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CHRISTIAN LEADER

July / August 2019

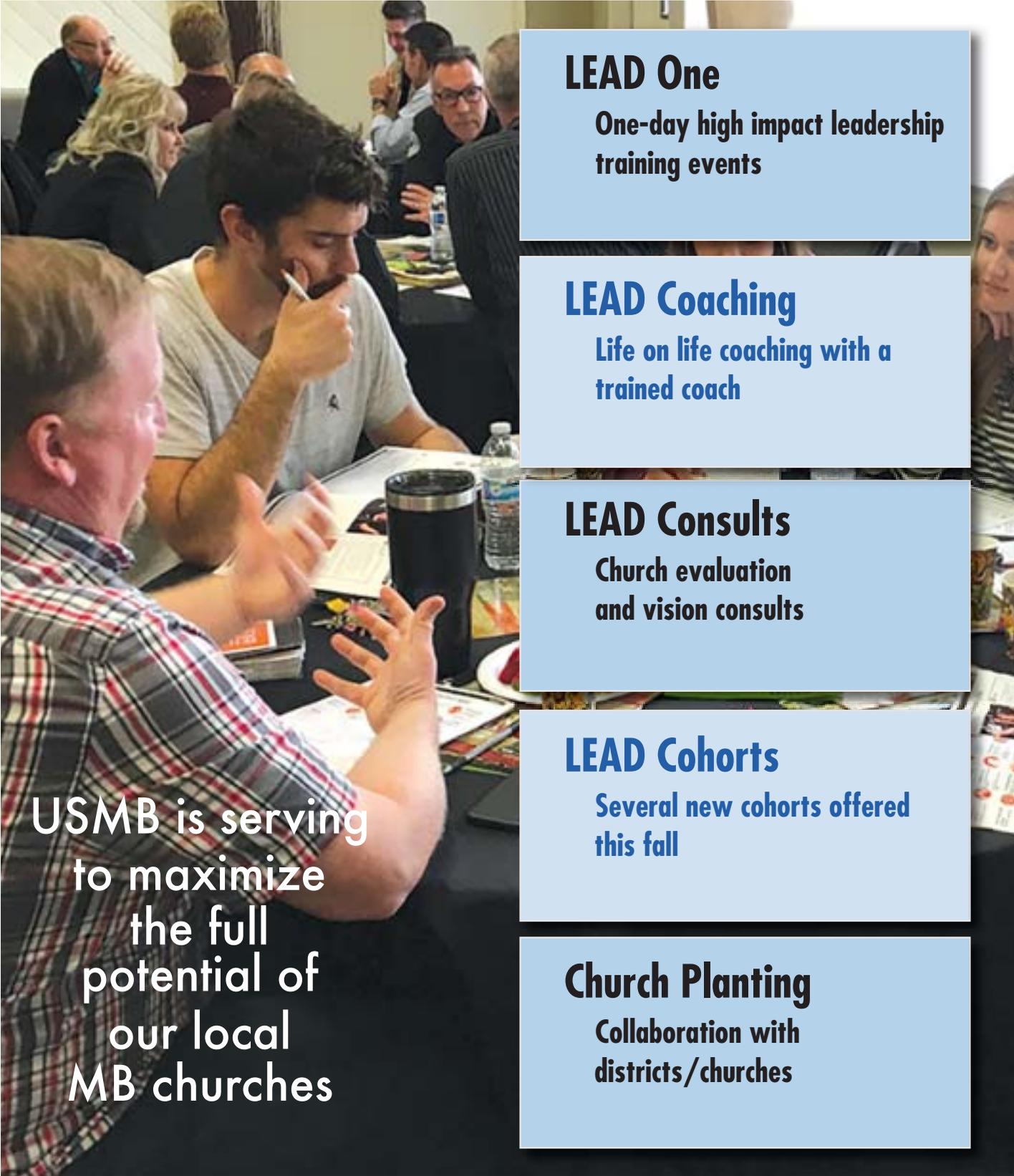
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# Showing grace

How we respond to our mistakes

We did not have the opportunity to include in this issue of the *Christian Leader* the June 13 announcement from the Board of Multiply regarding the agency's budget reductions and strategy shifts. You can read the announcement and a response from the USMB Leadership Board on our website: <https://christianleadermag.com/multiply-announces-two-strategy-shifts/>

To summarize, since the merger of MB Mission and C2C, Multiply's revenue has not matched expenses and so cutbacks have been made. Multiply has also dropped the multi-denominational aspect of its North American church planting work (formerly known as C2C) and is restructuring its short-term mission training programs "with a renewed focus on serving the mission and discipleship strategies of local churches, both in North America and globally."

As I write this, we don't know much about what these changes will mean for Multiply staff or how the U.S. Conference will structure its church planting efforts going forward. We do know that this has been, and will continue to be, a difficult and challenging time for the individuals making these decisions as well as those who are affected by the decisions. We also know that Mennonite Brethren will continue to faithfully work at planting new churches that spread the good news of God's *shalom*.

The details involved in the "what's next" questions will take some time to sort out. In the meantime, this decision gives us the opportunity to practice grace. No doubt some are saying the merger was a mistake or are questioning the wisdom of partnering with other denominations in church planting. In fact, one or both of these may be mistakes. Those of us who are involved with USMB ministries as staff and board members find ourselves living with the decisions—good and bad, big and small—made by the people who served before us. Missionaries and staff with our mission agency, students, faculty and staff at our colleges and staff of other denominational ministries of the future will benefit from and be hindered by the decisions made by those of us currently serving. Let's show one another grace as today's leaders aim to lead and serve in ways that will bless these ministries in the future and contribute to their ongoing success.

This isn't to say that we shouldn't learn from our mistakes. I appreciate the reminder of successful football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant: "When you make a mistake, there are only three things you should ever do about it: admit it, learn from it and don't repeat it." The merger of MB Mission and C2C did not turn out the way leaders hoped it would. But they—and we—can learn from this experience, recognize that leadership involves taking risks and remember that God is always faithful to guide and provide. ▀



Connie Faber

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

**Connie Faber**  
EDITOR

**Janae Rempel**  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

**Shelley Plett**  
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

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## Gary Wall to join ICOMB staff

Gary Wall, Pacific District Conference minister since 2002, has resigned, effective Dec. 31, 2019, in order to assume a new ministry position with the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) as the U.S. national director.



As the national director, Wall will promote the mission and ministry of ICOMB among U.S. MB congregations and will assist in resourcing, training and equipping pastors and leaders in the 21 country conferences as a member of the ICOMB executive team. Details of Wall's role will be defined in consultation with ICOMB executive director Rudi Plett and the ICOMB executive committee.

"Gary has a passion and strong calling for this ministry and his experience and giftedness are just right for the task at hand," says Don Morris, USMB national director, in an email announcing the transition.

PDC moderator Pat Coyle says the district will search for a new district minister with the goal of affirming a new minister at the PDC fall convention to be held Nov. 1-2, 2019, in Fresno, Calif., and hosted by Mountain View Church.

In a letter to USMB pastors and leaders, Wall says it was recent oppor-

tunities to participate in international trips with ICOMB as well as Multiply, formerly MB Mission, and Mennonite Central Committee while serving as the district minister that prompts his shift to global ministry.

Wall says, "The decision to respond affirmatively to the invitation to join the ICOMB team is a work of God's Spirit as I have wrestled with the implications of what has become a clear call to leave my ministry in the PDC. Tami and I are humbly and enthusiastically affirming this new ministry opportunity."

Wall will continue to live in Visalia, Calif., and will be responsible for raising 100 percent of his salary, benefits and ministry expenses.

"Transitions such as this present an opportunity for fresh leadership vision, which is my hope and prayer for the PDC and for ICOMB," says Wall.—*USMB*

## Registration open for Celebrate 2019

Registration is open for the third national gathering of boomers, builders and empty nesters. Celebrate 2019, hosted by MB Foundation, will be held Sept. 27-29, 2019, in Omaha, Neb.

In an effort to keep the event affordable, the registration fee remains at \$199 per person. "Cost is often a concern and one the planning team took a hard look at," says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation. "We hope a consistent registration fee will make this an event people can work into their budgets."

The registration fee will increase to \$227 after Aug. 27, so early registration is encouraged.

The theme for Celebrate 2019 is "Living with Purpose." The speaker is Ray Pritchard, president of Keep Believing Ministries. Entertainment will be provided by magician David Garrard and The Foto Sisters, a string and

vocal sibling trio. Celebrate 2019 will be held at the Embassy Suites Downtown Omaha.

For more information or to register, visit [www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2019](http://www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2019) or contact MB Foundation at 800-551-1547.—*MBF*

## TABOR initiates new scholarship

Tabor College is offering a unique scholarship worth \$112,000 over four years for 2020 high school graduates who attend Mennonite Brethren churches. The new "TABOR 20" scholarship will provide \$28,000 per year. It can be renewed all four years and will be awarded to a minimum of 30 students.

Prospective students can apply by downloading the free "Discover Tabor" app clicking on the TABOR 20 graphic, then filling out and submitting the form. Tabor's admissions office will get in touch with each applicant to talk about next steps. Applicants selected for a TABOR 20 scholarship would owe approximately \$12,000 during the student's freshman year.—*TC*

## MB Foundation, Pacific District co-sponsor small-church workshop

"Unlocking Your Potential" was the theme of a one-day workshop May 18 co-sponsored by MB Foundation and the Pacific District Conference and held at Hope Kingsburg, the USMB church in Kingsburg, Calif.

Participants from 11 churches and three MB ministries heard from Kevin Cox, whose theme, "Size does not determine impact," is the basis for ministry at Vista Church in Heartland, Texas, where he is the church planter/pastor. Speaking out of experiences of both failure and success, Cox guided 47 pastors and lay leaders in exploring ways churches with congre-

gations numbering less than 200 can impact their communities for Christ.

Cox emphasized a “kingdom of God” mindset for church planting. Tracing a “multiplication principle” from Genesis to Acts, Cox challenged church leaders to “exegete” their city in order to affect community transformation and join what God is already doing in establishing his kingdom.



