neighbors by bringing food or an opportunity to receive food if they are in need.

The church has also done supply drives throughout the year that involve the entire congregation. The collections cater to a specific and seasonal need in the community. In the past, the church has collected coats and blankets in winter, water in summer and school supplies in the fall. In the spring, church members look and listen for the particular need of the Peoria community at that time.

“We do events that make sense for the area, but ultimately the hard work that we’re doing is developing integral relationships.” Linderman says. “We really are looking for their counsel and their voice and trying to figure out what passions, dreams and pains they’re experiencing.”

Linderman believes that focusing on developing friendships with people through outreach leads to more intuitive and natural opportunities to share the gospel. He wants the people of Peoria to view the Axiom community as a safe place where their voices will be heard.

He suggests that churches begin incorporating the ideas of local outreach and mission into their environment by talking about them often. Axiom Church uses the phrase, “In Peoria as it is in heaven,” as a way to remind members to look for ways to display God’s love through action by meeting needs.

Linderman’s encouragement to those looking for effective ways to live on mission is to be creative, both in deciding what outreach looks like and in defining success. “We always want to qualify our mission by the outcome or success, and I think you have to take that away,” he says. “If it blesses people, then it’s mission.”

Linderman believes that outreach does not always have to involve a widespread or complicated effort. In his experience, outreach can often be just as effective when it starts small and remains simple.

“If this is something that’s been put on your heart, you need to cultivate the environment that is going to breed a heart for mission,” he says. “Just begin, wherever you are now, however you know how.” —*Jessica Vix Allen*

Unique location invites guests to worship

Community welcomed to “Christmas in the Barn”

The barn, with its burgundy exterior and white-trimmed panes, stands contrasted against the Nebraska sky. Light radiates from within as the sweet melody of a cappella Christmas carols drifts out into the night. Greeters await the guests soon to arrive.

Meanwhile, inside the barn, a small choir sings. Children dressed as shepherds and angels help set the scene, and servers arrange a spread of hot chocolate and cookies. Upstairs, the hayloft is aglow with candles and strands of Christmas lights.

The stage has been set for Henderson (Neb.) MB Church’s Christmas in the Barn service, where the ambiance welcomes people into a time of worship on Christmas Eve.

Henderson MB Church has held its Christmas Eve service in a barn at Mennonite Heritage Park, a historical site north of town, the past three years.

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Children from the Henderson congregation, including Jada Quiring, Eden Martin and Kate Haidle (left to right), wear simple costumes and participate in the Christmas Eve service as angels and shepherds. *Photo by Joanne Haidle*

Pastor Luke Haidle says inspiration for the event came from his father, who did something similar while pastoring a church in South Dakota.

“At the heart of it is really this desire to help people to have a worshipful evening but also create a space where people without a church home can encounter God, be reminded of the big picture and hopefully find a church home, whether it’s ours or another one,” Haidle says. “We’ve got a whole host of volunteers that generously give of their Christmas Eve to help pull this off.”

The church holds two, 45-minute services in the barn’s hayloft, giving free tickets to ensure the number of guests stays within the barn’s capacity of about 100 people per service. In addition to the choir music and food, the evening includes singing, led by

the church’s worship leader, and a brief devotional by Haidle. At the end of the service, guests receive a gift bag.

The event involves as many as 20 volunteers—including greeters, choir members, servers, worship team members and kids dressed as shepherds and angels—with even more people involved in setup and pre-event preparations. The first two years, the church recruited a couple with a newborn to dress as Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus.

Each year, attendance has been maxed out, and in 2018, 30 to 40 people were put on a waiting list. Haidle says the church plans to continue the event and will consider adding a third service as it continues to grow in popularity.

“To hold it in the barn is just such a fun, unique kind of experiential component that doesn’t happen otherwise,” Haidle says. “The atmosphere does provide so much, and then combine that with the classic and beloved Christmas carols being sung well and a simple gospel-centered devotional and some fun treats—it’s a neat evening.” —*Janae Rempel*

Church serves Christmas Day dinner

Lenoir continues 15-year tradition for community

How much food does it take to prepare a meal for 150 people?

