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CHRISTIAN LEADER

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Reflecting on YouthCon 2019

Teens ready for a “life of awesomeness”

The every-four-years USMB youth conference is a highlight for the students—and for all of us—who attend. If you need a shot of optimism, energy or fervor, volunteer to be a sponsor with your church at the next USMB national youth conference. Here are my observations on YouthCon 2019.

- YouthCon 2019 was fun. There were lots of smiles, laughter and chattering. Because we were the only group on the grounds, you knew that everyone you saw was “one of us”—or worked at the camp, which made them one of us for the week.

- The Glorieta kitchen staff has a great system for feeding a crowd of people—from a couple dozen to 2,000—in record time. There were lots of instructions during our first dinner but once we got the hang of it, eating family-style and busing our own tables was a breeze.

- There are more important things than sleep.

- While there is racial diversity in the U.S. Conference, that diversity is not typically reflected at national USMB events. However, our diversity was evident at YouthCon 2019.

- Even though YouthCon organizers hoped for 1,000 participants, at a total of 698, the USMB youth conference still ranks as the largest national gathering of U.S. Mennonite Brethren. It is significant in terms of attendance that the Pacific District Conference was represented by six of its 115 churches and youth from the Latin America MB Conference (LAMB) did not attend.

- High school students worship enthusiastically, sincerely, wholeheartedly and with a lot of spirit.

- The general sessions conveyed a sense of optimism, celebration and joy. There were repeated reminders of God’s deep and personal love for each one of us in spite of our sinfulness, and that we are created for a “life of awesomeness,” as speaker Kat Smith put it.

- YouthCon 2019 sessions were cohesive and intentional. The five speakers, OneTimeBlind drama troupe and Presence Worship band members reinforced the same key themes and ideas. Organizers intended the sessions to challenge students wherever they were in terms of their relationship with Jesus and his call to discipleship. Students were frequently asked to stand as a sign of their willingness to receive prayer, to confess a sin or to “go all in,” whether as a new believer or as a recommitment.

- While YouthCon had all the elements you’d expect at a fun-packed, large-group event, organizers also equipped youth workers to customize the conference for their teens. Stephen Humber, a Multiply staff member who headed the YouthCon pastoral team, wrote a series of lessons for youth workers to prepare their students for YouthCon and to help students process the experience when they returned home. During daily morning youth worker meetings, organizers gave a preview of what students would be hearing and doing during the day. The schedule guaranteed youth workers would have the opportunity to debrief with their students after each general session. ▀



Connie Faber

has served as editor of Christian Leader since 2004. She and her husband, David, are members of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.

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CL receives award

The *Christian Leader* received a first-place award in the Evangelical Press Association annual Higher Goals in Christian Journalism contest in the evangelism category for “Real simple sharing,” written by Aaron Myers and published in the March/April 2018 issue.

“Good job succinctly giving people practical ways they can grow in sharing their faith,” wrote the judge. “Good introduction, good body and good closing.”

CL editor Connie Faber says, “Congratulations to Aaron on receiving this award. He is a great communicator and I’m so glad his gift is recognized in the broader evangelical community. Thanks to people like Aaron, CL readers are challenged and inspired in their faith.”

The results of the annual Higher Goals and Awards of Excellence contest were announced at the EPA convention held April 7-9 in Oklahoma City. CL editors Connie Faber and Janae Rempel were present at the convention and Faber accepted the award on behalf of the magazine.—CL

Leadership Board meets

The USMB Leadership Board acted on several matters during its March 29-30 meeting. The Leadership Board meeting concluded a week of USMB gatherings that began with the National Pastors’ Orientation (March 25-27) followed by meetings of the National Board of Faith and Life (March 27-28) and National Strategy Team (March 28-29).

The Leadership Board voted to begin inviting a representative of the Pacific District Conference Hispanic Council to attend the two annual Leadership Board meetings as part of the board’s effort to strengthen connections between itself and Hispanic congregations. Xavier Piña, current



Editor Connie Faber receives the CL’s first place award in the Higher Goals contest from EPA president Eric K. Thomsen. *Photo by EPA*

Hispanic Council chair, attended the March Leadership Board meeting and talked with the board about strategies for forming cohesion and connection within the USMB family of churches.

In a related report, Don Morris, USMB national director, said that the National Strategy Team met with Henock Tsegaye, pastor of Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church, Olathe, Kan., and Henri Ngolo, who has connections as director and founder of Diaspora Global Resources Ministries to Congolese congregations in the U.S. who have their origin in MB churches in DR Congo, to hear from them about ways that USMB can engage with and serve the 11 Ethiopian and one Congolese churches (with more Congolese congregations looking to join) that are part of the U.S. Conference.

The Leadership Board voted to no longer print letters to the editor in the *Christian Leader* and to direct readers who wish to respond to instead post comments on the *Christian Leader* website (www.christian-leadermag.org.) They also directed the national director to provide oversight and to respond to comments.

The Leadership Board heard from Board of Faith and Life chair Tim Sullivan regarding the issues the board discussed at its meeting earlier in the

week. In addition to updates on the board’s work adding a footnote to Article 5 (Salvation) of the Confession of Faith, updating the memorandum of understanding with Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and two publication projects, Sullivan asked for counsel on the process going forward following the recent study conference on women in pastoral ministry. The Leadership



Leadership Board members pray for Gary Wall, Pacific District Conference minister, during the March board meetings in San Diego. The board spent time praying for the various individuals who represent USMB ministries. *Photo by USMB*

Board asked BFL to do additional work on a statement on women in ministry that Sullivan circulated; once the statement has been thoroughly reviewed and approved, it will be vetted with District BFLs before being communicated to churches.

In his report to the Leadership Board, Kyle Goings, chair of USMB Youth, presented statistics regarding a steady decline in attendance at national youth conferences, including from YouthCon 2019 that was held April 3-7 in Glorieta, New Mexico. The Leadership Board voted to “empower” USMB Youth to explore other ways to resource USMB teens.

The Leadership Board also discussed the Pastors’ Generosity Fund, which is used to meet financial needs of pastors, and a new Everence program funded by a Lilly Endowment grant that is designed to help pastors reduce their debt. The Leadership Board approved using funds from the Pastor’s Generosity Fund to help pastors meet the matching portion of the grant requirements of the debt reduction program. —CL

NPO highlights connections

Fourteen pastoral staff members and 10 spouses attended the 2019 USMB National Pastors Orientation (NPO) held March 25-27 in San Diego, Calif. The NPO was hosted by the U.S. Board of Faith and Life (BFL) and the nine U.S. BFL members along with nine ministry leaders and USMB staff participated in the three-day event.

The NPO was built around the question: “Where do I and my church fit into the greater Mennonite Brethren family?” Presentations by USMB national director Don Morris and district ministers Rick Eshbaugh (Central), Terry Hunt (North Carolina), Tim Sullivan (Southern) and Gary Wall (Pacific) focused on the USMB vision, three core commitments, networking and LEAD initiatives. Tim Geddert,



Pastoral staff members and their spouses gathered around tables for communion at the conclusion of the 2019 National Pastors’ Orientation. Photo: USMB

national BFL member and professor at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, spoke about MB theological distinctives and Peggy Goertzen, director of the Center for MB Studies at Tabor College, gave a history of the MB church. Representatives from *Christian Leader*, USMB Youth, MB Foundation, Tabor College, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and Multiply spoke about their ministries. The NPO closed with communion and a prayer commissioning the pastors in their ministries. —CL

CCMBC to host study conference

U.S. Mennonite Brethren are invited to attend the 2019 Equip study conference “Interpreting Scripture Today” hosted by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC) Oct. 23-25, 2019, at Waterloo MB Church, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

The purpose of the study conference is to reach a clear understanding of the Mennonite Brethren hermeneutical approach. This is an approach that “honors authorial intent, the illumina-

tion of the Spirit and the discernment of community,” says national Faith and Life director Ingrid Reichard; “an approach which allows for a God-honoring transfer of meaning to the current context in order to live humbly under the authority of Scripture.”

Craig Keener, professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, will serve as keynote speaker. Additional speakers include Reichard, Gil Dueck, academic dean at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C.; Kimberley Morrison, instructor at Columbia Bible College; Tim Geddert, New Testament professor at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary; Mark Wessner, president and associate professor of biblical studies for leadership at MB Seminary in Langley, B.C.; Kristal Toews, pastor of women’s ministry at Northview Community Church in Abbotsford, B.C.; Pierre Gilbert, teacher of Old Testament and biblical theology at Canadian Mennonite University and MB Seminary and associate dean of the seminary; and Doug Heidebrecht, director of global training and associate professor of mission and theology at MB Seminary, who also serves with Multiply and is a member of the CCMBC National Faith and Life Team.

5 minutes with...

Chad Stoner

Early bird registration cost is \$199 until June 30. For more information, or to register, visit: www.equipstudyconference.mennonitebrethren.ca. —CCMBC

Porter joins MB Foundation staff

Bruce Porter has joined MB Foundation and serves as a planned giving advisor in Fresno, Calif. Porter joined the team in January 2019 and will work closely with Church Relations Director Dennis Fast.

Porter is a graduate of Fresno Pacific University and MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and served as lead pastor at Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.; Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church; Buhler (Kan.) MB Church; and, most recently, Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif.

As planned giving advisor, Porter will serve the churches, donors and clients of MB Foundation in the Pacific District Conference to provide biblical financial stewardship solutions. —MB Foundation

Valerie Rempel to serve as MHS board chair

Valerie Rempel, interim vice president of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology, has been appointed to serve as board chair of Mennonite Health Services (MHS), a not-for-profit, faith-based, membership organization connecting Anabaptist-related health and human services providers.