“Kevin did an exceptional job of sharing his story, opening the Scriptures and offering practical guidance and challenge,” says PDC district minister Gary Wall. “He was gracious in understanding our multicultural dynamics and sensitive to the space people needed to feel included.”

The event was offered at no charge to attendees due to the sponsorship of MB Foundation. —MBF

## Tabor graduates class of 2019

Tabor College held its 109th commencement May 18, 2019, hosting an estimated 1,300 family members and well-wishers who came to the Student Center gymnasium to support the graduates. Of the 167 graduates, 114 earned a bachelor of arts degree and one received an associate of arts degree at the Hillsboro campus; 52 graduates earned degrees through Tabor Wichita, including 24 masters, 27 bachelor degrees and one associate degree.

Commencement speaker Andy Owen is a 1994 Tabor graduate now serving as a missionary leader in

Southeast Asia with Multiply, the MB mission agency that facilitates church planting locally, nationally and globally. He challenged the graduates to bring Jesus’ light to both the hills and valleys they will encounter in life.

Recipients of the Professor Fran Jabara Leadership Awards were Naima Mexsen Murra from Torreon, Mexico, and Michael Prichard from Aurora, Colo. Prichard also gave a graduate address.

Tabitha Weikle of McPherson, Kan., offered a graduate address, representing Tabor College Wichita & Online. Other participants included President Jules Glanzer; Executive Vice President of Academics and Compliance Frank Johnson; Director of Alumni Relations Rod Hamm; and Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies Del Gray. —TC

## Fresno graduates record class

A record graduating class and recognition of a local pioneer were two highlights of Fresno Pacific University’s spring commencement Saturday, May 4, 2019.

Some 705 students were eligible to graduate in the ceremony, held in Sell and Arena with more than 7,000 people in attendance. The bachelor’s degree completion class had 336 members, with 175 traditional undergraduates, 168 master’s degree candidates and 26 from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

FPU presented its first honorary doctorate to Fitzalbert “Bert” Marius, M.D. Marius was the first African American to perform open heart surgery in Fresno, and he was involved in more than 11,000 such surgeries during a 50-year practice before retiring at age 91. He and his team became the first African American interns at Fresno County General Hospital, now Community Medical Center.

Featured speaker was Johann Matthies, director of mission develop-

ment in Europe and West and Central Asia for Multiply, the MB mission agency that facilitates church planting locally, nationally and globally. He urged graduates to “Live a big life,” telling his story of growing up in the Soviet Union, emigrating to Germany and God’s invitation to mission around the world.

Other participants included President Joseph Jones, Ph.D.; Joshua Wilson, chair of the FPU Board of Trustees; Samra Gebretsadkan, president of the traditional undergraduate student body; and student ensembles, including the Chamber Choir and Pacific Brass. —FPU

## Jones’ book calls Christians to “Be Extraordinary”

A new book by Yvette Jones reaches out to everyone who wants to break out of their religious comfort zone. *Be Extraordinary! Devotions for Ordinary People Who Want to Live Extraordinary Lives* is “a devotional for those who want more than normal Christi-



anity of following tradition; it is for those who desire to turn up the temperature in their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ,” says publisher WestBow

Press, a division of Thomas Nelson and Zondervan.

Jones is the first lady of Fresno Pacific University, the MB institution in Fresno, Calif., and wife of FPU president Joseph Jones. Jones has experience in nonprofit administration, cause marketing, public speaking, event planning and program development.

# 5 minutes with...

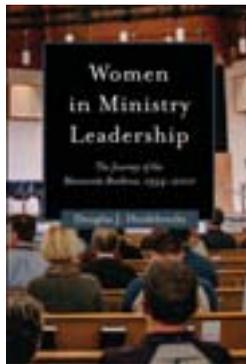
Jones and her family have lived internationally. To order Jones' book or for more information, visit [www.westbowpress.com/Bookstore/BookDetail.aspx?BookId=SKU-001196750](http://www.westbowpress.com/Bookstore/BookDetail.aspx?BookId=SKU-001196750).—FPU

## Heidebrecht releases book on women in ministry

Doug Heidebrecht's *Women in Ministry Leadership: The Journey of the Mennonite Brethren, 1954–2010* is the story of the denomina-

tional conversation regarding women in ministry positions within Canadian and U.S. Mennonite Brethren churches. The book, published by Kindred Productions and the MB Historical Commission, is a more popular presentation of Heidebrecht's doctoral dissertation, "Contextualizing Community Hermeneutics: Mennonite Brethren and Women in Church Leadership" (University of Wales, 2013).

In the book, which is based on written materials—board meeting minutes, papers and published articles—Heidebrecht explores three interwoven themes: What does the Bible say? How does the church live faithfully in a world that is changing? How do Mennonite Brethren wrestle together as a community toward the seemingly elusive goal of consensus? —KP



## Jacob Rodriguez

This fall, when Jacob Rodriguez starts his freshman year at University of California, San Diego, he will be a first-generation college student within his family. Jacob has grown up at Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church. He received Dinuba's Teenage Citizen of the Year award. Jacob took some time out from his busy graduation event schedule to talk about his successes.

### ***How does someone get to be Dinuba Teenage Citizen of the Year?***

Anyone who wants to can apply. The Dinuba Women's Club chooses the top three applicants. The top three go through an interview process where they ask you about your life and how Dinuba made you the person you are today.

### ***Why do you think they chose you?***

Probably because of all my activities. I was associated student body president and a four-sport athlete—basketball, football, water polo and golf. I competed at the state competition for the Health Occupation Students of America club and was president of the club my junior year. I was also part of Med Academy for kids who want to enter a medical career.

### ***What does this award mean to you?***

The Women's Club helping me out and believing I can achieve what I plan to do means a lot. Plus, it has helped me learn what my community is about and what they have to offer.

### ***You plan to pursue medicine?***

Yes. My junior year I got to volunteer in a summer program at Adventist Health that gave us experience in the medical profession. That sparked my passion for radiology. I want to become a radiation oncologist, a doctor who cures cancer patients using radiation.

### ***How would you define success?***

It is doing the most you can do and achieving an end result you are proud of. It may not be achieving what you planned to, but knowing you did all you can. I wanted to go to an Ivy League school, but God has a plan and the end result will be whatever God has for you in your life.

### ***What do you think teenagers have to teach other Christians?***

Sometimes it may seem like God isn't there or that he's letting bad things happen to spite you. But he's not doing this to make you go through a horrible time, but to help you become a better Christian and a better person overall. He's always going to be there for you.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

## We love Jesus *and* sports

Reaching your community through sports camps

I don't have to tell you that sports are a huge part of American culture. Whether it's a professional event of some kind or the local little league baseball program, the average American household is involved.

One of the many factors that led me to Jesus in 1974, while a junior in high school, was the testimony of a local college quarterback in my hometown of Modesto, Calif. He loved Jesus and was a great athlete too. As a kid that loved—and still loves—sports, it dawned on me that the two don't need to be mutually exclusive as long as Jesus comes first.

Since that time, I've had many opportunities as a former athlete and now as a coach and pastor to use sports as a platform to share the gospel. One of the ways we've done that at Shafter (Calif.) MB Church is through summer sports camps for incoming kindergarten through sixth graders.

For the past 10 years we've offered a wrestling camp, and this summer will be our third year to offer a basketball camp. New this year is a volleyball camp that will be directed by our two summer interns. Camp runs from 10:00 a.m. to noon each day with a combination of teaching, drills, games, snacks and a devotion that follows the theme for the week. This year's theme is "Train," taken from I Timothy 4:7-8.

On Friday night of each week we also have an "Exhibition and Dessert" for the whole family. The kids demonstrate what they've learned and are given a whole array

of take-home items such as a T-shirt and medal. We also send home information about our ministries and a sports New Testament provided by the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes Club.

The greatest blessing of these camps is the many community families we host in our facility and are able to build a relationship with. As we welcome them to our church home we also pray that the friendships we form will build bridges into their lives that the gospel can travel on.

I think of a family that sent one of their children to our wrestling camp a couple of years ago and since that time have started attending our church. They've gotten involved with our children's ministries as well as our youth ministries and were recently part of a class that I teach on membership. The sports camp was a great way to be exposed to our church and what we have to offer before actually attending a worship service.

I also help coach a local wrestling club for elementary school age kids during the school year and many of those children have attended our camps over the years. Many of them come from nonbelieving homes and being able to coach them in a sport as well as tell them about Jesus is a real privilege.

We have a saying at our church: "The gospel travels primarily through relationships." Sports camps are a great way to see that happen! **D**



Pat Coyle  
*has been the senior pastor of Shafter MB Church since 2001. He has enjoyed teaching kids about wrestling and Jesus for the past 10 years.*

# Yard sales support ministry

An army of volunteers help run annual sales

With help from family and friends, I transformed a 50-by-80-foot warehouse into what one customer called the “mother lode of yard sales.” Every item on the 50 tables filling the space had a price tag, and each area was labeled by department—kitchen, office, toys and more—ready for the constant flow of shoppers during the sale the first two Saturdays of May.

The yard sale—my ninth since 2011—was the culmination of countless hours my friends and I spent pricing, organizing, sorting and hauling donated items throughout the year for my nonprofit, “GodWill Ministries.”

It takes an army to run these annual sales. Almost 50 people from my church came to help at my most recent sale, which raised nearly \$6,500.

In the past, I never wanted to have yard sales—they are tiring and so much work. But the Holy Spirit has given me joy, and what started eight years ago as a fundraiser for a trip to Uganda has grown into a nonprofit organization that continues to support ministry locally and abroad.

I held my first yard sale in 2011 to fund a medical mission trip to Uganda. The trip turned my worldview upside down, and my husband and I began sponsoring Nabwawe, a young lady whose parents died of AIDS and who was living at New Hope Children’s Center.

When the opportunity came for me to return to Uganda in 2013 to see my sponsor daughter, I couldn’t say no. Once again, I had yard sales to raise money. I asked my neighbors and friends for items to donate and sold the nicer items online. The sale was huge and successful, and the Lord prompted me to give the money as he directed.