According to Terry Hunt, pastor at The Life Center (TLC) in Lenoir, N.C., it takes seven turkeys, five hams, 10 cans of green beans, five cans of corn, 10 boxes of rice and a pot of gravy, not to mention the many rolls, cakes, pies and drinks the church serves to guests on Christmas Day.

Those are the meal preparations made by members of the congregation for TLC’s annual “Feed the People” event, a free meal the church has served on Christmas Day the past 15 years to help meet both physical and spiritual needs in Lenoir and the surrounding communities.

“Feed the People” began when Sam Dula, a deacon at TLC, and his family saw a need for food for people in Lenoir and the surrounding communities.

“Children complain that when school is out over the Christmas holidays there are times when there is not enough food in their homes,” says Hunt, who also serves as North Carolina district minister. “The thought and intent of this event is to provide a good, hot meal on Christmas Day in the name of Jesus on the day we celebrate his birth.”



Chris Gaines, a deacon at The Life Center in Lenoir, NC, gets a lot of joy in preparing the community Christmas Day dinner, which is free to anyone looking for a good, hot meal. "I get to help people in need," he says. "We have a lot to give—not a lot of people do."

Photo by Lenoir News-Topic, Virginia Annable

To help meet that need, for the past 15 years, TLC has served a free meal on Christmas day. It takes about 20 volunteers to orchestrate the event, including those who bake and carve the ham and turkey, those who wash dishes, those who deliver takeout to people unable to come, and the youth who make bags of groceries to give away.

TLC also collects new and slightly used clothing, shoes and coats to give away twice every year, including at its "Feed the People" meal.

The purpose of "Feed the People" is three-fold, Hunt says: to combat hunger by providing a free, hot meal; to show care for people's needs as commanded in Matthew 25:31-46; and ultimately, to introduce people to Jesus. Each meal guest is invited to visit The Life Center the following Sunday.

In 2018, TLC served more than 120 meals and gave away 30 bags of groceries.

Hunt says the church plans to continue its "Feed the People" meal, with a goal of serving 250 meals in 2019 and 500 in 2020.

"The response from the communities that we serve has been one with gratitude and thankfulness, especially in our homeless communities," Hunt says. "We put out flyers where we know they frequent with information where the church van will pick them up. To top it off, we had a couple that attended the event come the following Sunday, receive Christ and join the church. We will be baptizing them soon. Praise the Lord." —*Janae Rempel*

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Can we partner with you?

Dreaming of partnerships that change us both

Whether you grew up in the Mennonite Brethren church (Phil) or are newer to the family (Christian), there is something that we have come to realize about our national and local church families: there is value in authentic, two-way relationships. Unfortunately, too many times when a church planter comes to town, the “partnership” ends up being an agreement in which you give us money and we give you prayer requests and pictures. This leaves you with the assumption that we are getting the work done and us with the assumption that we will have a place to live and food to eat because you send support money. However, the body of Christ has more to offer. Our communities can benefit so much more from each other.

We desire for the view of the church planting relationship to change for you (the established church) and us (the planters). There is more you have to offer us and more we can offer you. Being connected to these stories and planters can radically change how your church and how our denomination sees the kingdom of God. We don't want you to just read our stories, we want to be a part of each other's stories!

Our thoughts on this came about almost by accident as we were attempting to raise financial support while using this term “partner.” When I (Phil) was on a call with Pastor Tim Thiessen from Birch Bay Bible Community Church back in September, he asked me point blank: “What does a partnership look like? Is there more than just a money exchange?” This led us to think and talk about this concept of “partnership” in new ways with pastors from established USMB churches.

A partnership involves being co-workers in God's service, sharing in giving and receiving, sharing our resources with others and even sharing in each other's joys and sufferings. To loosely quote William Carey, a British missionary to India, “We will go into the pit, but we need you to hold the rope.”

Practically, we need you to support us through prayer, short-term trips with volunteers, cross-church redemptive friendships among our church members, discipleship ideas and resources, interns, new church planters and yes, carrying the financial weight of our unbelievers and baby Christians as they grow into givers.