Rempel was installed during the 2019 Mennonite Health Assembly in Wichita, Kan., Feb. 28-March 2. She will serve a two-year term.

MHS offers centralized resources and values-centered consulting services that expand each member's individual capacity for doing good, boost organizational effectiveness and cultivate and support the next generation of non-profit leaders. —MHS

Some congregations might be concerned if they heard their pastor was hanging out at clubs and bars on Saturday nights, but Pastor Chad Stoner's church family at Stony Brook in Omaha, Neb., knows he is doing exactly what God has called him to—use his gift of playing the saxophone to bring a



message of love and hope to the people in his community. The Chad Stoner Band plays a mix of rhythm and blues and jazz.

You were a musician before you became a believer. What drew you to Christ?

My wife, Elaine, and I discovered saxophonist Kirk Whalum. His saxophone "voice" moved us. We'd go hear him whenever we could. In the middle of a seemingly secular show he shared, "I'm unabashedly a follower of Jesus and I want to pour that love out on you tonight." I was so taken by his natural, joyful, authentic, winsome testimony. I thought that if it could look like that, a relationship with God was possible for me.

Is that where you are now?

Yes. It started with me playing a lot of saxophone and talking a little bit about Jesus, then playing a little saxophone and talking a lot about Jesus, and now doing a lot of both.

What do you want your congregation to learn from your example as a musician?

God has blessed me with gifts that he wants to use to express himself in the world. Talent becomes ministry when it leads to the relationships that Jesus has prepared for us. There are so many people who are precious

to God who haven't realized Jesus for who he is. We go where he leads as light in the world.

What cautions would you have for someone who feels called to a ministry like yours?

Only do this if God has given you the right strengths. There are all kinds of temptations here—addictions, dishonesty, sexual temptation and even a numbness that can cool your passion for Christ. Spiritual preparedness, accountability and focus of purpose are essential.

What makes for a good evening of performing?

When the musical connection leads to a personal connection. Many times, at the end of an evening, I've listened to someone share their hurts and hopes because the music opened their hearts. Many times, I've prayed with someone in the middle of the club. You don't always get to know the ways God is working, so each proof is a gift from him.

You can find Stoner's music on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon, etc. Watch for a new recording project this fall.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Becoming a house of prayer

Saturating every ministry in the church with prayer

Jesus declares in Mark 11:17, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” A house of prayer is a dwelling place for God. A place where a community of believers abide in perfect communion and intimacy with the One they call their Lord and leader. A church that dialogues with God about everything and lives a lifestyle of dependence on him.

God does not desire for us to make prayer an add-on to specific ministries or a monologue of all the things we want from him. His desire is for every ministry within the body to be prayer-saturated. Out of a lifestyle of communion with God, the church receives all the plans, purposes and strategies that she needs to fulfill her mandate on earth.

In her book, *The Prayer Saturated Church*, Cheryl Sacks writes, “In a house of prayer, we see prayer saturating every aspect of individual and corporate church life. Communication with our Father is the lifeblood of the church—an indispensable pillar—without which God-given dreams, gifting and spiritual power lie dormant. In a house of prayer, talking and listening to God characterize worship services, business meetings and even informal social gatherings. The whole congregation is involved in a lifestyle of drawing near to him.”

A house of prayer is built for the presence of God to dwell in—not visit or look at but actually inhabit. As a result, God’s presence will spill over from the church into the community and we will see God’s power transform our churches, city, nation and world. When God’s people gather to pray, then Christ’s life, Christ’s desires, Christ’s affections flow through his body to a dying world.

Why is corporate prayer important?

- God commanded it (1Tim. 2:1-2, 8; Col. 4:2-4, 12-13; Eph. 6:18-20; Mark 9:29).
- Christ modeled it with his disciples (Luke 11:1-9, 22:39-40, 45-46).
- Paul modeled it (Col. 1:9-10; Eph. 1:15-16).
- The early church practiced it (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:23-24, 31, 12:5 13:1-3, 16:25-27, 20:36-37).
- History confirms it.

Corporate prayer is the way in which God has chosen to bring about his plans and purposes on earth and also bring maturity and humility to his children.

“It is important at the outset to stress that this plan is of God and is an outworking of his sovereignty,” writes D. Butts in *Forgotten Power*. “He is the omnipotent God and could have devised any plan to bring about his purposes on this planet. In his sovereignty and wisdom, he chose prayer as his strategy. He chose to give mankind a role to play in accomplishing his purposes as a means of helping us grow to maturity.”

Corporate prayer is simply a group dialogue with God, founded in the Scriptures, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit and focusing on God’s desires for his church. Prayer originates with God and is all about God—the worship of God, the plans of God, the heart of God, the love of God ... extended to his people. God is the one who reveals the topic (often done ahead of time through a leader) and then it is the Holy Spirit who leads and empowers the “concert” of prayer that aligns itself with the intercessions of Jesus. We have a role but it all originates with God. ■



Esther Leonard is the pastor of prayer discipleship at Mountain View Church in Clovis, Calif., where she serves alongside her husband, Fred Leonard. Her passion is to equip the saints for a life of missions and practical hands-on prayer ministry, so that the church is mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

Trusting my heavenly Father

Jesus helps me heal from abuse, forgive my earthly father

When I was 7, I came home from school one day to learn that the night before my father had fatally shot a man before unsuccessfully attempting to take his own life. The news forever changed my world.

The man my father murdered was a family friend from church with a wife and four kids. We learned later my dad had been living a double life. The fight took place at a gay bar, and the man had been my dad's homosexual lover for years.

For the next 11 years, I endured abuse and threats from my father that planted fear inside me. Although I could not trust my earthly father, I've learned I can trust my heavenly Father. Jesus is helping me heal and forgive.

I grew up on a peach farm, the only child of my church organist father and church pianist mother. On the outside, we looked like a perfect family. My dad never laid a hand on me, but I was afraid of him from the beginning. My childhood memories are sparse. When faced with trauma, memory loss can be a defense mechanism.

In my parents' divorce settlement agreement after the murder, I was forced to visit my dad in prison twice every year until I was 18. During my first visit to the county jail, I felt the presence of evil and prayed for Jesus to make me brave. I sat in front of bulletproof glass as my dad was escorted in, his hands and feet handcuffed, his face forever scarred. We spoke through a telephone, like you see in movies. It felt like a horror movie.

My dad told disturbing stories about life behind bars—things a child should never hear. He never apologized for or acknowledged what had happened. My mom says I trembled and vomited before and after each visit.

Once my dad accepted the plea deal for his sentence and was moved from the county jail to prison, glass no longer sepa-

rated us, and he would request one-on-one time with me. Although officers guarded us, he damaged me with words: "I can't believe that not wearing a condom *one time* with your mom created you. Someone I never wanted, never intended to have."

I had repressed this poisonous memory deeply. Although the enemy tried to silence it so I could never heal, God called it into the light and spoke truth to my broken heart. Connecting with a Christian counselor allowed me to talk with a trusted, trained professional. Had I suppressed the trauma, I would've been destroyed from the inside out.

In high school, I developed friendships and played volleyball. Exercise was a healthy outlet, and my confidence began to return. However, things with my dad worsened. My busy schedule meant I wasn't home as often when he called and didn't respond quickly to his letters. That angered him.

When I turned 18, I no longer had to visit my dad in prison. My dad knew that and began twisting Scripture against me in an effort to control me. Fear kept me paralyzed until I began receiving letters in which he physically threatened my life.

Refusing to be the victim, I filed a prison's version of a restraining order and felt a weight lifted.

I wish I could say it's been easy ever since. But my fear continues as my father comes up for parole—so far he's been denied—every few years. His next parole date is in late 2019.

When certain triggers take me back to being that traumatized little girl, I lay the fear at the feet of Jesus, who died on the cross to break our chains. Healing is not a onetime thing; it's a process.



Janine Zulim attends Reedley (Calif.) MB Church with her husband and children. Zulim says being involved there, including attending their MOMS group, has been such a blessing to her. Her kids' various school activities and sports, working part-time for a financial advisor and supporting her husband in his career keep her very busy.

See TESTIMONY, page 30

RUNNING on spiritual fumes

Is your relationship with Jesus taking a hit because of the demands of parenting?

I always wanted to be a mom. I was a sought-after babysitter as a teen, and as a young adult, I loved spending time with my nephews and friends' children. Because I wanted to be a mom, and I loved kids, I just sort of figured I'd rock the whole mommy thing when I had a family of my own. I was wrong.

Around the time my third child began walking, I found myself so overwhelmed and weary that I started to wonder if I was cut out to be a mom at all. With three children 5 and under in the house, the constant demands of caring for young children were getting me down.

Up until that point in my life, I had felt like a competent person. I graduated from Bible college, worked as an editor at a large Christian organization, had friends and enjoyed various extracurricular pursuits. But becoming a mom, while one of the most wonderful things that had ever happened to me, was also the hardest.

Many days involved tantrums and tears...and then there were the children. I was a worn-out mama in need of encouragement and hope. That's when I realized I was struggling spiritually. I had known and followed the Lord since childhood, but in the midst of the demands of parenthood my relationship with Christ was taking a hit. At a time when I needed Jesus in my life more than ever, I was running on spiritual fumes.

Filling up

Not long ago, I had the rare opportunity to travel on an airplane alone. As I listened to a flight attendant recite the scripted safety information, I heard the familiar instructions for oxygen masks: "Parents, help yourselves before assisting small children." The wisdom in this instruction is obvious: My child isn't in the position to help me. And if I pass out, I won't be able to help either of us.