With ministry in Uganda on my heart, I began to organize annual yard sales. My

church family, neighbors, friends and family donated gently-used items, which I priced and stacked to the ceiling. Soon, my house and garage were filled to the brim. With only a path through my house, I was embarrassed when company came. I was being smothered by the very things needed to help me. My husband was supportive, but the clutter was wearing on both of us.

I began to pray for a new place to store the donations. God answered by providing a 40-foot shipping container—we now have two containers—then went a step further when my husband’s company offered space in a downtown warehouse to host my sales.

Our first sale in the warehouse raised thousands of dollars, which not only paid my way to Uganda, but supported ministries locally and abroad. We purchased shoes for all the children in one village. We helped a little boy get a much-needed surgery and bought treadle sewing machines for high school girls in northern Uganda.

I helped people locally, too, by supporting our church’s youth mission trips.

Many of us have a yard sale and say, “Never again,” but I continued, calling this ministry “GodWill.”

Last year’s sale made more than \$6,000. We purchased a sunflower seed oil-processing machine for the Ugandan village of Kapchorwa, enabling them to sell cooking oil and raise money for an orphanage and school.

This year’s GodWill sale helped fund my seventh trip to Uganda in June with a team of six women. We donated \$1,500 so a Kampala orphanage could purchase books for their sparse library, and we helped them organize the library and



Joanne Eytzen lives in Ferndale, Wash., a dozen miles from the Canadian border, next to the ocean and surrounded by snow-covered mountains on three sides. A Christian first, she is wife to her husband, Roger, of 31 years; mom to three grown children; and grandma to two grandbabies who are 4 months apart. Eytzen, who is retired, leads a women’s Bible study at her church, Birch Bay Bible Community Church, the USMB congregation in Blaine, Wash. She calls herself a “Jesus girl” and feels privileged to serve through GodWill and help people who need it.

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See TESTIMONY, page 30

# THREE THINGS NOT TO DO: THE HERODIANS' GUIDE TO PARENTING FAILS

**T**he social media site Pinterest is famous for presenting visions of craft projects designed to look flawless and easy. As a growing collection of “Pinterest fails” attests, however, these visions seldom match reality. The comfort in these “Pinterest fails” is that other people have tried and failed to match the illusion of perfection, and their failure can provide a better benchmark for our own work: “My cake might not be perfect, but at least it didn’t look like that!”

Much parenting advice comes packaged like a Pinterest project: Try this one parenting secret to calm your child! Prevent a meltdown with this simple trick! Like the Pinterest pictures, such advice can do more to inspire inadequacy than produce better parenting. So, rather than turn to the Bible for a model of the “perfect” parent to emulate, perhaps, like the growing collection of “Pinterest fails,” the “parenting fails” of the Bible can serve as a helpful reminder that “at least we’re not that bad!”

## The Herodians: What *not* to do

The Herodian family as described in Mark 6:14-29 is certainly a parenting fail. While there are several model parents in the Bible to whom one could turn for inspiration—Hannah, who devotes her son to God’s service (1 Samuel 1), Mary, who treasures her son’s growth in her heart (Luke 2:19), and the prodigal’s father, who welcomes his son with forgiveness (Luke 15:11-32)—the Herodian family is decidedly not among this group.

As Mark tells the story, Herod Antipas hosts a banquet with a dance from his step-daughter Salome. Pleased with the dance, Herod offers up to half of his kingdom to the girl, who first consults with her mother about what to request. Prompted by Herodias to ask for the head of John the Baptist (6:24), Salome further embellishes the request by requesting that the grisly gift be served up in a particularly horrifying way: on a platter. Though greatly saddened, Herod accedes to the child’s request and has John beheaded.

By all accounts, Herod and Herodias’s parenting of their daughter in this narrative offers a prime example of several parenting fails. So, by taking a page from the Herodian parenting playbook, parents today can glean three lessons in what *not* to do.

## ● ● ● Don’t parent partner-less

Although Herod was not (according to Josephus) Salome’s biological father, he and Herodias presumably shared in some aspects of parenting. The moment recorded in Mark 6:14-29 was not one of them. The murder of John the Baptist is possible, in part, because the Herodian parents are not on the same page. Indeed, the parents are not even in the same place. Mark’s Greek vocabulary is oddly precise in specifying the contrasting directions of her movements: she goes *in* to be with Herod (6:22, 25) and *out* to speak with her mother (6:24). The parental partners’ separation is clear.

This is also not the first time that the Herodian parents have been divided. Mark reports that Herod and Herodias had prior disagreement on their response to John (6:19-20). Thus, their separation during the banquet is hardly surprising, especially given the ancient norm of separating the sexes during such events. The result of this separation is that the parents are not partnered when it comes to making a decision that will impact Salome.

Whether single, widowed or married, many parents have partners (e.g. spouses, care-givers, teachers) in their parenting. While parenting partners may not all agree on every aspect of parenting, having like-minded partners to assist in the endeavor can model for children multiple ways of enacting similar values. By failing to be united in their parenting, Herod and Herodias raise their child to be complicit in the slaughter of an innocent man.

## ● ● ● Don’t be afraid to say “no”

Mark’s narrative suggests that Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist (6:20). Likewise, the text reports that Herod is deeply grieved upon hearing Salome’s request for John’s head (6:26a). As the adult in the relationship, Herod should have put his foot down and said “no.” Yet, as the text indicates, Herod did not want to decline Salome’s request.

Furthermore, lest Herod be the only parent on trial, Herodias is equally culpable. When asked by Salome what she should request, Herodias could have refused to dictate what the girl should demand. However, like her husband, Herodias fails to assume the role of the adult in the relationship, and she instead prompts Salome to ask for Herodias’s own wish: the head of John the Baptist.

The parental refusal to say “no” allows Salome the freedom to get creative with her mother’s suggestion. As if a beheading itself were not gruesome enough, the Herodian parents’ in-

ability to say “no” allows Salome to make things even worse by specifying the specific mode of presentation for the Baptist’s head.

Beyond this problem of allowing Salome a dangerous level of liberty, Herod’s spinelessness in the face of his step-daughter also offers her a problematic model for submitting to others over the maintenance of healthy personal boundaries. For modern parents who want their children to “just say no” to any number of harmful invitations, the Herodian parents’ inability to say “no” is a prime example of a parenting fail.

● ● ● **Don’t sacrifice healthy adult relationships**

Although Herod had imprisoned John on account of Herodias (6:17), the text also suggests that Herod gladly listened to John (6:20), even when John’s message included criticism of Herod’s actions (6:18). This suggests that John’s relationship to Herod, then, was a healthy one for Herod, insofar as Herod was able to hear John’s fair critiques not only with openness but with gladness. However, when Herod feels the pressure from Salome, he does not appear to hesitate in quite literally sacrificing someone he enjoys hearing for the sake of appeasing a child.

In putting John to death, Herod gives up an opportunity for personal growth through a relationship with another adult who could have contributed to his emotional and spiritual development. Instead, Herod actively eliminates that relationship from his life.



While Christian parents today are likely not at risk of committing homicide to keep their children happy, the same temptation to sacrifice healthy adult relationships may be present in subtle and insidious ways. Maintaining such relationships, even with those who may sometimes offer well-

founded critiques, is important for parents to engage in their own development, even as they work to encourage growth in their children.

**Avoiding Herodian parenting fails**

The Herodian family raises a daughter who turns out to be an accomplice to murder. While most Christian parents today are not likely too concerned about their children growing up to slaughter a prophet, many may be concerned about instilling in their children the character and moral values consistent with Christian faith. Thus, even if this “worst case scenario” is not a likely one, some of the parenting decisions that led to it serve as instructive parenting fails.

The good news this story offers to parents, then, is like the good news of Pinterest fails. When compared with the Herodians’ parenting, at least we’re not that bad!

*Melanie Howard is assistant professor and program director of biblical and theological studies at Fresno Pacific University. She is a graduate of Messiah College (B.A.), the University of Notre Dame (M.T.S.) and Princeton Theological Seminary (Ph.D.) Along with her husband, Jeremiah, Howard is an active member of Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Fresno, Calif., where she serves as the chair of the Worship Commission and a member of the church council, among other roles.*

# Family retreat vs. family vacation

Retreats allow families to worship, play and grow together

**W**e often talk about the challenges faced when getting caught up in the fast pace of today's world. It can be hard to find quality time to spend with loved ones, leaving them to fall through the cracks and damaging relationships. Wouldn't it be nice if there was a place that parents and children could go together to renew the love and trust they have as a family?

I'm not talking about another family vacation that is full of hectic running around, trying to make individual reservations for every activity and resulting in everyone splitting up to do their own thing. I'm talking about a family retreat: an organized event in a designated location that allows families to worship, play and grow together. Who doesn't want to come home feeling closer than when you left?

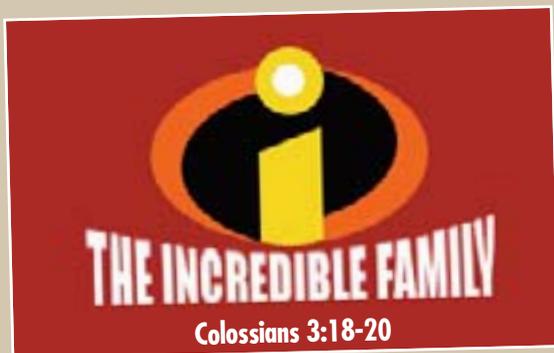
No matter the type of retreat, we often see growth from those who attend. Maybe they become closer to God. Maybe they find a new hope or mission in life. Or maybe, they grow stronger as a family. Here's a few benefits of going on a retreat as a family:

**Eat together.** This may not seem like a big deal, but today's families seem to be finding it harder and harder to all be at the dinner table at once. On a retreat, there is a designated time for families to eat with one another. No sports, jobs or school activities to turn dinner into drive-thru. I can personally say that some of my best conversations happen over a meal. It is an ideal time to talk and learn about each other.

**Play together.** Retreat centers have so many recreation activities available to delight everyone in the family. Whether it's swimming at the beach, shooting hoops or flying through the disc golf course, no one is going to be bored. It's important for kids to remember that parents like to have fun, too.