But what does the established church get from a church plant? Our hope would be that some of the ways we do ministry to reach the unreached would become part of your evangelistic DNA, while at the same time giving some potential leaders in your community an opportunity to have hands-on ministry experience right here at home. There are likely people in established churches who have never gone on a mission trip because going to another country and speaking another language isn't a fit for them. But just maybe something more local is.

We are grateful to have engaged with other pastors across the U.S. and the different districts as we have processed our thoughts on “partnership.” As the local body is made up of many different parts with different functions, coming together with one purpose, so, too, is the USMB national body of churches. You have played a pivotal part in our church communities. As church planters, it is our hope that we can have an impact on yours. ■



Christian Kohs, and his wife, Erica, are planting Redemption Church, a USMB church plant in Owatonna, Minn.

Phil Wiebe, and his wife, Melissa, are planting Lakeview Church, a USMB church plant in Stansbury Park, Utah. The Kohs and Wiebes, together with Jon and Michelle Fiester, church planters with Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., and Mario and Stephanie Trujillo, church planters with City Church in Pueblo, Colo., have developed strong friendships and a healthy support for each other through prayer, conversations and sharing resources. These relationships have caused them to desire a more active relationship within the larger USMB family.

Jesus meets us where we're at

Two stories of God at work in City Church

God is at work in the hearts of people at City Church in Pueblo, Colo. We love how Jesus meets us where we're at but doesn't leave us where we're at. Instead, he makes us his workmanship to show others what it looks like to be saved by grace through faith.

Brenda, a single mother of two, has been through a lot. Life has not been easy for her. She has struggled with hate and anger toward men and has found it very difficult to trust people. But she started to become curious about Jesus at work when she noticed the difference in the lives of people who loved him. She opened her heart to them, to learn from them and experience community with them. Eventually, they invited her to attend a Sunday morning gathering where she started to experience the grace and love of Christ and to understand how much he loved her.

"In those moments," Brenda says, "God's love broke through the hate and anger in my heart, and Jesus met me where I was at."

She starts to tear up whenever she shares her story, because she has never felt so loved, so forgiven and so thankful for God's grace in her life. Brenda gave her heart to Jesus and was baptized seven months ago at City Church. Today, she is being disciplined weekly and is serving faithfully through helping out with food, events and worship.

Paul is a native to Pueblo. He didn't grow up hearing much about God, although his mother and friends said that they believed.

When Paul first heard the gospel through a family member, he was skeptical. At the time, he was recently divorced and was struggling with depression. To deal with the hurt in his life, he had turned to drinking and partying. He knew that he was self-medicating, but he didn't know where else to turn.

Paul struggled to believe in the grace of God because he felt his life was useless. He couldn't believe that Christ would forgive him for everything he had done. Still, he was drawn to the family member who had shared the gospel with him, and he began to attend services at City Church. It was there that the grace of God started to change his heart and he began to believe that Jesus really would meet him where he was at. He started to meet daily with his family member, asking questions about Jesus and then going to City Church together every Sunday.

Eight months ago, Paul came to faith in Jesus. Three months ago, he was baptized at City Church. He is now being disciplined every week and is serving faithfully with security and cleaning and wherever else he can be of use.

We are so thankful for what God has been doing in our city through the local church and for the stories of redemption that God is writing. We are all learning and growing in our faith as a family of missionary servants for the glory of God. We ask for continued prayer, that these new disciples will multiply and make new disciples in the kingdom of God. ▀



Mario Trujillo is the pastor of City Church, a USMB church plant in Pueblo, Colo. Harvest Time essays share stories from USMB church plants that are being nurtured by Multiply and district conferences. Multiply works collaboratively and jointly with USMB and the five district conferences to birth new Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States and provides training, coaching, assessing and project management for church planters.

Even when we disagree

We were more than civil; we were family

There's nothing like cleaning out your parents' worldly belongings after they've passed on to their eternal reward to remind one that we're all just passing through. In sorting through Mom's many treasured keepsakes (ah yes, she was a saver,) I discovered a *Christian Leader* magazine from 1977. She kept it because it contained an article written by long-time MB missionary to Africa, Arn Prieb. He wrote a tribute about our relative George Wall, a missionary pilot in Zaire/Cameroon who had died in a plane crash.