I think this is also true of my spiritual life. I need to spend time with Jesus in order to have the patience, love and strength I need to help my children. In fact, more was at stake than I even realized. In the midst of changing diapers, sweeping up goldfish crackers and folding endless loads of laundry, God had given me a greater purpose and calling than I saw.

That's when I took a look at Psalm 127:3-4, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like

arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth." God has called my husband and me to raise our children to love and serve him. We get to launch our children out into the world to accomplish things we ourselves never could. That's a big deal and a sacred task I'm convinced the enemy wants moms and dads to forget.

As I seek to raise my children to love and serve God, I need to put on my own oxygen mask before I can help my kids. Acts 17:28 says, "For in him we live and move and have our being." Being connected to Jesus daily is the only way I can truly fulfill my calling as a Christian parent.

Finding connection

So how can moms and dads guard against isolation and spiritual depletion during the parenting years? A turning point for me was giving myself grace and just doing something each day to find spiritual connection, even if it was just keeping the worship music on repeat. Here are three other things that helped:

1. Connect to the true vine. Jesus said that he is the vine, and we are the branches. A healthy Christian abides in Christ and depends on him daily. We abide in Jesus by spending time in his Word and responding to him in prayer.

In the throes of raising young children, I have often felt like I'm in survival mode. Gone are the days of sitting down to study my Bible for an hour uninterrupted. At times, I have felt too overwhelmed to even pick up my Bible, but I still desperately need God's Word in my life. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." I wouldn't take a walk outside in the dark without a light, and I shouldn't navigate this season of my life without the guidance of Scripture.

I had to find new ways to connect with God and get my daily dose of "abiding." I listened to audio Scripture passages while I was doing housework. I posted encouraging Scriptures around the house to meditate on. I joined a women's Bible study. I looked for a few moments here and there to utter a few words of prayer. As I found ways to abide in Christ daily, I noticed I was becoming a more patient and loving mom.

2. Remember his promises. Scripture is chalk full of promises of hope and help. God is with us. He is our helper. We are more than conquerors. Though I was familiar with

by Suzanne Hadley Gosselin

these promises, in the daily grind of motherhood, I was losing sight of them. Did they even apply to harried, overworked mamas? When I was up most of the night with an infant, could Jesus really give me rest? When I lost my temper with misbehaving children yet again, was I truly more than a conqueror?

I needed to remind myself that God's promises are firm and never change. My seasons may change, but his character and faithfulness never does. Though the landscape of my life looked radically different than it had before, I could still access God's promises. And when I did, I found greater peace and joy in the daily grit of motherhood.

3. Seek support. When my first child was born, I thought I had to be the perfect mom and do it all on my own. More accurately, I thought I could do it all on my own. The truth was, I needed others. Other moms. Other believers. Other women who had been where I was. As an overwhelmed mama, it took extra effort to engage with fellow Christians through small groups and Bible studies. But as I did, I discovered that many people were experiencing the same challenges I was. I wasn't alone. More than that, we could carry one another's burdens and encourage each other.

I also needed to learn it was okay to ask for help. During his first two years of life, my oldest son had some significant health issues that landed us in the hospital on several occasions. Though that was a difficult and scary season, God used it to show me that I could depend on fellow believers. Women from our church stepped in, bringing meals, watching my other children and even helping me clean my house. Though it was humbling to be the one needing help, God showed me that it was a beautiful part of his plan for the church—many members of the body working together to support one another and glorify him.

Aiming arrows

Last year, our church proposed a new long-term vision to see our neighborhoods full of families centered on Christ and actively living out the gospel by the year 2030. While each of our ministries is working to support that goal, we realize parents must do the heavy lifting. Our children are arrows, and that makes us warriors. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we point our children to Jesus and show them what it means to love God and others.

Imagine all those arrows flying out into our communities and world, taking the love of Jesus to people who desperately need him. As we abide in Christ, God will enable and empower us to raise the next generation of people who love and serve him.

Suzanne Hadley Gosselin is the co-author of Grit and Grace: Devotions for Warrior Moms. Her husband, Kevin, is a pastor at the Bridge Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif. They have four young children.



Theologically sound,

Discipleship involves a balance between knowing about God and personally knowing God

By Lynn Kauffman

Over the years, Mary and I have led several Ocho Decisiones Que Sanan Tu Vida (Life's Healing Choices) recovery groups. At a recent meeting for men, one of the guys accidentally brought the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith in Spanish to the meeting instead of our course workbook. Such an oversight can easily happen given the similarity of the books' covers and size.

This got me thinking about how we need balance in our walk with God. On one hand we are invited to discover God and his teachings through responsible study and reflection of the biblical text. In many ways this is our starting point for living abundantly. But God also invites us to be healed of our hurts and destructive thinking patterns and habits in order to shape our lives "along the same lines as the life of his Son" (Rom. 8:29, *The Message*). The above two books represent these two parallel pursuits.

Truth that frees indeed

Jesus' words to a group of new believers in John 8:32 highlight the need for knowing the truth both mentally and experientially in order to live well: "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you" (*The Message*). Free to live with greater peace, joy and purpose. Free to love our brother and sister like Jesus loves us. And free to be salt and light in this hurting world.

Knowing about God and about the Bible should lead us to personally knowing God, who then releases spiritual and emotional healing in our lives as we obey him. However, only knowing mentally the truths of the Bible will not set us free.

Tragically, for many Christians their quest for Bible knowledge and doctrinal correctness far exceeds their quest to be healed of unhealthy attitudes and behaviors. How do I know? I have been there. I have lived it.

I know the sad reality of broken relationships, spiritual dryness and enslavement to destructive thinking and sins when I didn't pursue spiritual, emotional and relational growth along with Bible study. Let's look at the results when knowing about God and the Bible and personally knowing God are not in sync.

Broken relationships

Fractured and unhealthy relationships seem to flourish when one is dedicated primarily to Bible study more than building relationships. I am reminded of the example of three missionary men in Spain that I knew. Each graduated from the same conservative seminary. Doctrinally they were on the same page. Each had a vast knowledge of the Bible. Each was an excellent teacher. But their relationships with each other sadly waned. Simply said, they couldn't work together. And in some cases, they had a difficult time partnering with others.

Spiritual lethargy

Spiritual dryness also sets in when it's all head and no healing. Jack Deere, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary for 11 years, followed a warped understanding of the great commandment. Instead of loving God and neighbor above all else, Deere writes that his "greatest commandment had become, 'Be right,' and the second greatest was, 'Convince your neighbor that you are right!'"

The result of such twisted thinking was Deere's growing loss of intimacy with the Bible's author and meaningful fellowship with others. Eventually he resigned and dedicated himself as a pastor/teacher to knowing God and "strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding up the injured, bringing back the strays, and searching for the lost" (Ezekiel 34:4). Deere shares his story in the book, *Power Encounters Among Christians in the Western World*.

I shall never forget the confession offered by Waldo Hiebert, Mennonite Brethren pastor, church statesman and seminary professor, in the early 1980s when I studied at MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. In a seminary chapel service, Professor Hiebert suddenly stopped his talk and uttered the words, "I am spiritually dry." His face portrayed the deep sadness in his heart. Out of this came a refocusing of his time and energies to live and teach about the spiritual disciplines.

I could say the same with equal resolve about seminary professors like D. Edmond Hiebert, Allen Guenther, Henry Schmidt, Elmer Martens and others in my seminary days. I have also been challenged by a number of pastor mentors like Robert Radtke, Robert Vogt and Leslie Mark.

personally broken

Each was able to beautifully balance biblical scholarship with upright lives and respectable relationships.

I could also add to this list the names of nonacademic brothers and sisters my wife and I have rubbed shoulders with over the years, including some from the immigrant community we last served. Their knowledge of God and his Scriptures is complimented with healthy living and lives that positively influence others.

Besetting attitudes and sins

Lastly, when the acquisition and communication of Bible knowledge takes center stage we often still struggle with the same sins and attitudes of the past and present unless properly dealt with. They are like an unbearable load on our back that rob us of our energies and life itself. Seemingly we cannot shake ourselves loose of them. And our kingdom mission is curtailed.

Since coming to Jesus in my early 20s I have experienced much transformation in many areas of my life. But not so in others. For example, for most of my adult life I have struggled with anger, bitterness, lust, people-pleasing, control issues, being funny and spiritual pride.

Knowing about God and about the Bible should lead us to personally knowing God, who then releases spiritual and emotional healing in our lives as we obey him. However, only knowing mentally the truths of the Bible will not set us free.

I certainly have not fully “known the truth that sets me free” in these areas. A consequence of some of these sins was almost suffering a nervous breakdown while serving overseas as a missionary, in spite of my excellent Bible school and seminary preparation. Only in the last 15 to 20 years has the three-steps-forward-two-steps-back process of being set free of these sins happened. I am not where I once was.

As a result, my relationships are much healthier. My inner joy and peace are on the increase. More than ever I am enjoying my walk with God. But there is still much road to travel. I will always be discovering the sinful stuff of my life as I line up my life with the life of Jesus.

James tells us, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The

prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). James literally states, “Be continually confessing your sins one to another and continually praying one for another.” Such practices with relation to sins are to be habitual activities in the life of a Christian and in the local church. Healing is the promised result. A healing which for sure can be physical in nature, but which oftentimes includes spiritual and emotional healing.

In the last two decades many churches have incorporated Celebrate Recovery, a 12-step recovery program, into their ministry flow. In more recent years Re:Generation, another biblical recovery process, is popping up in a growing number of churches. I am delighted that one church in our small community has begun this recovery ministry. I believe these, and similar ministries designed for all disciples of Jesus, not just the “down and outers,” are a gift to the local church.