If you want to kick it up a notch, add team building. Whether it's supporting each other through a high ropes course or conquering challenges together on low ropes, there is sure to be improvements in communication, respect, encouragement, safety and trust. Not to mention, a lot of activities available are as exciting, if not more, than

## Looking for a theme for a family retreat? Consider one



“

*It's important for kids to remember that parents like to have fun, too.*

”

ones done on vacation. I mean, what's more exciting than zip lining?

**Worship together.** Strong spiritual relationships help strengthen earthly ones. Even if your family goes to church together every Sunday, you may be separated during the service. Kids run off for children's church while the parents stay and listen to the sermon. Getting the chance to worship side by side on a retreat will build that desired closeness. Plus, the message is geared toward families.

**Meet together.** Or don't. Doing every single thing together for a retreat doesn't allow for much conversation about the day. A little separation allows members to come together later (like over dinner) so they can say "You won't believe what I did today."

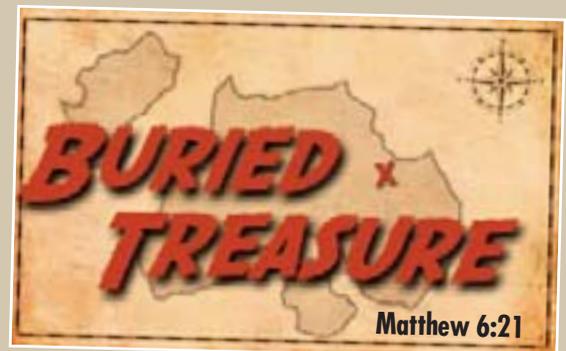
Many family retreats use speakers or workshops to discuss family dynamics and roles. They allow members to open up with one another to heal old wounds or discuss topics they may not be able to on their own. These meetings can be done together or separate. A good thing

about separating is that the message can be specifically directed to a role, i.e. moms, dads, kids. By talking with other church members, everyone can converse and learn about what it means to be that part of a family. This also builds a foundation for future needs, because people know they can look to their church family for guidance and support.

**Family vacations are fun.** Don't get me wrong. But if your family wants to get a little more out of the experience, consider talking to your church about hosting a family retreat.

*Kayla Crawford is on staff with Christian Retreats Network and wrote this article for the organization's spring 2019 magazine. It is reprinted with permission. Christian Retreats Network works with its partners to provide places where people can get away from their day-to-day and find God, deepen their faith and connect with their family, friends and peers.*

of the following listed with a corresponding Bible verse.



# WHEN PRODIGAL CHILDREN DON'T RETURN

**The loving father in Jesus' parable can help us relate to our own wandering children**

**By David Ortis**

**A** younger son demands his inheritance, then “sets off for a distant country”—severing himself from his father’s beliefs, values, and spiritual legacy—with no intention of returning. Years later, without warning, the son returns home to the joy of his father (Luke 15:11–24).

We’re familiar with the parable of the prodigal son. Unfortunately, joyous returns do not always occur for the many parents who watch their children head off to a spiritually “distant country.” Yet, the loving father in the parable can help parents relate to their own wandering children.

### **From guilt to forgiveness**

When prodigal children don’t return home, parents are left with deep guilt, thinking *they* caused the child’s yearning to leave. This guilt is a false interpretation of Proverbs 22:6. Yet, the passage says, “should go” not “will,” observes Phil Waldrep in *Parenting Prodigals*. The parent’s role is to plant seeds of faith, not guarantee they will grow. The prodigal must choose to return home: the child-turned-adult is responsible for his or her own faith. Our loving God does not leave parents mired in self-blame but heals guilt with the balm of forgiveness.

God’s pardon signals that parents are free—even compelled—to extend mercy to themselves, duplicating the divine compassion. When parents forgive themselves, something miraculous happens. Defenses for faulty parenting or assumed responsibility for a child’s decisions are no longer needed.

Forgiving yourself matures parents’ ability to bear, believe, hope and endure no matter what their prodigal throws their way (1 Corinthians 13). Our heavenly Father shows parents that they still have a role in the life of their prodigal; they are still mom and dad.

### **From cajoling to loving**

Like our heavenly Father, the father in the parable demonstrates love by allowing his child to chart his own life’s journey, not by running after his son and cajoling him to stay. In the parable, the father “had to let [his son] go in freedom, even though he knew the pain it would cost both his son and himself,” writes Henri Nouwen in *The Return of the Prodigal*. “It was love itself that prevented him from keeping his son home at all costs.”

“I had to let go of all my efforts to get him to return to his faith,” said a mother of her 20-year-old prodigal son. She loved him enough to allow him to experience the consequences of his decisions, to find his own pigpen. “I had to hand him over to God.”

Writes Nouwen, “It was love itself that allowed [the father] to let his son find his own life, even with the risk of losing it.”

### **From “in the right” to in relationship**

Parents cannot fix their wayward children, “especially the embarrassing and defiant ones (who) mess up their lives in incredible ways,” writes Waldrep. “They have financial calamities, trouble with the law, drinking and drug difficulties.... They marry people we can’t stand, and they make decisions that are foolish at best.... We feel compelled to jump in to make it right.” In their rescue attempts, parents’ coaxing and preaching often alienates their children who respond, “I don’t want your help.”

When alienation breaks the parent-child bond, parents have to choose between having a relationship and being right. In the parable, the younger son’s experience of remorse was made possible by remembering that his father would listen: “I will arise and go to my father.”

The same attitude that released the son to leave home would welcome him back. If a parent chooses relationship, when the child is ready for faith, he or she will grab on to it.

### **From wounded to waiting**

Of course, prodigals don't always stay away. A prodigal may bring home an unbelieving common-law partner for the weekend. Or a child who stops his addiction and professes faith may fall off the wagon, relapsing back to his addiction and old lifestyle. After a few cycles, parents are exhausted and filled with disbelief. Said one parent: "I'm tired of killing the fatted calf."

In the parable, the father, not the servants, is the first to notice his son coming up the road. He reflects the ceaseless vigilance of waiting for the child's return. Parents who work hard at waiting will be comforted, writes Isaiah: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (40:31).

God instills enough energy in parents to walk and not faint from despair when the prodigal child is not in sight.

### **From right to wrong**

The older brother, the good son, did his duty. Yet, he refuses to join the party to celebrate his younger brother's return. He responds to his father's encouragement with a verbal lashing of self-justification, bitterness and condescension toward his younger brother.

The elder brother is like the Pharisees and scribes. As "tax collectors and sinners" draw near to hear Jesus tell the story, they stand aloof murmuring, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1-2). Jesus tells the religious righteous that the tax collectors and sinners were their younger brothers. But with insensitivity, rudeness and theological arrogance, the Pharisees and scribes value purity of theology and a show of righteousness over God's love.

What great irony this parable reveals. The son who does "right" by staying on the farm doing his duty is, in fact, wrong. The son who lives "wrong" ends up being honored with the fatted calf. May parents and the church never allow concerns with theological purity to overwhelm God's primary edict to love prodigal children (Mark 12:30).

Taking on the loving heart of the heavenly Father is the central message of the parable. For years, even decades, as the prodigal child gambles away opportunity, parents pray out of deep brokenness: *Lord Jesus, if there is a spark of hope, however small, in my child's heart, fan it into the flame of salvation and bring my child out of hell, home to his compassionate heavenly Father.*

An old Jewish proverb offers encouragement: "God is closest to those with broken hearts." In eternity, when these parents meet Jesus face-to-face, the one who also lost so many of his children will embrace them and say, "I understand."

*David Ortis is a member of Bakerview MB Church, Abbotsford, B.C. He is a therapist with Focus on the Family Canada and a former pastor. This article was first published in the Mennonite Brethren Herald, the publication of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, and is reprinted with permission.*



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## Awe & Wonder

Arizona church creates original worship music

**W**hen Micah Bentley and the Axiom Church worship team took the stage on Easter Sunday in Peoria, Ariz., one of the songs they sang was their own.

Axiom Worship has been creating original music for five years, and their latest single, *Awe & Wonder*, debuted in April.

“*Awe & Wonder* is all about sensing a desire among our team and leaders and probably Jesus himself to see our community and, even more, our culture, reclaim a childlike sense of awe and wonder of God and the mystery,” Bentley says. “Our culture is so cynical, disenchanted and worried about correct information or having it all figured out when it comes to God, yet maybe there’s an opportunity to just innocently seek his presence and ‘become like a child’ as Jesus says and actually let Jesus lead us. We want to see our community filled with a burning hunger for God’s presence.”

*Awe & Wonder* is one of a number of original worship songs created by Axiom Worship for use in church and made available to others online.

Bentley, who is the worship and arts pastor at Axiom, has served as songwriter, singer and musician for many of the songs Axiom Worship records. He co-produced *Awe & Wonder* with fellow musician and band member George White, who also plays drums and produces, engineers, mixes and masters songs.

*Awe & Wonder* was birthed out of intentional time the Axiom worship team spent listening for God’s voice.

“We did this knowing that what was said would be used as inspiration for a new song,” Bentley says. “We wrote



Micah Bentley (foreground) and George White (on drums) co-produced *Awe & Wonder*, a single released by Axiom Worship in April. Axiom Worship has been creating original music for five years. The music is used at Axiom Church in Peoria, Ariz., and is also available online. *Photo by Nesto Meza Wynsum & Marrow Photography*

down words, statements and ideas of what God desires to see in our community and noticed where there was overlap and agreement in what we were all hearing from God. I then took that time and the notes we gathered and prayerfully condensed the thoughts into a theme.”

Bentley created a demo, then he and White spent a day tracking the instruments, he says, adding that additional worship team members helped with vocals.

“George then took the recording and mixed and mastered the song,” Bentley says. “This was sort of a rushed process

compared to normal because we were trying to put the song together to release on Easter weekend.”

The timeline for release depends on the project.

“Typically, one song can take one to three days to record and a week or two to mix,” Bentley says. “An EP or album is one to three weeks, depending on length and detail, and about one month of mixing and mastering.”

The creative process of recording music not only provides content for Axiom’s worship services, it also gives opportunity to mentor young musicians.