The feature story of that 1977 CL was about the USMB convention, held that summer at Rosedale Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif. There were the obligatory photos of the youth group selling cups of Pepsi for a quarter, the oil well on church property (that went dry as soon as the church mortgage was paid in full) and a youthful pastor from Kansas named Larry Martens, enjoying a California plum. The reporter noted that convention proceedings were tense at times—severe financial problems were threatening Fresno Pacific and Tabor College and the delegates were not happy with how things had been managed. “Despite strong comments from the floor, the mood was surprisingly benevolent, suggesting many had taken seriously earlier entreaties to pray for a spirit of peace and brotherhood,” the editor wrote.

As I write, our study conference on women in pastoral ministry is fresh on my mind. I was pleased that a good number of our younger leaders, pastors and church planters were present as we engaged in this conversation. They're in their 20s and 30s; I'm in my 50s, and it won't be long now that the conference leadership baton will be passed. What I hope is remembered, and what I hope

we, who gave leadership to the study conference in Phoenix, passed along, is that we can maintain fellowship and unity even when we disagree.

One of the highlights of the conference was receiving affirmation from those watching us from the “outside”—brothers and sisters from other parts of the country and world there to observe or report. We U.S. Mennonite Brethren were affirmed for the way we graciously engaged with one another. As Lynn Jost, director of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary's Center for Anabaptist Studies, put it, “We listened and talked without rancor.... We were more than civil; we were Christian sisters and brothers.”

We disagreed, but we did so in a Christ-honoring way. Maybe, just maybe, for all the things this current generation of MB leaders is getting wrong, we got something right and have passed it on to the next generation of leaders. We can still be family even when we come to differing conclusions on important matters of faith and life. We don't have to adopt the ways of our culture when we differ—hate, hostility, denigrating of character, mean-spirited discourse and dismissive behavior have no place in the body of Christ.

In Phoenix, we spoke to one another passionately and with conviction. The Bible and its interpretation and application matters to us. It's vitally important, and so we care deeply. But on matters such as these where scholars who love the Lord and take the Bible seriously disagree and come to differing conclusions, in my view we ought not part company and break fellowship. Perhaps my children will find a 2019 CL report while rummaging through my things one day, and maybe they'll be reminded of some people back then who did their best to follow the Jesus way. ▀



Gary Wall has been the Pacific District Conference minister since 2002. In addition to his ministry among the 110 MB churches in the western U.S., he has been encouraged and challenged by his international MB experiences in India, Thailand and Colombia. He and his wife, Tami, enjoy their four daughters (two sets of twins!) and their two grandchildren.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/ MEMBERSHIP

Barry Wang was baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**, Jan. 14.

Heather Bachelor was baptized at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, Dec. 16, 2018. Lucille Hahn, Debbie Bush, Jack Boucher and Pamela Boucher were received as members.

Willem Waterhouse, Zebulon Waterhouse and Augustus Waterhouse were baptized and received as members at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church**, Dec. 16, 2018.

Lawrence Elrich, Jeremy Manning, Mary Manning, Frank Reddig and Janice Reddig were received as members at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, Dec. 16, 2018.

Charlee Sanchez and Melanie McCune were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, Dec. 9, 2018.

April Collins, Victoria McAfee, Jack Smith, Grace Humes and Brooklyn Bartell were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, Dec. 9, 2018.

DEATHS

Harder, Lula Mae, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, May 5, 1924—Dec. 13, 2018. Parents: Edwin J. and Alma (Karber) Neufeld. Spouse: Jess Harder, deceased. Children: Max (deceased), Fenton; five grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

Janzen, Norma Bea, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Nov. 22, 1930—Dec. 29, 2018. Parents: Milton and Leona Neufeld. Spouse: Harlo Janzen, deceased. Children: Eddie, Danny, Tammi Onsum; 10 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren.

Kliewer, John William, Sr., Weatherford, Okla., member of Corn (Okla.) MB Church, Aug. 13, 1925—Dec. 8, 2018. Parents: Willie and Matilda (Suderman) Kliewer. Spouse: Lillie Reimer, deceased. Children: Warren, John; four grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren.