I always look forward to these encounters. For me there have been few meetings in the life of the church that God has used so much to bring multifaceted healing to my life as these recovery-in-Christ-when-life-is-broken meetings.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 8:1 that “knowledge puffs

up while love builds up.” Or in the words of the Amplified Bible, “Knowledge alone makes people self-righteously arrogant, but love that unselfishly seeks the best for others builds up and encourages others to grow in wisdom.” May we be these kind of kingdom Jesus-followers that are learning and being healed in order to better love and build up others of the faith and be salt and light in our hurting world.

Lynn Kauffman and his wife, Mary, live in Sanger, Calif. He works as a part-time chaplain at a major medical center and behavioral health facility in Fresno, Calif. They served as Mennonite Brethren missionaries in Spain for 20 years and as a pastoral couple with several USMB congregations also in the Fresno area.

How are you doing at making disciples? It was a question I had never been asked.

In 35 years of church life, I had never been asked about my basic obedience to Jesus' final and most straightforward command: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you," (Matt. 28:19-20a).

We were at a conference in Thailand and our trainer was a long-time missionary working in Southeast Asia. His work with a previously unreached tribe in a neighboring country was built on one basic strategy—obey Jesus and make disciples who in turn make disciples.

My paradigm of discipleship was largely based on an idea that more information would form me into Christ-likeness. The method was to read more books, attend more seminars and, if I wanted, to have a mentor. Discipleship then was much more about spiritual formation than about actually learning how to obey Jesus and make disciples.

Spiritual formation is of immense importance and I've benefited from good books, great seminars and some terrific mentors. But the discipleship of my youth largely ignored the idea that I should obey Jesus and make disciples who also obey Jesus and make disciples. It was there in Thailand that I began a journey toward understanding obedience-based discipleship as opposed to knowledge-based discipleship.

The importance of obedience

The story of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7 highlights the importance of obedience. Both men in Jesus' story have heard and know the right information. The difference between the two is that the wise man heard the words of Jesus and put them into practice. He simply obeyed.

If Jesus' first invitation to the disciples was, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" and his final command was to go and make disciples, then making disciples is inextricably linked to our own discipleship. You cannot have one without the other. We must learn to obey Jesus. After all, the biblical example of discipleship is not simply obedience, it's risk-taking obedience to Jesus.

Somehow in Western church culture, obedience

has taken on a negative connotation. Perhaps it's born of our insistence on personal rights and freedom at all costs. It could be a response to fundamentalist tendencies in our past that lead to soul-destroying legalism.

Regardless, if we are to move toward forms of discipleship that lead to the making of disciples who make disciples and greater spiritual maturity, then we need to reclaim a biblical understanding of obedience. It is Jesus' idea after all.

In John 14 and 15 Jesus says, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching" (14:23), and "You are my friends if you do what I command" (15:14). The apostle John in 1 John 5:2-4 puts it this way, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his com-

If we are to move toward forms of discipleship that lead to the making of disciples who make disciples and greater spiritual maturity, then we need to reclaim a biblical understanding of obedience. It is Jesus' idea after all.

mands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,...."

Obedience is not blind duty. It's not soul stifling legalism. Biblical examples and understandings of obedience are life-giving and faith-stretching. Obedience is the outpouring of our love in response to God's love. If it is anything other than that, we need to re-evaluate our own spiritual journeys to discover where we've left biblical teaching behind.

All of Scripture presents a clear pattern: God delights to multiply the kind of disciple who is dedicated to pursuing immediate, radical, risk-taking obedience to Jesus. The picture Scripture paints of those who live this way is a picture of a people who are filled with joy and purpose and the abundant life that Jesus promises.

Think of Abraham, Moses and David. Think of Peter, John and Paul. Read through the book of Acts. Obedience is the life-giving, faith-stretching default of the true disciple of Jesus. And so, if we are to become the type of disciples who are making disciples, we need to reclaim a biblical understanding of obedience.

When we step out in faith to obey Jesus and share the good news of the gospel, . . . our faith can truly grow and mature. And because we are obeying Jesus, we also become the type of disciples who are making disciples.

Jesus' spiritual economy

But how do we do that? A mentor of mine, Curtis Sergeant, teaches a concept he calls spiritual economy. Our earthly economies are built on the idea of the transaction. I have something that you want, and so I protect it and only give it to you for a cost.

But the spiritual economy of Jesus is different. Jesus tells us, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). Paul exhorts Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Curtis suggests that the spiritual economy consists of three parts: knowledge, obedience and sharing. When we are faithful to obey the daily promptings of Scripture and the Holy Spirit and regularly share with others the truths that God is revealing to us, then God will respond by revealing more truth to us. This is how Jesus frames it in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

We will see more of Jesus in our lives as we obey and share the things we know to be true. It is when we step out in faith to obey Jesus and share the good news of the gospel that our faith can truly grow and mature. And because we are obeying Jesus, we also become the type of disciples who are making disciples.

Along these lines, Nathan Shank, a disciple-making movement catalyst serving with the International Mission Board in South Asia, makes this observation: "We have learned, information does not create movement; thus, our goal is not effective content. Rather it is application of biblical truth that characterizes a movement of the spirit of God. Our goal has always been a 1:1 ratio among what is understood and what is applied."

Our training in Thailand set me on a new journey of discovering what it means to live a life of discipleship based on obedience to Jesus. Truth be told—it's been hard. A lifetime of low expectations toward obeying Jesus has created patterns of behavior that are difficult to break. Obedience has

not been my default. I've lived most of my life as a fan of Jesus rather than a committed disciple of Jesus. And I'm a long way from a 1:1 ratio among what I understand and what I'm applying.

If you're like me and you want to grow as a disciple of Jesus, then commit to pursuing radical obedience to Jesus. Start today! Here are a few steps you can take to begin moving toward greater expressions of joyful obedience as disciples of Jesus.

Begin to pray strategically for opportunities to share with those in your life who don't yet follow Jesus. Create an intentional habit of daily prayer by first writing down a list of family, friends and acquaintances who are far from God and then by setting a daily alarm on your smartphone or posting a reminder on your bathroom mirror. Pray for them every day.

Get training on how to share your faith in a simple reproducible way. A tool we train everyone to use at our E2E training weekends is the three circles. A quick YouTube search for "Three Circles Gospel" will lead you to demonstrations of this gospel tool. Commit to practicing it daily until you've mastered how to use it.

Gather a few friends together to read and discuss this article. What would it look like if together you pursued lives of obedience to Jesus in everything? Pray together and identify one thing that Jesus is inviting you to obey today. And then do it!

Jesus is inviting us back to a biblical understanding of discipleship built on lives of radical obedience to our Lord. It won't always be easy and new habits will have to be formed, but it will result in greater spiritual maturity, increased kingdom impact and the joy filled abundant life that Jesus promises.

Aaron Myers serves as a regional mobilizer for Multiply, a Mennonite Brethren ministry that seeks to multiply disciples and churches locally, nationally and globally, and is the director of Everywhere to Everywhere, a three-day missional training event. He and his family live in South Dakota where they settled after serving nearly five years in Central Asia.



USMB youth “together” in New Mexico

YouthCon returns to camp experience

After gathering in urban centers for the past 12 years, YouthCon 2019 marked a return to the mountain top camp experience of the previous USMB national youth conferences held every four years for more than 40 years. The YouthCon planning team chose Glorieta Adventure Camps, located in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains 15 miles southeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico, as the convention site. It is the same location selected by the very first USMB national youth planning team in 1975.

Returning to a camp location better enabled the 590 high school students and sponsors to experience and pursue community with teens and youth workers from other USMB congregations—one of the organizers’ primary goals—while also being challenged to grow in their faith.

■ Meals were served family style in the large dining hall, with students and sponsors sitting in groups of 12 around rustic tables with benches. Students worked together to collect their paper and food trash and to clear and wipe down their tables.

■ Community was enhanced by the numerous coffee shops and indoor and outdoor gathering spaces for playing table games, visiting and enjoying late night fire pits found around the Glorieta campus. Youth groups were housed in lodges that had comfortable common spaces.

■ The 2,400-acre campus provided dozens of free time options for the afternoons and late nights. A list of 19 free time activities included miniature golf, ga-ga ball (a version of dodge ball), rid-



Students—and even some youth workers—spontaneously joined Presence Worship and the YouthCon House Band for the final song of the conference to celebrate their commitment to keep marching on with Jesus. *Photo by Jessi Dalke*

ing drift trikes and mountain bikes, hiking, crate stacking, climbing walls and a super swing.

Students challenged to go deep

Morning and evening sessions promoted the YouthCon theme of “Together” as each of the five speakers invited students to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus and one another. Humorous but thought-provoking sketches performed by the drama troupe OneTimeBlind illustrated key concepts, and Presence Worship led in energetic times of singing and praise.

Students were reminded of the many Mennonite Brethren and inter-Mennonite agencies that are ready to serve them, thanks to the exhibits from Tabor College, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, Faith-Front, USMB, Multiply and Mennonite Central Committee. Representatives from several ministries shared during

sessions.

Another YouthCon resource was the 15-member pastoral team. The group, made up of Multiply staff and missionaries led by Stephen Humber, was available to pray with and give pastoral counsel to teens and youth workers. The pastoral team also hosted a prayer room that provided opportunities to pray for Mennonite Brethren around the globe.

For more than 18 months, the pastoral team had regularly prayed for YouthCon and continued to do so while on-site. God honored these prayers as students responded to the opportunities they were given throughout the week to go “all in” for Jesus.