“The purpose for us for creating original worship music is out of a desire to capture and create prayers and worship in songs for our community that speak to what Jesus is doing in our community at the time and can be used in our liturgy,” Bentley says, adding, “We have an awesome worship team of around 20 people who all contribute in different ways. We’re developing those with the desire to grow as songwriters and musicians by collaborating on these original songs. Sometimes some of the team plays or sings on songs and helps with writing.”

Axiom Worship released its first original music project in 2015, an EP called *Novus* that correlated with a series on spiritual transformation.

“We’ve been slowly doing more music projects since then,” Bentley says. “It started out of a desire to simply create something that came from within and was very much ‘us.’”

Next came the *Of Christ* EP—containing liturgy, a single and an instrumental—released in 2016, then *Advent* in 2017.

“The *Advent* EP was drawn from the desire to walk through the four weeks of advent and journey toward Christmas,” Bentley says. “The *Of Christ* project was a desire to create an experience with Jesus using song, silence and prayer. Some of the music we create is also use-

ful for some of the other content we create like videos, so that inspires some of the instrumental stuff we do.”

Inspiration for content for Axiom Worship’s EPs comes from a variety of places.

“We’ve drawn a lot of inspiration for the content in these EPs from following the church calendar and its rhythms, spiritual formation practices like *lectio divina*, and just from the things we sense Jesus doing in our community at the time,” Bentley says.

Axiom Worship’s style has been influenced by the alternative rock band,

Wild Earth, of which Bentley is a part.

“Axiom Worship’s genre is ever-evolving but probably based in the indie/alternative/folk rock categories,” Bentley says. “At least, those genres definitely influence a lot of our team. We do some things very intimate, stripped down, acoustic and sometimes very dynamic and full band, rock sounding.”

The worship team incorporates Axiom Worship’s music into services at Axiom.

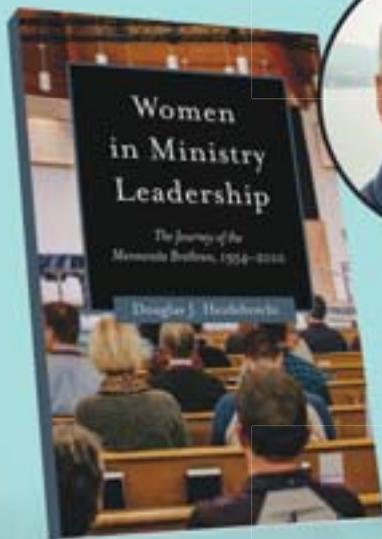
“We do lots of different songs, from modern worship songs in the church, to re-arranging hymns as well as our original songs from Axiom and Wild Earth,”

Bentley says, adding that he has also created instrumental songs to be used during communion.

Bentley says Axiom Worship is currently working on a hymns EP to be released later this year, as well as formation content such as audio liturgies.

“To me, worship is inevitable, it’s just a matter of what we worship,” Bentley says. “When we create something like music and direct it towards proclaiming truth and creating space to experience God’s love and presence, it can be a really transformational place. I think music is a powerful instrument for that, and we really try to make Jesus the complete and only aim with the music we create at Axiom.” —*Janae Rempel*

## Women in Ministry Leadership: The Journey of the Mennonite Brethren, 1954–2010



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## Fresno fights poverty

Two USMB churches partner with Vision 22

“**W**hat does it look like when churches partner together to impact a struggling city?” This is the question being asked by a collection of churches in Fresno, Calif., involved with a movement known as Vision 22.

The name—Vision 22—refers to the 22 neighborhoods in Fresno in which there is concentrated poverty, meaning that 40 percent or more of the residents are living below the poverty line.

Two USMB churches are currently committed to being Vision 22 partner churches: North Fresno MB Church and Neighborhood Church. Their dream is to build relationships that will help Fresno’s neighborhoods flourish.

### It started with Katrina

In 2005, the Brookings Institution, a research group in Washington D.C., published a report highlighting the way that low-income families in New Orleans were disproportionately affected by Hurricane Katrina because of con-

centrated poverty. The report included a list of large U.S. cities with the highest rates of concentrated poverty, with Fresno topping the list at 43.5 percent. Ten years later, follow-up reports showed that New Orleans had dropped out of the top 10, while Fresno only dropped one spot.

This information prompted leaders at several Fresno churches to form the consortium Vision 22 with the purpose of deepening relationships between churches across the city, believing these partnerships will help bridge socioeconomic and racial and ethnic divides.

Joe White, pastor of Neighborhood Church, explains that the founders of Vision 22 discovered that there were churches in the impoverished neighborhoods in Fresno that were “under-equipped, under-resourced, struggling churches but were gospel-centered and vibrant.”

The goal is to create “triads” of three churches in different areas of the city both inside and outside of the 22 pin-pointed neighborhoods of extreme poverty, so that these churches can share resources and knowledge.

“We’re trying to change the nature of the conversation and response [to poverty] by being in relationship,” says James Bergen, pastor of North Fresno Church (NFC).

A Vision 22 partner church commits to participate in the movement in six ways, including delivering a curriculum to its congregation, daily prayer and meaningful connection with partner churches several times a year.

“It’s less about tackling issues of poverty than it is about acknowledging that part of the holistic solution is to make sure the church is vibrant and doing its job or fulfilling its calling in these neighborhoods,” Bergen says. The hope is that each partner church will “discern a way for their relationships to result in lasting impact upon our most deteriorated neighborhoods.”



Employees work in the wood shop at Neighborhood Jobs, a small business run by Neighborhood Church to employ those with barriers to employment.

*Photo by Neighborhood Church*

### Neighborhood focused

Both NFC and Neighborhood Church have been serving their respective Fresno neighborhoods in unique ways, even before the Vision 22 movement materialized.

“Over the years our church has been very engaged in citywide issues in general,” Bergen says.

NFC is located in the Robinson neighborhood, where both the unemployment rate and crime rate are higher than the citywide average.

About eight years ago, NFC launched Fresno Area Community Enterprises (FACE), a nonprofit resource and training center for families, churches, agencies and businesses that are collaborating for community transformation through a holistic approach of caring, resourcing and developing.

The holistic approach of FACE includes after-school tutoring, mentoring and discipleship programs, a GED study group, a financial literacy course and an Auto Service Day that provides



Kathy McIlhargey, Vision 22 prayer leader, leads in prayer at the recent quarterly lunch and conversation for Vision 22 pastors and leaders of key ministries held at North Fresno Church.

*Photo by North Fresno Church*

under-resourced families with the opportunity for free vehicle maintenance.

FACE also includes two micro-businesses that provide employment in landscaping and moving services for people with barriers to employment.

Bergen says that one big way that NFC aligns with the Vision 22 movement is the idea that relationships and connection between people matter more than simply throwing resources at a problem like poverty.

### Taking responsibility

Neighborhood Church is located in the Jackson neighborhood, which has high poverty and crime rates as well. According to White, 71 percent of the

residents do not have a high school education.

Neighborhood Church views Jackson as “an 8- by 12-block geographical area of spiritual responsibility,” says White, who was born in Fresno and grew-up in one of the highest-crime, lowest income neighborhoods in the city.

After living in a wealthy neighborhood in Canada for a time, White and his wife moved back to Fresno in 2015 and planted Neighborhood Church that same year.

Neighborhood Church consists of three elements: a weekly gathering, a non-profit and a small business.

The weekly gathering takes place at Jackson Elementary School on Sunday

afternoons. Currently, White says 2.89 percent of the neighborhood attends these gatherings, and their goal is 10 percent. Nearly everyone who attends did not have a church family before they began attending Neighborhood Church.

The non-profit arm of the church looks to “meet specialized needs” in the neighborhood. Over the course of a year, the church has worked with the city of Fresno on creating a new safety infrastructure on one of the most dangerous local streets that includes new sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting and signage.

Similarly to FACE, Neighborhood Church meets the practical need of employment by offering young people ages 16 to 24 with employment barriers the chance to work at Neighborhood Jobs. The church renovated a workshop to create an artisan space where young adults can learn job-transferable skills. Currently, they employ five workers making small wooden “libraries” that can be put up on streets for people to take or leave books for free.

“We have more orders than we know what to do with,” White says.

Neighborhood Church lists on its website 21 ongoing ministry initiatives, each one focused on further developing the community using Christian principles. Examples include prayer walks, Bible studies, sports programs and literacy mentoring at the elementary school.

White compares the relationship between meeting the practical and spiritual needs of a community to the two blades of a scissors. “You can only actually make a difference if you’re operating both blades,” he says.

White believes that progress and impact can be measured over time in more ways than simply anecdotally. Neighborhood Church plans to operate by looking at statistics over time regarding areas such as educational attainment, affordable housing, employment, crime rates, community engagement and con-

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version and baptism.

“We really believe that Jesus can make a lasting impact in people’s lives,” White says.

Although the format of NFC and Neighborhood Church may look different, in many ways they’re working toward the same goal.

“We have a similar vision that the flourishing of our neighborhood is at the core of who we are as a church,” Bergen says. “To be vitally engaged in neighborhood issues is just part of our calling.” —*Jessica Vix Allen*

## Ministry addresses poverty in Omaha

### Omaha neighborhood served by church, ministry

**I**n 1996, members of Faith Bible Church in South Omaha, Neb., decided they wanted to do more to reach the community in their urban neighborhood of Columbus Park.

“The church agreed to start a brand-new program that would be more than just an outreach arm of the church, but it would be a stand-alone ministry very closely connected to the church,” says Stephen Stout, who served as director of that program for 19 years.

Good Neighbor Ministries (GNM) was launched to provide practical services for vulnerable residents in Columbus Park, as well as to spread the gospel—and it has pursued that mandate for more than two decades.

### Poverty in Columbus Park

The population of South Omaha is 44 percent Hispanic or Latino, reports the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). In 2015, a report from UNO’s Center for Public Affairs Research



Volunteers with Good Neighbor Ministries participate in Columbus Park Cleanup Day on May 25. The city-wide cleanup provides Omaha residents the opportunity to dispose of large items for free. *Photo by Good Neighbor Ministries*

found that the poverty rate for Omaha’s Hispanic population had been increasing steadily since 2000, rising about 10 percent.