Ondricek, Nila Jean, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., Oct. 1, 1935—Dec. 29, 2018. Parents: Edward and Evelyn

(Moeding) Peskey. Spouse: Myron Ondricek, deceased. Children: Randy, Ricky (deceased); four grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Schmidt, Delores Ann, Hesston, Kan., member of Corn (Okla.) MB Church, Aug. 26, 1941—Dec. 10, 2018. Parents: WP and Tillie (Friesen) Schmidt. Spouse: Milton A. Schmidt, deceased. Children: Connie Estep, Roger; five grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

Schmidt, Moira Lyle McCurdy, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, Oct. 10, 1934—Jan. 21, 2019. Parents: Alexander and Mary McCurdy. Spouse: Elmer Schmidt (deceased). Children: Brian, Darrel; four grandchildren.

Schmidt, Ruby Mae, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Jan. 16, 1925—Dec. 12, 2018. Parents: George and Lizzie (Dyck) Willems. Spouse: Vernon Schmidt. Children: Tarry, Darrell, Elaine Lorton, Barbara Schmidt; nine grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren.

Stahl, LaVerne J., Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., Oct. 14, 1933—Jan. 8, 2019. Parents: Joshua B. and Anna (Kleinsasser) Stahl. Spouse: Rosetta "Tootie" DeNolf. Children: Brion, Angelyn Palmer, Nathan, Meribeth Shaw; 11 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

Thiessen, Melvin "Mel," Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Dec. 18, 1928—Oct. 31, 2018. Parents: Henry and Anna Thiessen. Spouse: Dorothy. Children: Steve, Glenn, Tim, and Julie Nord.

Wallace, Betty Mae, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, July 18, 1941—Dec. 26, 2018. Parents: Arthur and Jossie Martin. Spouse: Milton "Tom" Wallace. Children: Thomas (deceased), Curtis, Trace; 11 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

DISCIPLESHIP

Women at **Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, were invited to participate in a "Joined Hearts" mentoring ministry based on Titus 2:3-5.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church held a four-week Mission Exploration Station for children in

Roland Reimer remembered



Roland D. Reimer, retired Mennonite Brethren minister, died Jan. 25, at the age of 85. Reimer and his wife, Lois, were in pastoral ministry for 40-plus years. Reimer served as the Southern District Conference minister for 13 years, retiring in 2003 after traveling an estimated 350,000 miles in that role. Prior to this, Reimer, who is a graduate of MB Biblical Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary, served Mennonite Brethren congregations in Topeka and Wichita, Kan., and Denver, Colo.

As the district minister, Reimer helped lead the SDC into a time of increasing organization, programs and resources. He worked hard to connect churches in the district and to build a sense of community among the pastors.

Tim Sullivan, current SDC minister, remembers Reimer for his compassion for pastors and their families and his wisdom. "He was also fiercely loyal to the larger community of Mennonite Brethren and encouraged pastors and churches to engage in the larger family, something that I've come to value increasingly through the years," Sullivan says.

Reimer is survived by his wife, children Karen and David, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

grades 1-6 beginning Jan. 20 that emphasized local and overseas missions.

FELLOWSHIP

Youth at **Henderson (Neb.) MB Church** held a potato bar fundraiser Jan. 13. The youth raised more than \$3,000 for YouthCon and updates to the youth room and an additional \$705 to help send youth from Greenhouse Community Church in Utah to YouthCon.

A baked potato bar and dessert auction at **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, raised more than \$1,000 for youth to attend winter camp.

Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Clovis, Calif., hosted a "Dance Our Prayers" event Jan. 18 with the intent of bringing joy, wonder, grief and longing before God in embodied prayer through free form, creative movement.

People at **Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church** held an official vote Oct. 14, 2018, to change the church's name to Hope Kingsburg. The motion passed by a 97 percent vote of affirmation.

WORSHIP

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a night of worship in the courtyard Jan. 13 with marshmallow roasting, s'mores and hot chocolate.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., collected an offering of \$796 for Journey Bags for local foster children.

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., collected paper goods for the Topeka Rescue Mission during the month of January.

Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb., collected hats, socks and gloves for the homeless. People were also invited to bring backpacks for more than 100 students in the Millard area in need of one.

Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., served in shift work and provided meals at New Hope Shelter Jan. 9-15.