“Well, I finally did it,” wrote one student in reflecting on the week. “I’m diving in head first, straight into the deep end. I’ve finally accepted this faith as my own, not something you just do because you are told to.” —*Connie Faber*

Youthcon

April 3-7, 2019
Glorieta, NM



Pradnya Bergdahl
Madera Avenue Bible Church
Madera, California

“Before YouthCon, I really thought I needed to bring my best self to God, and I couldn’t have an honest conversation with him. I needed to talk about my feelings and really understand what I was feeling before I brought it to God. Now I know...God wants me to talk to him about it. I can go straight to him, and I can read in his Word the advice he has given to others, and I can learn from that.”



Bradyn Brown
Corn MB Church
Corn, Oklahoma

“I almost did not come to YouthCon, and I had a lot of my friends convince me to come. I was just scared what people would think about me because I’ve never really been to anything like this. The experiences that I have had, it’s been amazing. Being able to worship with so many kids my age—it’s really brought me closer to God this week.... It’s definitely going to impact my life.”

Food

2,450 chicken strips served Thursday night
16 pounds of marinara sauce for pasta night

Location

7,431 feet of elevation
2,400 acres at Glorieta Adventure Camps



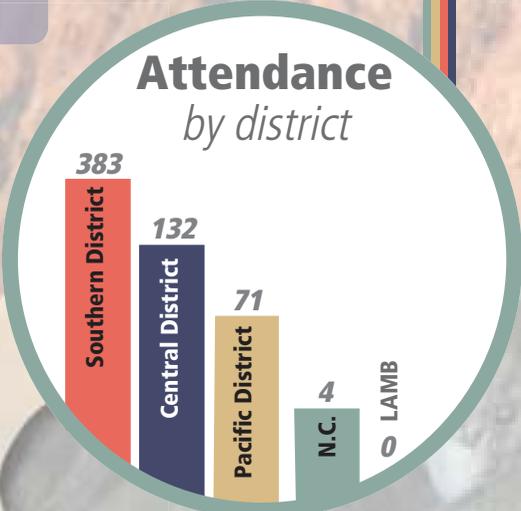
Joel Salgado
Community Bible Church
Mountain Lake, Minnesota

“I came (to YouthCon) looking for an answer, and I didn’t find it right away.... God gave me an answer (that) what happened in my life is probably good for me, to glorify him in the end even though I really don’t see it right now—just to help other kids that have gone through the same thing.”



Tech

- 55,000 pounds of tech equipment
- 196 lighting fixtures
- 2 tons of extension cords



People

- 698 attendees
- 590 students and sponsors
- 8 worship band members
- 5 speakers



Jadan Vannoy
The Life Center
Lenoir, North Carolina

“Before YouthCon, I felt like worship was just something where you go and listen to music and maybe dance or stand or clap your hands. But being here and seeing the different kinds of worship and going to a workshop and seeing what people consider worship really opened my eyes. I feel like now (worship) is something where you meditate and talk to God. And not only that, it’s where you draw closer to him.”



USMB youth go “all in” at YouthCon 2019

Speakers challenge students to take the next step

Five hundred and ninety youth and sponsors awaited with anticipation the start of YouthCon 2019 as more than 16 million LED lights brightened the screen on stage in the Holcomb chapel.

With the house band providing background music, a video depicted traveling the mountainous road to Glorieta Adventure Camps near Santa Fe, N.M. Cheers from students echoed through the 3,000-seat chapel, which had been transformed by Chris Glanzer and his tech team into a concert-like venue. The screen went black, and Presence Worship led students in an opening song.

Strobes shone into the audience as anticipation continued to build. Emcee Sara Jo Waldron, youth pastor at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, welcomed students to a week of going “all in” with Jesus. Waldron introduced the theme of “Together,” one of the values event plan-



OneTimeBlind performed at each session. This sketch illustrated the challenge of giving Jesus control of our lives, with Kat, top, struggling to let Jesus stay on the throne (stool) of her life. *Photo by Nancy Boothe*



As YouthCon emcees, Hallie Bontrager, Scot Pierce, better known as ScottyP, JJ Kresge and Sara Jo Waldron typically provided comic relief as they reviewed the day's activities, celebrated birthdays, led morning calisthenics and made announcements. *Photo by Nancy Boothe*

ners hoped would be reinforced by returning to a camp setting this year.

“Something wonderful happens when hundreds of people gather together in one space to lift high the one and only name that saves,” Waldron said. “This week, our theme is ‘Together’ because we believe when people gather together in the name of Jesus Christ, things change.”

And with that, YouthCon 2019 was officially underway as the crowd cheered the emcees’ choreographed routine and the house band’s rendition of “We’re All In This Together” from the movie *High School Musical*.

Over the next three days, general sessions followed a continuing, overarching narrative that invited students to find their place in God’s story and to evaluate necessary changes in their lives to move into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Event co-planners Neil Bontrager and Kyle Goings handpicked speakers to provide messages that would speak to students from all walks of spiritual life and provide opportunities to make commitments to deepen their faith.

In addition to speakers, Detroit-based OneTimeBlind (OTB), a ministry that creates art to help modern-day Jesus fol-

lowers think deeply and talk openly about God, performed thought-invoking drama shorts that corresponded with the theme of the messages.

After each session, students met as youth groups to discuss the session and to process their responses.

Ryan McCullough: Life is a story



During the opening session Wednesday night, speaker and OTB leader Ryan McCullough provided a big picture overview of God’s story. Referencing Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Isaiah 46:9b, McCullough invited students to lean into God’s story as following Jesus gives life purpose.

Questions of “Who am I?” or “Why am I here?” find their answers in knowing the rest of the story, McCullough said, sharing his call to ministry with OTB. Rejecting the temptation to do life on his own, McCullough accepted God’s story for his life.

“We get our bearings in the world through story,” McCullough said. “It might feel like we’ve lost our story, but



we're going to hold fast to this truth that God is in charge, and there's a larger story."

Kat Smith: An introduction to Jesus

OneTimeBlind member Kat Smith continued the narrative Thursday morning by introducing people to Jesus, who died so we could have life to the full, giving life joy and purpose.



Through a skit, McCullough, Smith and fellow OTB members Drew Smith and Laura McCullough portrayed Jesus as a friend who desires involvement in our daily lives instead of rigid adherence to religion. The cross is where life begins, not ends.

"Sometimes Jesus is right in the middle of our story, but we just don't see him," Smith said. "Or maybe it's just that we have never been introduced to him. I love a Jesus who smiles and laughs. ... A Jesus that came to bring joy to a troubled world. A Jesus who loves us uniquely and deeply."

Reading from John 9, Smith told the story of a man born blind—he couldn't see Jesus but still believed because Jesus was right in front of him.

"It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what it is we're living for," Smith said.

Bill Hogg: Trusting Jesus

Thursday night OTB illustrated choosing who to serve, laying down baggage and trusting Jesus



with a series of skits involving walking the line between good and evil, carrying burdensome bags of trash and a trust fall. The skits paved the way for Bill Hogg's message calling students to a radical trust in Jesus who declared victory over evil by the cross.

"(Jesus) came from heaven so that you can become fully alive," said Hogg, Multiply national missiologist.

When Jesus died on the cross, not only did he forgive sins, he also dealt a blow to the forces of darkness, Hogg said, referencing the spiritual warfare in Mark 5:1-20.

According to 1 Corinthians 6, we were bought with a price and our life is no

longer our own, Hogg said.

"Will you go all in with Jesus?" he asked. "Not minimal, not in the shadows, but full on, all in. Because that's the recipe for the passionate life—the kingdom life—is to go all in with Jesus."

At Hogg's invitation, students filled the area in front of the stage to commit to being "all in."

Tam Hodge: Freedom in confession

Los Angeles-based author and speaker Tam Hodge used her own journey to emphasize confession leading to



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The extended prayer time led by Randy Friesen at the Saturday night closing session included a time during which youth workers moved to the balcony in Holcomb chapel to pray audibly over the teens who remained on the main floor. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

forgiveness Friday night.

Sharing her personal history of abuse, alcohol and drugs, Hodge said her two abortions brought the most shame and guilt.

“Just because you make mistakes doesn’t make you a mistake,” Hodge said. “But I thought I was a mistake that wasn’t worthy of love, happiness.”

Hodge found Jesus, who encouraged her to confess her abortions to her husband, friends and children.

Hodge encouraged students to take their secrets to God, then OTB revisited the trash bag skit. Kat laid her trash at Jesus’ feet but held onto her guilt, later returning to the stage to lay down her guilt.

During a group confession time, Hodge encouraged students to speak a secret on the count of three, not to be heard but to receive power by naming it.

“Sometimes we don’t know how much courage we’re made up of until we step into that fear and we conquer it by calling it out,” she said. “Confession frees us, it equips others, and sometimes it frees others, too.”

Tam Hodge: A new identity in Jesus

Hodge addressed students again Saturday morning, focusing on students’ identity as God’s children.

“God has always been faithful,” she said. “He’s never not been there. He’s always provided, he’s always shown up, he’s always blessed, he’s always encouraged.”

Roadblocks that prevent us from embracing our identity in Christ include negative self-talk and the weight of guilt, shame and secrets. Like a ceiling fan covered with dirt only visible when the fan stops spinning, Hodge said we often ignore the baggage we carry with us.

“We need to slow down long enough to be reminded of whose we are—children of a perfectly capable God,” she said. “We are strong because (God) is strong. We are capable because he is capable. ... He is a good Father, and he delights in beautiful things—us.”

At the conclusion of the session, everyone encircled the chapel’s perimeter for a time of communion led by YouthCon pastor Stephen Humber. Leaders served the bread and cup—an act reinforcing the “Together”

theme and acknowledging God’s goodness and love.