According to an article in the *Omaha World-Herald* in January 2015, experts posited theories for the increase that included everything from the lingering effects of the Great Recession, to decreasing pay for traditionally low-wage jobs, to an increase in single-parent homes.

Living in the Columbus Park neighborhood, Stout and his family have seen firsthand the desperation of some living in poverty. He estimates they experienced 12 major thefts in the span of about 10 years.

“My wife has such a good heart,” Stout says. “After our car was stolen for like the fourth time, she put a bag of cookies and a gospel tract in the car and a little note.”

To Stout, poverty sometimes looks different than one might imagine.

“Not having a voice, I think, is pretty significant,” Stout says. “Or feeling like their voice isn’t really that significant. Like, ‘I might have an opinion, but because I’m poor and don’t have any kind of position, it probably will be

outvoted.’ I think that often can be a significant part of poverty that is kind of overlooked.”

Much of Stout’s work with GNM involved coordinating volunteers to help with service projects and traveling to churches throughout the Central District Conference to raise awareness and funds.

Stout is now the lead pastor at Faith Bible Church and has handed the reins of Good Neighbor Ministries to Paul Dyke. Dyke, an Omaha native, was attending seminary and looking to get back into ministry when he came across the job opening at GNM. He began as director in 2017.

### Collaboration

While FBC and GNM are separate entities, collaboration has been the idea from the beginning. In recent months, this has included helping with flood relief and sponsoring kids attending Bible camp this summer.

Dyke’s investment in the community reaches beyond GNM, as he is also president of the Columbus Park Neighborhood Association. The association recently received a grant from the Omaha Community Foundation that

will be used to host Columbus Park Day in August, a community BBQ and party to foster stronger connections, invite fresh engagement in the neighborhood association, as well as build bridges between residents and neighborhood social services.

While the event will be put on by the neighborhood association, Dyke also sees it as a means to increase the presence and awareness of GNM in Columbus Park.

Given his years of ministry with GNM, it comes as no surprise that Stout encourages his congregation to engage with the neighborhood. About twice a year, church members connect with

their neighbors by going door to door, introducing themselves and offering prayer and a small gift. This summer, the church will help facilitate three Good News Club gatherings, a ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship.

Meanwhile, Dyke would like to see GNM move in the direction of offering more mentorship and education.

“Education gives options,” Dyke says. “Education provides employment that provides income which brings stability, which means practical needs are being met.”

Dyke meets weekly with a child in a local elementary school through a program called TeamMates, and he is work-

ing to recruit other mentors.

“One of my hopes and prayers is to broaden and add to the ministry, providing some really practical tools and trainings and developmental opportunities for people that are in poverty to grow out of poverty,” he says.

Combating poverty is a never ending task, says Dyke, pointing to Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:11, “The poor you will always have with you.” But Dyke believes that his mission is reaching his neighbors, wherever they land on the wealth or education spectrums, so they may be transformed by knowing Jesus.

—*Jessica Vix Allen*



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## Hosting the homeless

First MB joins community effort to serve homeless

**F**our times each year, First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., transforms classrooms into guest rooms and welcomes homeless families for a weeklong stay. It’s part of the church’s involvement with Family Promise of Greater Wichita (FPGW), an affiliate of the nationwide Family Promise, which seeks to provide a holistic response to families experiencing homelessness.

“Family Promise is a comprehensive program that provides a hand up rather than just a handout for families in distress,” says First MB director of community impact Linda Oelze. “We believe their mission and vision are in line with Jesus’ mandate to care for the poor.”

First MB is one of 25 host congregations for FPGW that has committed to provide shelter and meals for homeless families in the program. Additional Wichita-area churches provide meals, volunteers, donations and supplies.

“It is so incredible how God has brought over 40 churches of all denominations together in Wichita to serve the homeless in our city,” Oelze says. “I would encourage any church who does not currently have Family Promise in its area to consider partnering with other churches to start an affiliate.”

Family Promise provides homeless families with more than a place to stay. According to its website, Family Promise is a national movement whose mission is to help homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response.

### Homelessness in Wichita

During the 2017-18 school year, schools in the greater Wichita area provided services to nearly 2,500 children without a permanent nighttime address, according to FPGW executive director Stacia Thompson, who says the number is likely double when factoring in children ages 0-4 and others who are transient and not attending school.

It’s difficult to gather accurate statistics on homelessness in Wichita, Thompson says, as statistics do not always paint an accurate picture and can downplay the need. According to Wichita’s 2019 Point in Time count, for which social service providers count the homeless in a community on one day, using a narrow definition of homelessness excluding those staying in motels, “couch surfing,” or staying with friends, Thompson says. The count reported 593 homeless persons, an increase of 20 people from 2018.

“Those of us that work in this arena know that the numbers are much, much higher,” Thompson says. “It’s just that the counting systems used are so flawed and the way the government keeps changing the official definition of homeless skews the numbers so it looks like the problem is decreasing, but it really isn’t.”



Every November, First MB Church gives 100 percent of one Sunday offering to several ministries they support. This past year, First MB gave \$35,000 to Family Promise Greater Wichita. Pictured, from left to right, is Carrie Corliss, Family Promise Greater Wichita board president; Ella Corliss, her daughter; Sara Froese, First MB FP coordinator; Stacia Thompson, executive director; and Linda Oelze, FMBC director of community impact. *Photo: Katy Penner*

### From classroom to guest room

First MB first became involved with FPGW in spring of 2018 and hosted its first three families last December in Phase 2 of FPGW’s three-phase process.

In Phase 1, FPGW assists families with urgent needs for homelessness prevention. Phase 2 is the Rotation Program, in which families are housed and fed by congregations like First MB, then transported to a Day House for customized case management. In Phase 3, families who have graduated from the Rotation Program receive mentoring.

To prepare for a week of hosting, First MB volunteers converted four kids’ classrooms into guest rooms and a fifth room into a family room, with a nearby kitchen and bathroom. Volunteers laundered bedding, did meal prep, planned activities and served as dinner or overnight hosts.

For a typical week of hosting, families arrive for a meal and orientation on Sunday evening. Then, each morning after breakfast, volunteers transport families to the Day House—a house with furnished living areas, a kitchen, office

spaces, a playroom, showers and laundry facilities.

For its December hosting, First MB volunteers created a festive atmosphere, and invited families to attend one of the church’s Christmas Eve services.

“We had a lit, decorated Christmas tree in each of the guests’ rooms as well as our family room,” Oelze says. “There were stockings on the doors and gifts under the tree on Christmas morning for each family member. We shared a large meal on Christmas evening, complete with crystal, china, candles and music. The families said they felt like royalty.”

### A vivid, daily reminder

“Guests have a vivid, daily reminder that there are people who care about them and want to walk alongside them in this difficult season,” Oelze says. “There are people committed to help them realize their hopes and dreams.”

First MB averages 60 volunteers per week of hosting, an effort coordinated by Oelze and Sara Froese, First MB Family Promise coordinator. Oelze says 94 people from First MB have attended the required Family Promise training.

Families are referred to Family Promise or may self-refer. To be considered, families must meet certain criteria and commit to the program, after which an in-depth interview determines placement. The program is funded by donors, including individuals, businesses and congregations.

In 2018, FPGW served 20 families, and 71 percent of families in the Rotation Program achieved housing.

Three families First MB has hosted have graduated from the program, Oelze says, including a family of five, whose story Oelze, Froese and Thompson have narrated.

## A family transformation

The family—a father, mother and three elementary age children—came from out of state for a job that did not work out. Far from family and without the means to return, the family resorted to sleeping in a park. A Family Promise volunteer overheard the family discussing their situation at a local McDonald's and suggested they give Family Promise a call. They did, completed the interview process and were brought into the program.

The father found a job, the kids enrolled in school and the mother began studying for her GED and connected with medical providers to help her chronic health issues.

Through Family Promise, the family achieved their case management goals, found housing, saved 80 percent of their income for a nest egg through Family Promise's savings match program, developed a sustainable budget, were approved to receive a free car through Family Promise's vehicle donation program and received household items and furniture through donations from volunteers.

Since their graduation, the family now volunteers for Family Promise.

"The mom recently attended a couple of Family Promise events, and some volunteers didn't recognize her because her entire countenance had changed," Oelze, Froese and Thompson write. "She now walks with her head held high, makes eye contact with people and has seen her physical health improve tremendously. It has been a joy and a privilege for all of us to witness this transformation in the entire family."

First MB hosted its second families in March and most recently hosted families June 23-30. The church will host families again in September and December.

"Many in our church have such a concern for the homeless but feel so unequipped to help or clueless as to where to begin," Oelze says. "Family Promise avails us the opportunity to be a part of the solution while sometimes providing a glimpse into a culture outside of our own. We often liken it to having a mission trip within the church. We have found serving in Family Promise to be a great deterrent of perpetuating stereotypes and judgmental attitudes."

The church is committed to serving families through FPGW.

"At First MB, we want to continue to raise the awareness of needs, more ways to engage and generate enthusiasm, and recruit more volunteers within our congregation," Oelze says. "Our hope is to continue to be a hosting congregation while we trust God for new (and) additional ways to partner with and support Family Promise." —*Janae Rempel*

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# Pushing forward

LEAD Coaching was just what I needed

I entered LEAD Coaching with some hesitancy. A year later, I'm thrilled to say it was just what I needed.

My coach was Ed Boschman, and we started by going through a couple different personal evaluation tools. While this was my least favorite part of the process, it identified some strengths and weaknesses. Next, we jumped into evaluating my "life plan." This looked at my passions and core values and practical things such as planning an ideal week.

This was much more beneficial and helped me put on paper many things that had been rattling around in my brain. It has been very helpful to refer back to my plan for an ideal week. Because in ministry the weeks are always fluid, seeing an ideal plan has helped keep me on track. It was also helpful to write down my vision statement and core values, which helped focus my overall time and energy.

Next, we dove into practical ways to make sure things don't fall through the cracks in my life. I always have known that I struggle to "get things done" and reading David Allen's *Getting Things Done* was especially helpful. I have gained tools to combat my natural struggle with dropping the ball. I now have a systematic plan for dealing with tasks as they come to me. I have put in place numerous strategies to juggle my responsibilities and make sure I'm following up on necessary things. I still have a lot of room to grow here, but I'm thankful for much growth in the past 12 months.