The women's ministries at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** sponsored a grocery shower Dec. 5-19, 2018, for students at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church put together 15 Christmas food baskets to give to neighbors in need Dec. 23, 2018.

Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., hosted a birthday party for Jesus at Longfellow Elementary Dec. 19, 2018.

Hope Kingsburg (Calif.) hosted "Bethlehem Experience" tours Dec. 17-18, 2018. More than 900 people attended.

The junior high youth group at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, assembled 906 luminaries for the annual live nativity Dec. 15. People from church went caroling at a local nursing home Dec. 16. The church held its third annual Family Christmas Dec. 9 with drama presentations and musical performances followed by a fellowship time.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., assembled 20 gift baskets Dec. 14, 2018, to give to the needy or shut-ins in the community. The church also contributed 187 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Volunteers from **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** served at Jefferson School by participating in a cleanup day Dec. 8, 2018, and serving food and drinks during a "Donuts with Dad" event Dec. 12.

Enid (Okla.) MB Church volunteers served at the Mercy House Jan. 8 and Dec. 11, 2018, preparing meals and doing laundry.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., collected new toys and clothes to donate to the Salvation Army for needy area children and teens.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., in partnership with The Good Neighbor Center and the California Food Bank, gave out almost 95,000 pounds of food in 2018 to feed hundreds of families in the Sanger area. Food is given out the first Saturday morning every month. Between 20 to 25 volunteers donate their time each month to set up the food and help individuals fill their carts. Food includes fresh fruits and vegetables and occasionally an assortment of breads.

New Year's cookies a way of saying thanks

Staff members at First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., made between 3,000 and 3,500 New Year's cookies Sunday, Jan. 27, as a thank-you to the congregation. A tradition 14 years in the making, the church staff first began frying New Year's cookies when lead pastor Brent Warkentin came to the church in 2005. The staff estimates they have fried 28,000 to 30,000 cookies since 2005. Jaxon Young, son of Kid's Ministry director Cynthia Young, dips the cookies in glaze.



The joy of giving

People at Laurelglen Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif., brought joy to more than 300 seniors living in three area care facilities by donating and delivering stuffed animals, notes of encouragement and gift bags on Christmas morning. Amy Barks, the volunteer that led the Joy of Giving event on Christmas Day 2018, reports that volunteers delivered 311 stuffed animals and gift bags and over 300 handmade cards created by people of all ages at LBC. The 40 volunteers, ranging in age from 5 years to 65 years—and two dogs—sang Christmas carols in the hallways and enjoyed sweet conversations with the residents as they delivered the gifts. "The givers were far more blessed than the receivers," says Barks.

church news

LOCALLY

Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., made 234 bags for MCC school kits and collected an offering of \$1,055.

People at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gave more than \$160,000 during Market of Hope 2018.

Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., collected 49 boxes for Operation Christmas Child.

People from **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, packed 813 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

People from **Greenhouse, Saratoga Springs, Utah**, packed 100 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Forty-four people from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, served at the Operation Christmas Child processing center in Dallas, Nov. 23-25.

People from **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, sent 86 school kits to Mennonite Central Committee.

Approximately 100 people from **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, helped purchase supplies and assemble 773 school kits for MCC.

Women at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** baked 21 pounds of peppernuts for the Oklahoma Mennonite Relief Sale Oct. 23.

GLOBALLY

Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a Comforter Construction Day Nov. 19, 2018. Volunteers made 31 comforters to send to MCC.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Openings

Lead Pastor: Enid MB Church, Enid, Okla., is prayerfully seeking a man for the lead pastor position. This person will be the teaching elder, leading in conjunction with the elder board. He will be the primary teacher and administrator for our congregation. We are seeking a pastor who is enthusiastic and committed to the vision and value of the church through expositional biblical preaching & teaching and oversight. For more information, please visit our website at www.enidmb.com or email to embsearchteam@gmail.com

Associate Pastor of Youth and Community Life: Garden Valley MB Church, Garden City, Kan., is seeking applicants for a full-time associate pastor with a passion for the spiritual development of youth and adults as disciples of Christ. To apply, please send resume to gvchurch@gmail.com.

University

Fresno Pacific University is seeking a faculty in Criminology. Complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/careers.