Randy Friesen: Following Jesus

Randy Friesen, president of Multi-PLY, concluded programming Saturday night by extending an invitation for students to follow Jesus. He introduced Tim Peters who shared about his call. As a high school student from Hillsboro, Kan., who attended Glorieta ’87, Peters made a decision to follow Jesus wherever God led, and that commitment led him to ministry in inner-city Los Angeles.



A OTB skit depicting ownership of a “decision-making stool” illustrated the choice believers have to surrender to Jesus or continue to do things on their own.

Referencing three types of people in Scripture, Friesen showed that God calls and uses anyone—good people like the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21, misunderstood people like Levi in Matthew 9:9, or disappointed people like Peter in John 21.

“Jesus looks us right in the eye and says, ‘Follow me.’” Friesen said. “Have you ever said yes to that invitation?”

At the conclusion of his message, Friesen invited students to make a commitment to say yes to Jesus. With youth leaders lining the balcony and extending their arms over students below, Friesen led a collective commissioning prayer.

Then, the eight-member, Wichita, Kan.-based Presence Worship Band led by Ryan and Brie Wallace and Jake Stemo led students in several songs as they had throughout the week. Students gathered at the foot of the stage, alternately dancing with enthusiasm and lifting hands in reverent praise.

The house band joined Presence Worship for the final songs. Led by



James Isaac of First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., the house band played popular tunes as people entered and left the chapel and provided music during the “Things we’ve learned at YouthCon” overview of each day.

But on this closing night, the two bands played as one the popular “Marching On” by Rend Collective. Students poured onto the stage, where they jumped and danced with arms raised. It was a fitting curtain call to a spiritually-charged and life-transforming week. —*Janae Rempel*

Labs provide interactive learning opportunities

High school students eager to address relevant topics

Labs at YouthCon 2019 were intended to be interactive workshops on a variety of topics that gave students practical action steps for living out their faith. Most of the 28 labs were offered twice Friday morning in place of the general session.

The labs were well received by students and many said they had a difficult time choosing only two.

“The labs were amazing,” said one student. “I loved getting to hear from really powerful people.”

“I learned a lot,” said another.

“I wish there had been more labs,” said a third.

Labs were included in the YouthCon schedule to provide a learning opportunity in a more interactive setting than a large session, says Rhonda Dueck, who worked with her husband, Kevin, to coordinate the labs.

Presenters found inventive ways to involve students. Students prayed and worshipped in creative ways, read Scripture, watched movie clips, talked in large and small groups, ate fair trade

chocolate, created posters, brainstormed and completed personal inventories and surveys on paper and by registering their answers by standing on one side of the room or the other. Several presenters used object lessons and take-away items to help students think in new ways about the topic.

The Duecks contacted youth workers for ideas for lab topics that “connected with our Anabaptist values, were relevant current topics and topics they thought youth would want to process,” says Rhonda. “There was quite a variety of ideas generated, which reflects the wide variety of topics that our high school youth are interested in processing.”

Popular lab topics based on attendance included youth mental health issues, prayer, athletics and a panel discussing love, sex and dating. Other lab topics were trauma, human trafficking, slavery, immigration, artificial intelligence, social media, pornography, Bible basics, sharing your faith, preparing for college, Bible study, worship and songs in the church, personal stories from Multiply workers, drama and storytelling, peace and conflict, finances and Christians and politics.

Presenters included missionaries and staff with Multiply, formerly MB Mission; Tabor College and Fresno Pacific University and seminary faculty and staff; Mennonite Central Committee

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staff, MB Foundation staff and members of One Time Blind and Presence Worship. While many lab leaders also represented an agency or ministry or were part of USMB Youth, the Duecks recruited several individuals with expertise in a specific area to come speak to the students.

High school students are eager to talk about issues that matter to them, says Dueck, and they want the church to actively address these topics.

“Our youth have serious concerns and questions about faith, politics, culture, prayer, justice, money, mental health and so much more. If we are going to be relevant to the next generation, we must listen to our youth and join them in wrestling through the many topics that are important to them,” Dueck says.

The Duecks worked with presenters to facilitate continued discussion during the Friday afternoon free time about top-



The two labs Friday morning that focused on prayer were well attended. Participants in the Ninja Prayer Warriors! lab led by Bob and Kelly Pankratz were encouraged to listen to the Holy Spirit and to allow the Spirit to speak to others through them. *Photo by Nancy Boothe*

ics covered in the labs as well as issues students would have liked to talk about but weren't included in the morning workshops. “No topic is off limits,” Dueck told the students when she an-

nounced the additional lab time. About two dozen students took Dueck up on the opportunity for continued conversation. —*Connie Faber*



Nancy Boothe



Nancy Boothe

Afternoons at YouthCon were left open for activities, visiting the coffee shops and retail stores and spending time in the prayer room. YouthCon attendees had two dozen free, mostly outdoor guided and unguided recreational options from which to choose.



Nancy Boothe



Jessi Dalke



Jessi Dalke

USMB staff committed to serving churches

The USMB national staff, made up of only two full-time and four part-time employees, live and work in different parts of the U.S. rather than through one main office location. Being a decentralized staff can be a challenge at times, yet the staff find ways to mitigate those challenges.

“We are in almost constant communication via email, text and sometimes phone,” says Donna Sullivan, one of the two full-time employees. “Our periodic Zoom meetings and occasional face-to-face meetings are very beneficial and serve to draw us closer together as friends and co-workers. With technology, it (living in different places) is certainly a viable option, and it works well.”

USMB staff members include Don Morris, national director who lives in Edmond, Okla.; Donna Sullivan, administrative secretary/bookkeeper/event planner living in Wichita, Kan.; Connie Faber, *Christian Leader* editor and Janae Rempel, assistant editor, who both live in Hillsboro, Kan.; Lori Taylor, executive assistant living in Bakersfield, Calif.; and J.L. Martin, social media coordinator who lives in Heston, Kan.

Martin, who joined the staff in January, says, “As the newbie, I think the staff works well together. Everyone seems to have a specific gift that allows the staff to (function) well. This is also enhanced as we memorize a Scripture together and pray at 12:11 pm (from Romans 12:11, 12) each day.”

Staff member’s preference to live where they desire, often driven by family situations or a spouse’s job location, is the primary reason for being decentralized.

“When Janna and I moved to Edmond, it was due to the need to be near a good airport, but also because some of our children and grandchildren live in this area,” Morris says. “We didn’t want to move where we had no family. It’s actually worked quite well for us over the past 15 years.”

There are challenges for this small staff. Taylor says, “When working on an action item, there is a time delay for both parties, and the words it takes to describe the situation in an email are more easily misunderstood. Or it just takes more time to write than it would to say in person.”

Working hard to provide an array of services to USMB, the USMB staff is committed to maximizing the God-given ministry potential of local MB churches.

“We take seriously the mandate we were given at the 2016 national convention to focus on the three core commitments of evangelism/church multiplication, intentional disciple-making and leadership development,” says Morris. “I think this small staff, with limited work hours, does as much or more than a staff twice its size. These are dedicated and very gifted people,” he adds.

Taylor says serving churches is inspiring. “I appreciate when Don takes the time to remind us of our mission and the

value each of us contributes through our positions. What motivates me the most is hearing stories of transformation in our churches or other agencies. These stories help me realize that what I do matters. The focus is helping our churches and pastors have everything they need to accomplish what they are called to do—minister to people.”

Sullivan feels the USMB staff is unified in their work to serve the USMB mission. “I feel we’re all committed to the ministry, the vision, our core values and our initiatives to help make this happen,” she says. “Even though each of us works hard in our specific area and location, we remain sensitive to other’s work and our joint work toward the mission. We want our work to complement and aid other’s work, not to hinder in any way. I think we feel we are all on the same team and are grateful to be...making a difference in our MB family and ultimately the kingdom.” —USMB

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Utah church plant launches

Having church building is key in this community

The newest USMB church moved into its new facility April 14 for its last prelaunch service. Lakeview Church, sitting on the shore of the Great Salt Lake in Stansbury Park, Utah, took the keys to its new building with just days to spare before the public launch of services on Easter Sunday.

Situated 25 minutes west of downtown Salt Lake City, Stansbury Park is a burgeoning community that is home to a significant Mormon population. With little evangelical presence, Stansbury Park is in need of a gospel-centered church to reach a fast-growing population that is steeped in religion.

Phil Wiebe, lead pastor of Lakeview Church, has been working tirelessly for the past several months with realtors, contractors and construction workers to locate and build out a storefront facility that can be used for ministry and outreach purposes. Having an actual building in town is important in a region of the country that is marked by the physical presence of so many church buildings with long spires pointing into the sky. Located right on the main thoroughfare into town, the new Lakeview Church building is ideally situated to attract and host people as the gospel is proclaimed and ministry is carried out in Jesus' name.

As a new community of believers, Lakeview Church exists to help peo-

ple find the joy of salvation and freedom from shame and guilt that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. Phil and the rest of the launch team know and understand that a church is not a building, but a group of people forgiven by Jesus and living in the grace of his love.

They know and understand that unless Jesus is building his church, they're laboring in vain. A church building, though, helps serve as a tool from which Jesus can be lifted up and the truth of the gospel can be communicated and lived out.

Lakeview Church is part of a collaborative local and national effort between Mennonite Brethren from across the United States, the Pacific District Conference; Multiply, the MB church planting agency, and numerous local MB churches from around the country, such as The Bridge Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif., and Birch Bay Bible Community Church in Blaine, Wash.

Partnership, relationship and support have been key components in the birth of Lakeview Church. Yes, Jesus builds his church, and he invites us to be part of what he is doing. But when the body of believers links together for the cause of the gospel, then the reality of oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17 is lived out and exemplified in the world. That linkage and partnership is part of the beautiful unfolding story that is Lakeview Church.■



Chris Douglas is Multiply's U.S. church planting mobilizer. After serving for many years as a pastor in Canada, Douglas became involved in the leadership of the C2C Network. In 2018, he and his wife, Diane, moved back to the U.S. to serve with Multiply. They currently live in Boise, Idaho.