From here, we jumped back to my ministry vision. This was by far my favorite section. This is what I enjoy doing and working through this with Ed gave me the tools to work with more clarity, more focus and more strategies for implementing a vision. Patrick Lenceoni's *The Advantage* was very helpful with overall vision planning and *Making Vision Stick* by Andy Stanley was huge in helping me work on

getting vision to stick. This section became the impetus for our church's vision planning and has proved most helpful in moving us toward a more focused and Spirit-filled future. I will forever be grateful for what I took away from this section of the coaching.

The final section may not have held the glitz and glamour of the previous section, but it was the nuts and bolts needed to keep our vision planning on track, and I believe it will be very helpful in the future. Vision planning is natural for me, but actually driving that forward to results is the more difficult part. This section kept me focused and taught me how to clarify vision and put together a real plan to implement it. During this time, we also talked through making time and space to engage those far from God and to have a strategy for increasing my personal evangelism. This has been very helpful.

Through this entire time, the thing I've valued the most has been building a relationship with Ed. Not just a friendship but rather coming to know there is a godly and gifted leader who is fighting for me and willing to invest in me. This has been huge in pushing me forward in ministry and life. I am so grateful for Ed and this time we've had together.

As I look back on the last 12 months, I'm amazed to see what all we've covered and what God has taught me. I'm amazed to see how God has carried me through the goals I set early on. Our church now has a discipleship and spiritual growth track and a vision and plan for multiplication. Personally, I have a plan for personal outreach and have implemented a plan to eliminate areas where I drop the ball.

While none of the areas of focus were new to me, I'm amazed at how being a part of LEAD Coaching has helped me to simply and clearly address these areas. I'm so grateful for this ministry and grateful I got to be part of it. ■



Jeremy Jordan has served as the lead pastor of Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., since 2012. Prior to that, he was the church's associate pastor for two years. Jeremy and his wife, Amy, live in Edmond with their five children.

## The day of small things

God is with Redemption Church in its ministry

In the Old Testament, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai for Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua the high priest that the time had come to rebuild the temple. Living in their paneled houses, the people of Judah had allowed the Lord's house to fall into ruin, so the Lord was calling them to, "Think carefully about your ways" (Haggai 1:7).

"As they began the labor of building, the Lord's promise to his people was, '... be strong and work, for I am with you!' (Haggai 2:4).

As the temple was forming, the people of Judah recognized that the new temple was "like nothing by comparison" to the former temple (Haggai 2:3). It seemed small and insignificant. So, through the prophet Zechariah, the Lord told Zerubbabel, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6) will the temple be built.

Then the Lord asked the people, "For who despises the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10). Despite its lack of size and grandeur, the rebuilding of the temple was going to be accomplished in the power and strength of the Lord, not through the capability or ingenuity of the people. The Lord's exhortation was, "Don't spurn what I am doing."

In a North American culture that celebrates the big and strong, the powerful and mighty, it's easy for us to "despise the day of small things" and to focus our celebration on the glory of the mighty and the impressiveness of the weighty. And yet, dotted across the landscape of the United States, we have little gospel outposts ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching the good news of Jesus and advancing God's kingdom.

Owatonna, Minn., is home to one such gospel outpost, Redemption Church. Planted in 2018 by Christian Kohs, the

church plant is a partnership between Multiply and our Mennonite Brethren tribe. Since September 2018, Redemption Church has seen 16 people make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the waters of baptism.

"Since coming to Redemption," says Taylor, "my life has changed dramatically with the teaching of Christian and the family at the church. My relationship with the Lord has grown so much. My Home Group has been there with me through some pretty tough times. I'm blessed to be part of this group."

Don't despise the day of small things! "I started attending Redemption as a hard-line atheist," says Sebastian. "For many years, I held a very low view of the Christian faith, and how nominal Christians conducted their lives, given that nominal Christianity is what I had generally been exposed to. However, the people of Redemption stood out. I had never been exposed to a community that was so fully devoted to Jesus, living their lives to show honor and glory to him. People were open about the harder things in life, people loved one another, women were treated and talked about with honor, and Jesus was always glorified."

Don't despise the day of small things! In Haggai 2:4, the Lord tells Zerubbabel and the people, "Be strong... this is the Lord's declaration. Work! For I am with you!" God is present with Redemption Church. He is present in the life of all churches that proclaim his glory and declare his good news. When God orders a project to be done, he always does his part. It is for the family of God at Redemption Church to be strong and do their part. He is with this small gospel outpost and he will fill it with his glory. For this reason, and this reason alone, do not despise the day of small things. God is working! ▀



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.



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

# Longing for community

Incarnational community feeds our hungry souls

One of the most emotionally charged moments in all of my life occurred in the early evening of Dec. 5, 2018. My wife, Esther, and I were returning home to Dell Rapids, S.D., from a Thanksgiving holiday which was grievously extended by a tragic event.

It is rare to have our four grown children together, but this was the year everyone's schedules aligned: Craig from Alaska; Matt, wife Terra and their children, Inessa and Elijah, from Washington; Melinda from Iowa and Tanya from Kansas. Our time at my mom's home in Hutchinson, Kan., was filled with relatives, turkey, table games, laughter and football games. Esther asked for professional family pictures as an early Christmas present, little knowing how much we would treasure these pictures.

Wednesday we said our goodbyes to Tanya, who had to work Thursday. She loved being one of the main cooks at a nursing home in Beloit, Kan., and looked forward to making sure they had a great Thanksgiving. Less than four months earlier, Tanya had lost her husband, Dan, to a sudden heart attack. She was still grieving but was enjoying family and looking forward to Christmas. It had been good to have her with us and hard to say goodbye as she headed home.

Sunday morning's forecast was for a winter snow storm with blizzard conditions. The Beloit region experienced whiteout conditions, precipitating road closures and causing numerous accidents. Tanya's typical 5 a.m. commute from her home in Cawker City to Beloit was 20 miles, and we encouraged her to consider staying home.

Monday morning when she didn't come into work, her boss contacted members of Dan's family. Family members checked her apartment and found it empty and her car gone. Checking with one of her co-

workers, they learned Tanya had called Sunday to say that the roads were icy, and she was going to turn around and go home. But she didn't make it home. After the storm passed Monday the highway patrol found her empty car at the bottom of a steep embankment a mile and a half from her home. Two days of searching for her with helicopters, law enforcement officers, canine units and 60 volunteers on foot, horseback and ATVs ended when I stood with the sheriff and identified her body, found three miles from the car. It appeared she left the car to walk home but then tried to return to the car. The sheriff speculated that she missed the car due to the zero visibility, became lost and perished.

The soul-numbing days that followed were filled with planning a funeral service and rearranging flight plans and job schedules. We were consoled by the many friends and family who were able to attend the services and received numerous cards, phone calls, Facebook messages, texts and prayers from those unable to attend.

On Wednesday, Dec. 5, Esther and I left Craig and Matt's family at the Kansas City airport, and we were alone, driving back to Dell Rapids. We moved to Dell Rapids a couple of years ago from Sioux Falls. We like small town living, and for my role as the Central District Conference minister, it's conveniently located near I-29 and I-90. I can reach all of the churches in the Central District Conference in a day's drive. We have easy access to an airport and our five Sioux Falls churches are within 30 minutes. Dell Rapids is where my office and the CDC files reside, but our house sits empty over half the year as we're on the road nearly every weekend. We often say Dell Rapids is "where our stuff lives."



Rick Eshbaugh serves as the Central District Conference minister. Eshbaugh, a 1985 graduate of MB Biblical Seminary, has also served as a USMB pastor in Oklahoma, Kansas, Washington, Oregon and North Dakota and with Church Resource Ministries as part of the national reFocusing team.

See VANTAGE, page 30

## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/ MEMBERSHIP

Preston Kalma, Allie Smith, Val Mayoral, CJ Beckstead, Aidan Turteltaub, Chelise Draper and Jon Draper were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church**, South Jordan (Utah) Campus, June 2.

Bob Walker and Joy Walker were received as members at **Garden Valley Church**, Garden City, Kan., May 26.

Maya Lewis and Anthony Bunch were baptized at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**, May 19. Genevieve Ochoa and Kyle Yoder were baptized and received as members April 21. Greg Akin, Tim Geddert, Gertrud Geddert, Beth Hunt, Bruce Porter, Janice Porter and Kevin Reifman were also received as members.

Jaime Holdaway, Gen Stewart, Kiana Muramoto, Jody Tripp, Carson Brown and Jennifer Sosa were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church**, Draper (Utah) Campus May 19. Amy Wilde, Anna Wille, Teara Manzanares, Elise Barrus and Amanda Johnson were baptized March 24.

Grayson Ratzlaff and Brandon Garcia were baptized at **Parkview MB Church**, Hillsboro, Kan., May 19.

Elizabeth Fassel, John Dodd, Krista Young, London Solomon, Marshall Simmons, Samantha Daugherty, Scarlet Daugherty, Shelby Aiono and TC Turner were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church**, St. George (Utah) Campus May 5.

Coltin King, Zander Bennett and Harmony Beery were baptized at **Valleyview Bible Church**, Cimarron, Kan., May 1.

Cale Brakeman, Sean Loya, Jenny Meadors, Ella Meadors and Grant Meadors were baptized at **Laurelglen Bible Church**, Bakersfield, Calif., April 28. Andrew Grace, Katie Grace, Jack Grimm, Patty Grimm, Jason Meadors, Jenny Meadors, Cam Smith, Corwin Thompson and Deana Thompson were received as members April 14. Kevin Morrison was baptized March 31.

Marisa Rios was baptized at **Neighborhood Church**, Visalia, Calif.

Six people were baptized at **Redemption Church**, Owatonna, Minn., April 21.

Ella Hurst, Mariah Burris and Ashtyn Wichert

were baptized and received as members at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** April 21. Ashlyn Bingham, MacKenzie Smith, Maria Averill, Keeley Carpenter, Allye Haile and Mikala Cornelsen were baptized.