Service Opportunities

SALT applications are open! Serve the world and change your life. Serving and Learning Together (SALT) is a year-long, cross cultural service experience for young adults age 18-30. Through MCC's SALT program, Christian young adults from Canada and the U.S. serve internationally in a wide variety of positions in fields like education, agriculture, health care, information technology, peace-building and more! To learn more and apply, visit mcc.org/salt.



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greatest and second commandment. Is it hypocrisy to advocate for Romans 13 submission to government while also claiming moral authority for a Revolutionary War against the church and king of England? Is the American rallying cry "liberty or death" compatible with denying yourself and taking up your cross? Is Christ teaching us to kill or die for civil rights?

The mantra "Freedom isn't free" is a counterfeit of our freedom in Christ. There is only one eternal freedom that is the result of killing or dying—the freedom of Christ from sin and death. His death accomplishes salvation once and for all. It is truly free! No other deaths will further the gospel except for the sacrifices of martyrdom. Are Christians in America choosing the idol of faith in America's founding fathers over adoption as heirs in the kingdom of God? Ask Christians from other countries and see what they say about American Christianity.

*Clint Bergen
Orland, Calif.*

Close encounters

Our calling is to be interested in those around us

How did Jesus typically encounter people? Jesus asked far more questions than he answered. He put 290 different questions to his hearers. When Jesus was asked questions he responded, as often as not, with another question. He went toward his questioners' backgrounds, desires, lifestyles and assumptions. The one who "knew all people" never stopped inquiring about them.

Why should we be any less inquisitive when we really don't know our hearers or where they're coming from? Might it be best to get to know a person so that we can better present the truth of the gospel to them based on *their* life rather than ours?

An unknown evangelist said: "Before being an answerer, the evangelist is first and foremost a questioner.... I might have thought my job was to be interesting (as I presented the gospel). In fact, my calling is to be interested."

It seems to be common knowledge that in today's world, in order to witness about Jesus with people who are unsaved, what's initially necessary is a relationship with that person. Few people will listen to the gospel if presented by someone they don't know. It requires an investment of time and energy. I may even have to be the first to confess failures so that repentance is out on the table, so to speak. Being vulnerable in this way isn't natural for most of us, but it could be critical to helping someone come into relationship with Jesus. Are we willing? Is it important? I think most of us would provide an emphatic "yes!"

Tim Keller, popular Christian author and pastor writes, "Christianity used to have cultural familiarity and modest respect. Most Americans not only had a rudimentary knowledge of Christianity but also tended to respect it, or at least feel they ought to show some respect.

That's not true today."

Today's culture makes it increasingly easy for people to live semi-pleasurable lives without ever truly acknowledging and wrestling with life's big, essential questions. To break through this inner barrier, we need to help people discover the living Jesus. We can't do that in isolation. We can't do that from the pews of the church.

Careful listening helps a Christian understand the worldview of their non-Christian friend, allows them to love that person with their time and attention and lets them press back on weaknesses and inconsistencies. Listening also builds credibility, so when the conversation spins toward Christianity, it's a natural and hopeful turn.

Once we've invested in a relationship with an unbeliever there comes a point where we can begin to ask weighty questions: What gets you through life? Given life's struggles, what are your coping mechanisms? What comforts you? What gives you hope? What's the real meaning of life? How do you handle suffering? How do you ever really find satisfaction?

It's among those questions that the true hope and message of Jesus can be expressed. If we don't reveal Jesus as the answer, we'll miss the mark in this secular generation of individualism as most people look to themselves for answers.

Developing intense relationships with non-Christians can seem daunting. It can also appear less efficient, certainly, than converting dozens—or even hundreds—at once in a youth conference or weekend retreat. But as author Francis Chan says, "In the tougher soil of a post-Christian culture, it's the slow preparation that must be done. And as public conversations about Christianity are more and more contentious, the move to intimate conversations makes even more sense for today." ■



Don Morris began serving as the USMB national director Aug. 1, 2016. Prior to accepting this new position, Morris served as the USMB interim executive director for two years and as the director of Mission USA since 2004. He and his wife, Janna, live in Edmond, Okla., where they attend Cross Timbers Church.

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