What's our prayer vantage point?

Asking God to shine his light on the darkness

I was recently in North India, which is home to more than 400 million people and over 2,000 unreached people groups. It is also the birthplace of four global religions and countless gods, idols and deities. During the week of my visit, the largest religious pilgrimage in the world, an event called *Kumbh Mela*, brought 120 million Indians into the Ganges River for ritual cleansing, in hope of salvation.

Nearby, I met with 60 church planters and leaders representing various denominations and every state across the region. Together, we reflected on the theme of the “fear of the Lord” and in particular how actually *seeing* God changes everything in our relationship with him. We looked at Isaiah’s testimony, “I saw the Lord...” (Isa. 6:1), Paul’s testimony about how he “saw the Lord” (Acts 22:18) and others who encountered Jesus in the flesh after his resurrection. When Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, he asked that the “eyes of [their] hearts would be enlightened” (Eph. 1:18) to know the hope of their calling, their value to God and his incredible resurrection power for those who believe. With these Scriptures and others, we then spent time seeking the Lord in personal prayer.

As I prayed, the Lord gave me a picture of North India covered by a dark cloud. The 120 million pilgrims were re-covenanting their lives and territory with spiritual principalities and pow-

ers. The Lord invited me to see this picture from his perspective, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion” (Eph. 1:21). He reminded me that “God placed all things under [Christ’s] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:22-23). As part of the body of Christ, I too was seated with Christ in heavenly places, above the principalities and powers. The Lord challenged me to call these church leaders to apply or express the wisdom of God to the fallen powers (Eph. 3:10) through applying the finished work of the cross in intercession for our peoples.

These leaders caught the vision and began crying out to the Lord in repentance for the covenants of their peoples with spiritual darkness. They cried out to the Lord for the light of the gospel to shine in the darkness of their communities and cities and to set their people free. The anointing of the Lord on this extended corporate prayer time is not something I will soon forget.

I left India asking the Lord what annual festivals are celebrated within our own culture that give the principalities and powers authority in the spiritual realm of our nations? How does intercession from heaven’s perspective change how we pray for our context? In what ways are we being called to repent, and how can we call our people to the freedom of the Gospel? What’s our vantage point in prayer? ■



Randy Friesen is president of *Multiply* and provides vision and leadership to the growth and development of this global ministry. He travels to mission projects around the world and speaks to audiences across North America, calling this generation to a life of risk and sacrifice in an eternal direction. *Multiply*, formerly MB Mission, inspires, equips and encourages the body of Christ to multiply healthy disciples and churches.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/ MEMBERSHIP

Alex Saavedra, Tim Naylor, Stephanie Durr and Stephen Durr were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**.

Bret Southwick, Michele Gofforth, Amanda Hansen, Josef Thebeau and Shawn Checketts were baptized March 3 at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**.

Chelsea Loveridge and Rachel Cordell were baptized Feb. 10 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**.

Eight people were baptized Jan. 27 at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**

Aaliyah Alimayu, Conner Boyd, Carolyn Higgins, Anndee Rivera, Vanessa Shin and Avery Weeks were baptized Jan. 27 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Nine people were baptized at **Mountain View Community Church, Sunnyside Campus, Fresno, Calif.**

WORKERS

A farewell luncheon was held March 24 for Darrin and Staci Eddy and family who have served as associate and youth pastor at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

Jeff Neher concluded his service as youth pastor at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, May 31.

Curt Vogt was installed March 31 as lead pastor at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church**.

Mike Andrews concluded his service as spiritual formation pastor at **The Rock Community Church, Littleton, Colo.**, in February.

DEATHS

Alejo-Lopez, Marta Inez, Sanger, Calif., member of Grace Community Church, Sanger, Feb. 21, 1953—April 9, 2019. Parents: Jesus Lopes and Teresa Lopez Malvido. Children: Juan Rivera, Guadalupe Lopez Malvido, Juan Alejo, Teresa Alejo and Dagoberto Alejo; 16 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Bartel, Bette, Reedley, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, May 24, 1925—Jan. 25, 2019. Parents: Leroy and Laura Buckingham. Spouse: Curt Bartel, deceased. Stepchildren: Sharon Vogt, Steve Bartel, DeeAnn Hershberger; seven grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Buller, LuAnne (Hamilton), Edmond, Okla., member of Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., Jan. 27, 1961—Dec. 27, 2018. Parents: Robert W. and Betty (Rosson) Hamilton. Spouse: Jonathan Buller. Children: Andrew, Jeremy, Zachary; two grandchildren.

Dick, Ruth, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Feb. 14, 1924—Jan. 27, 2019. Parents: Cornelius and Anna (Thiessen) Bergmann. Spouse: Wesley, deceased. Children: Kathleen Hochstetler, Loren; six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

Heinrichs, Lydia, Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, May 28, 1928—Jan. 23, 2019. Parents: Henry Ediger and Agatha (Wiens) Ediger. Spouse: W.J. Heinrichs, deceased. Children: Joanne Hofer, Carol

Lewis, Valarie Priest, Lanet Erickson, Jim, Cindy Cairns; 11 grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren.

Heinrichs, Willard Eugene, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Dec. 18, 1935—Jan. 30, 2019. Parents: Samuel Jacob and Emma Willems Heinrichs. Spouse: Velma Heinrichs. Children: Douglas, Roxane Paone, Karla Hunter; three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Isaac, Erma, Reedley, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, Sept. 4, 1928—Feb. 7, 2019. Parents: Martin and Marie Friesen. Spouse: Pete A. Isaac, deceased. Children: Rod, Burdett, Linden, Gary, Donald; nine grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Jost, Myrna June, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., June 21, 1932—March 12, 2019. Parents: Harry and Esther (Winter) Eitzen. Spouse: Victor Jost. Children: Connie Faber, Nancy Rogers; 12 grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Klaassen, Wilhelmina (Hellmann), Denver, Colo., member of Garden Park MB Church, May 17, 1927—Nov. 7, 2018. Parents: William and Helen (Giesbrecht) Hellmann. Spouse: John E. Klaassen, deceased. Children: Jewel Winter, Joyce Neufeld, Gloria Witt; six grandchildren.

Miller, Mary Ernestine "Ernie," Sanger, Calif., member of Grace Community Church, Sanger, Aug. 10, 1924—March 13, 2019. Parents: Ernest Leonard and Emma Belle Morrison Butler. Spouse: Clifford Miller, deceased. Children: Donna, Carol, Leonard, Glenn; seven grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Pauls, Edgar Gene, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Oct. 26, 1929—Feb. 26, 2019.

Pine Acres ministers to women from six denominations

The "Wonderful Wise Women" at Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla., has grown to include 24 members from six denominations since its inception in 2015.

Three recently-widowed women began the group to provide regular opportunities for fun, food and fellowship. The women, Sharon Simmons, Sharon Blagg and Glenna Johns, were part of the same Sunday school class.

"We were friends and did some other things together," Simmons says. "One day the newest widow said, 'We need to get some kind of a ministry for the widows in our church. We're a growing number.'"

Known initially as "Wonderful Wise Widows," the group enjoyed monthly fellowship and soon began

welcoming widows from other denominations.

Recognizing widows as an underserved part of the Pine Acres church family, deacons volunteered to sponsor the ministry.

The group, which includes women in their 50's to 80's, has since changed its name to "Wonderful Wise Women" and also welcomes women who are no longer married as a result of divorce. The group has enjoyed a variety of activities, including a tea party in March (pictured).

Simmons never envisioned the group getting so large. "Everybody knows it's sponsored by Pine Acres Mennonite Brethren Church—but nevertheless, it's becoming an ecumenical ministry," Simmons says. "I think that's just beautiful." —CL



Photo by Pine Acres Church

Parents: John and Elizabeth (Koop) Pauls. Spouse: Marlene Dick, deceased. Children: Diane Peters, Eileen Kliewer, Connie Ratzlaff; eight grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Pauls, Marlene Faye, Corn Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Sept. 4, 1935—March 7, 2019. Parents: C.H. and Marie (Gossen) Dick. Spouse: Edgar Pauls, deceased. Children: Diane Peters, Eileen Kliewer, Connie Ratzlaff; eight grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Prieb, Eldo, Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., Jan. 30, 1930—March 11, 2019. Parents: Peter J. and Mary Siebert Prieb. Spouse: Erma June Rempel, deceased. Children: Mike, Conrad, Steve; eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Ratzlaff, James “Jim” Noel, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Nov. 25, 1939—March 9, 2019. Spouse: Mary. Children: Karen Rupe, Tim; three grandchildren.

Schmidt, Malvin Wesley, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, June 2, 1929—March 18, 2019. Parents: Andrew and Bena (Balzer) Schmidt. Spouse: Darlene Klaassen, deceased. Children: Jerry, Leroy, Kelly, Malvina Schmidt; four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Schultz, Alden Edwin, Champlin, Minn., former member of Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn., Oct. 24, 1930—Jan. 22, 2019. Parents: Abraham and Elizabeth Schultz. Spouse: Lois. Children: Tom, Jeff, Steven, Kurt; nine grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Siemens, Frankie Irene, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Jan. 2, 1923—Feb. 9, 2019. Parents: Frank and Essie (Redfearn) Trogdon. Spouse: Ruben Siemens, deceased. Children: Phil, David, Jeff; eight grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren.

Thiessen, James “Jim,” Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., March 28, 1938—Dec. 21, 2018. Parents: Jake and Mary (Warkentin) Thiessen. Spouse: Joyce Frantz. Children: Marilyn Friesen, Michelle Kleinsasser; six grandchildren.

Toews, Darlene, Dinuba, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, June 29, 1931—Jan. 22, 2019. Parents: Frederick and Margaret Wiest. Spouse: Ervin Toews, deceased. Children: Erynn Bock, Thomas, Connie Christensen and Tamara Nuckles; six grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

Tschetter, Goldie, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., March 6, 1921—Feb. 9, 2019. Parents: Joseph and Katheren Hofer. Spouse: Clarence Tschetter, deceased. Children: Rena McNaboe, Kim Tschetter; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Vix, Mavis, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., Sept. 15, 1931—Feb. 25, 2019. Parents: Jacob and Olga (Winter) Balzer. Spouse: Wesley Vix, deceased. Children: Lyndon, Kenton; seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Warkentin, Dale Wayne, Wichita, Kan., of First MB Church, Wichita, former MB pastor and missionary, Dec. 14, 1936—Feb. 15, 2019. Parents: Elmo Henry and Sara Dorothy (Enns) Warkentin. Spouse: Joyce (Swanson) Warkentin, deceased. Children: Craig, Brent, Lori Walsh; five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Wiens, Ernest, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, Sept. 27, 1924—Feb. 17, 2019. Parents: Daniel and Katherine Ediger Wiens. Spouse: Esther May Berg.

REACHING IN FELLOWSHIP

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., hosted a “Messiah in the Passover” demonstration by Chosen People Ministries April 7 to observe how Jewish traditions pointed to Jesus as Messiah.

First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., held a Kids’ Lego Night March 27, where parents and their children constructed Legos and learned about being made in God’s image.

Hope Kingsburg (Calif.), held its annual Happy Days/HOPE Spring Fling March 24 with hot dogs, tri-tip sandwiches, games, activities and a program.

People at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** were invited to participate in a “Work as Worship” retreat March 15.

Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., held a Family Fun Night March 24 with a potluck supper and

games. On Feb. 10, the church made cheese pockets for a camp scholarship fundraiser. In all, people made 166 dozen cheese pockets and raised about \$2,900.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held its annual all-church picnic April 28 with a catered dinner, desserts, pastor pie-in-the-face, dessert competition and kids’ games. The church held its annual Family Game Night March 1. People were encouraged to bring their favorite board games and dress as their favorite board game character.

Volunteer tutors and mentors from **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, provided treats for teachers and staff at Ayer Elementary School for Valentine’s Day.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church held a mortgage retirement celebration March 3.

REACHING OUT LOCALLY/GLOBALLY

People from **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church**, contributed 15 pies and cobblers for an Open Gate Ministries soup and pie lunch, which raised more than \$2,000 for ministry to the homeless.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., gave gift cards and prayer to families in the neighborhoods around the church April 13.

People from **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, made almost 3,000 verenika March 23 for the West Coast Mennonite Relief Sale April 12-13 at Fresno Pacific University. The church also made lunches for HOPE Sanger to help feed homeless people in the community.

Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., held an Easter egg hunt April 13.

Easter at Neighborhood

Live bunnies and chicks were a popular new addition to the Easter Extravaganza hosted by Neighborhood Church in Visalia, Calif., on Easter weekend. The church held five Easter services—two on Saturday, April 20, and three on Sunday, April 21—to show its commitment to the community.

“We postured the Easter weekend as ‘Visalia Matters,’ focusing the sermon on why Easter matters and the impact the resurrection has on us and how we can use that to further the kingdom,” says Neighborhood Church office manager Sarah Ledgerwood.

Attendees at the services—adults alone numbered 2,878—had opportunity to capture a memory in a photo booth, take tod-



Photo by NC Photography Team

dlers photos with baby chicks and bunnies, enjoy inflatables, dye Easter eggs and eat donuts. Food trucks were present Saturday as well.

church news

North Fresno (Calif.) Church held its annual Easter Egg-stravaganza with its neighborhood April 20 with a pancake breakfast and kids' activities at Robinson Park.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held its third annual S'MORE Visalia community event March 31 with live music, inflatables, food trucks

and s'mores. Local first responders and community leaders were also invited.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., participated in a church-wide service opportunity March 10 by providing free barbecue for the community, a non-perishable food drive and bounce houses and games for kids.

Children at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, partnered with Food for the Hungry to help provide food, shelter, education and medical aid to Haitian children.

Women at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, packed 50 feminine hygiene kits for women at the Mercy Home Orphanage in Kinshasa, Congo, Feb. 4.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Openings

Associate Pastor: Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., is seeking a full-time associate pastor who will have responsibilities for our youth and outreach ministries. The associate pastor shall be a well-trained professional, committed to Jesus Christ, the body of Christ and the ministry of young people and their families and is responsible to champion the value of evangelism in the congregation. The candidate should have a demonstrated ability in working with youth and outreach ministries and have bachelor's degree; master's of divinity or theology is preferred but not required based on experience. To apply, please contact search team chair Jim Wanke at jimwanke@rosedalebiblechurch.com. A full job description is available at rosdalebiblechurch.com.

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 emb-searchteam@gmail.com

Pastor: Gingrichs Mennonite Church, a small LMC congregation in Lebanon, Penn., seeks a full-time (or 0.50-0.75 FTE) pastor for preaching, spiritual guidance, pastoral care, visitation, community outreach and growth development. Applicants should be comfortable with team leadership and hold an undergraduate degree—post-graduate biblical training and some experience preferred. Congregation is a vibrant, loving, caring and encouraging community of Christ followers. www.gingrichsmennonite.com Resumes, PIFs and sample messages can be sent to gingrichschurch@comcast.net

Ministry Job Openings

Chief Development Officer: MB Foundation, with \$200 million under management, seeks candidates for the chief development officer position located in Fresno, Calif. For additional information, go to <http://bit.ly/MBFoundation-CDO>, www.dba-search.com or contact Ron Infinger at ron@dba-search.com.

University Job Openings

Fresno Pacific University is seeking a clinical faculty and site director in Special Education. This position is located at our Visalia Campus. Complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/careers.

Fresno Pacific University is seeking a clinical faculty and site director in Pupil Personnel Services. This position is located at our North Fresno Campus. Complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/careers.



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Thank you for your support and interest in USMB ministries!

From TESTIMONY, page 9

Shortly after ending communication with my dad, I attended Bible college, later earning a psychology degree from Fresno Pacific University and getting married.

I've learned I can release my desire for justice and trust we serve a just God. He might not change my circumstances, but he will be with me.

God has taught me the power of forgiveness. Many of us have been sinned against, some in life altering ways. Why should we forgive someone who has caused suffering? Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget, need to trust that person again or that your anger will go away. But choosing to forgive someone who doesn't deserve it brings healing.

Jesus was wronged, slandered, beaten, abandoned and murdered, yet he forgave. When we offer our hearts to God, he gives us the Holy Spirit, who gives us strength to forgive and to heal from what or who tried to break us.▶

The importance of denominations

Denominations help fulfill the Great Commission

Denominations. Do they still have purpose? Although technically USMB is a conference of churches and not necessarily a denomination, the question still pertains to us.

Some will say that denominations are unnecessary and actually hinder the commission of Christ. I submit that although denominations are not perfect, their existence is very important to the complete fulfillment of the commission of Christ.

Church history is filled with divisions with the way we see Jesus and how we determine the way we are to live out what he has told us to do. For followers of Menno Simons, that came to the forefront in the years of the radical reformation. What we know as Mennonite Brethren is that there are ways of following Jesus that others have minimized but we see as primary. Those include being true disciples who are people of the Word, believer's baptism, the importance of community and being people who promote peace. These are just some of the things that drew my wife and me to join an MB church in the late 1970s.

As Mennonite Brethren, we disagree with those who are convinced that baptism brings conversion (through regeneration) as a means of grace and regularly baptize infants. That's a significant difference. I have Presbyterian brothers and sisters who are convinced that baptizing infants is necessary in their covenant theology. I disagree wholeheartedly and would not be able to celebrate with them in their practice of the sacrament of infant baptism.

It's not just baptism either, as we have historically disagreed over church polity and ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, covenant theology and a ton of other "ologies." Not only are theological arguments littered all over church history, but the practice and fulfillment of each position are huge points of contention as well. We

disagree about things like evangelism methods, worship, church discipline, church planting, missions, etc.

In the big picture, we are sinners saved by faith in Jesus through the grace of God, but we still live in a fallen world and are still prone to sin. And we tend to disagree on a lot of things.

It must be our foundation to understand that our faith is collective as well as individualistic in nature. The Great Commission was given to the church, and we'll likely fail when we try to accomplish it all on our own. We need the unity of the MB body to reach people with the gospel, not only here but around the world.

We have biblical convictions that should be derived solely from our understanding of Scripture, but we also should come to grips with the fact that some of our brothers and sisters will disagree with us. So, in order to keep our peace, it is necessary to gather with like-minded believers. We need our MB family in order to abide in that way.

That said, there are times when we can do things inter-denominationally, especially with those who are close to us in core theological positions. We can pray for one another as we seek to reach people who don't yet know Jesus. That is a very good thing when believers can lay aside their differences to accomplish a bigger purpose—as Jesus builds his church. I respect what other denominations can bring to the table with their passion to reach the lost.

Though all believers are ultimately founded upon the work of Christ and his Word—and that's pretty solid standing ground—we still need our tribe. We truly do need local churches that share our convictions and practices, strive to remain biblical and consistent and together plug into the work of the kingdom. That's where unity can be found and that is a very good thing—and worth it. ▀



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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