Ray O'Neil, Bonnie O'Neil, Kao Saelee and a 10-year-old girl were received as members at **Butler Church**, Fresno, Calif., April 21. The young girl was also baptized.

Tony Denesha and Sarah Denesha were received as members at **Heritage Bible Church**, Bakersfield, Calif., April 21. Russell Reynolds was received as a member March 24.

Reesa Warkentin was baptized and received as a member at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church** April 14.

Tiffany Chrisman was baptized at **Bible MB Church**, Cordell, Okla., April 7.

Genevieve Hinde, Alejandro Janas-Alvarez and Joshua Janas were baptized at **Garden Valley Church**, Garden City, Kan., March 31.

Aaron Abbott, Hayley Abbott, Jay Fletcher, Sheri Fletcher, Ryan Johnson and Molly Johnson were received as members at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church**, March 3.

### DEATHS

**Essman, Greg**, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Sept. 15, 1969—Feb. 27, 2019. Parents: Jack and Treva (Stroud) Essman. Spouse: Rachel Essman. Children: Alexis Essman, Britney Essman, Caitlin Essman, David Essman; two grandchildren.

**Faul, LaVella Seibel Hirschhorn**, Harvey, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, March 5, 1925—May 8, 2019. Parents: Samuel and Marie (Zelmer) Seibel. Spouse: Delmer Hirschhorn (deceased), Jake Faul (deceased). Children: Larry Hirschhorn, Gloriann Shocklee. Step-children: Ron Faul, Marvin Faul, Carol Reimche, Doretta Wiebe, Penny Sauter; three grandchildren, one great-grandchild, many step-grandchildren and several step-great-grandchildren.

**Faul, Rosene Lavern**, Hurdsfield, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., Feb. 6, 1942—Jan. 25, 2019. Parents: Leonard and Martha (Buchwitz) Knutson. Spouse: Bill Faul. Children: Mark, Lori Yoder, Susan Sieler; eight grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, five step-great-grandchildren.

**Gardner, Lillian Fern**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church and former pastor's wife, Dec. 1, 1937—May 21, 2019. Parents: Morris and Anna Feuers Johnson. Spouse: Ken Gardner. Children: Doug, Midnite Flanagan.

**Gerbrandt, Joanne**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Jan. 30, 1943—Sept. 20, 2018. Parents: Wilferd and Ellen (Walker) Luck. Spouse: Gary Gerbrandt. Children: Julie Rey, Amy Wiley; two grandchildren.

**Goodner, Charlotte**, Grand Ronde Indian Reservation, Ore., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, July 2, 1923—Nov. 29, 2018. Parents: Oney and Lela (Grant) Rhoades. Spouse: Clifford Goodner, deceased. Children: Merri Monke-meier, Emily Doss, Dwight; eight grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

**Hiebert, Max**, Ulysses, Kan., member of Korer Heights Church, Newton, Kan., formerly of New Life Church (formerly Ulysses (Kan.) MB), Feb. 6, 1938—May 12, 2019. Parents: John and Edith (Mehl) Hiebert. Spouse: Donna Wilkerson. Children: Terri Cantrell, William (deceased); two grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

**Isaac, Laura Louise**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, March 8, 1931—May 3, 2019. Parents: Henry and Katherine (Thiessen) Buhler. Spouse: Vernon Isaac, deceased. Children: Rodney, Daniel (deceased), Stanley; 11 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren.

**Javorsky, Carolyn**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, July 21, 1941—May 18, 2019. Parents: John W. and Pauline Gossen. Spouse: Kenneth Javorsky, deceased. Children: Cathy Javorsky, Keith, Kenton, Sandra (deceased), Karrie (deceased); six grandchildren.

**Just, Marvin Jr.**, Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Nov. 19, 1935—March 24, 2019. Parents: Marvin Sr., and Emma (Unruh) Just. Spouse: Tips Just. Children: Cindy Carter, Steve, Kari Kirkwood, Jeff; 12 grandchildren.

**Klassen, Ethel**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Aug. 7, 1918—Feb. 2, 2019. Parents: Herbert and Marie (Wiens) Entz. Spouse: Jacob Klassen Jr., deceased. Children: Ken, Elaine Boggess, Howard (deceased); four grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

**Klassen, Lucille Irene**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Jan. 8, 1923—May 19, 2019. Parents: Carl and Lizzie (Litke) Leppke. Spouse: Jacob D. Klassen, de-

ceased. Children: Judith Harris, Jolene Loewen, Joetta Whitcomb, Dennis (deceased); eight grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

**Kliewer, Alvina**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, July 11, 1931—April 9, 2019. Parents: Peter J. and Agnes (Loewen) Friesen. Spouse: Lowell Kliewer. Children: Nancy Weis, Jerry, James, Wayne; eight grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Kusch, Nancy**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, April 21, 1942—March 23, 2019. Parents: Roland and MaryAnn (Fleming) Rempel. Spouse: Roger Kusch. Children: Ron, Greg; three grandchildren.

**Liedtke, Betty Hofer**, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, Aug. 20, 1932—April 23, 2019. Parents: Edward James and Lizzie Luella (Braland) Dietz. Spouse: Laurel Liedtke (deceased), Otis Parmely (deceased), Jacob M. Hofer (deceased). Children: Terry (deceased), Karen Bell, Tim, Colleen Jark; 12 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren.

**Litke, Phyllis Rose**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., Sept. 24, 1930—April 25, 2019. Parents: Jacob B. and Agnes (Thiessen) Wiens. Spouse: Virgil Litke, deceased. Children: Sharon (deceased), Glenn, Brenda Jordan, Sid; nine grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

**Litke, Virgil Gene**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., Oct. 12, 1926—April 16, 2019. Parents: William W. and Elizabeth (Buller) Litke. Spouse: Phyllis Wiens. Children: Sharon (deceased), Glenn, Brenda Jordan, Sid; nine grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

**Magner, Merle**, Bellingham, Wash., member of Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash., Dec. 4, 1928—Aug. 10, 2018. Parents: Earl and Laura Magner. Spouse: Martha Magner. Children: Laura Johnson, Kathy Cramer, Nancy Willert.

**Maurer, Ivan L.**, Reedley, Calif., member of Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church, April 4, 1920—April 18, 2019. Spouse: Marjorie Race, deceased. Children:

Lyle (deceased), Twyla Pauls, Lenette Burckhart, Ellis, Elaine Wiens, Michael; nine grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren.

**Patzkowsky, Lavina Ruth**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Sept. 22, 1930—May 15, 2019. Parents: Tena Kroecker and Cornelius H. Ediger. Spouse: Raymond, deceased. Children: Susan Foster, Merle, Laura Margerum; nine grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

**Penner, Namie (Hook)**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Nov. 9, 1926—April 15, 2019. Parents: Otto and Elizabeth "Lizzie" (Warkentine) Hook. Spouse: Art Penner, deceased. Children: Jim, Pam Scanlon; three grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

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

**Quintanilla, Greg**, Orange Cove, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 12, 1928—March 13, 2019. Parents: Genaro and Cruz (Elizondo) Quintanilla. Spouse: Alicia Quintanilla; Concepcion Quintanilla (deceased). Children: Angel, Luis, Adolfo (deceased), Fred; five grandchildren.

**Quiring, Miriam**, Aurora, Neb., member of Henderson (Neb.) MB Church, Aug. 13, 1930—May 21, 2019. Parents: Abraham H. and Elizabeth (Braun) Regier. Spouse: Henry H. Quiring, deceased. Children: Connie Travis, Joyce Nielsen, Gaylene Grosshans; four grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

**Ratzlaff, Vernice**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Dec. 20, 1937—March 18, 2019. Parents: David and Helen Kornelsen Ratzlaff.

**Reimer, Winfred Denver**, Bellingham, Wash., member of Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash., June 26, 1921—April 7, 2019. Par-

ents: Dietrich Cornelius and Nellie (Voth) Reimer. Spouse: Alyce Reimer. Children: Ron, Kent, Glen, LeAnn Clement; 10 grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

**Roberts, Dwight**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 11, 1929—Dec. 17, 2018. Parents: Virgil and Naomi (Miller) Roberts. Spouse: Verna Roberts. Children: Craig, Sheila Lester; four grandchildren.

**Saltzman, H. Rae**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Aug. 12, 1925—Feb. 10, 2019. Parents: Harold and Myrtle (Streen) Saltzman. Spouse: Marj. Children: Mark, Scott, Ted; six grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren.

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

**Siemens, Nick**, Reedley, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Oct. 13, 1923—March 16, 2019. Parents: John K. and Helena (Pankratz) Siemens. Spouse: Ruth Huebert (deceased), Dorothy Jean Van Meter Douglas (deceased). Children: Kenneth (deceased), Dale, Glenn; nine grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren.

**Toews, Joel Gerald**, Enid, Okla., member of Enid MB Church, Dec. 1, 1922—April 17, 2019. Parents: Susana Regier and Abraham G. Toews. Spouse: Anna Lula Voth, deceased. Children: Douglas, Darryl (deceased), Randall (deceased), Sandra Roberts, Lori Dallavo; 10 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

**Tschetter, Ellen Mae**, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, June 3, 1928—April 18, 2019. Parents: Albert M. and Mary (Epp) Schmidt. Spouse: Willard Tschetter. Children: Gerald, Bradley; three grandchildren.

**Woelper, Peter**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 4, 1938—April 13, 2019. Parents: Ernst and Erna (Meyer) Woelper. Spouse: Kathie Woelper. Children: Pete, Eric; six grandchildren.

## South Mountain Community Church West Jordan Campus closes

When South Mountain Community Church in Utah closed one of its six campuses, another campus got a new home. With the closing of its West Jordan (Utah) Campus, SMCC's International Campus, which formerly met in Draper, has moved into the space. Meanwhile, West Jordan attendees have transitioned to the South Jordan Campus seven miles away.

West Jordan was initially a church plant launched in 2003 under the name Shadow Mountain Community Church. In 2015, the congregation voted to become a SMCC campus. When West Jordan ex-

perienced struggles three years later, SMCC decided it best to encourage people to begin attending the South Jordan Campus, says SMCC lead pastor Paul Robie. The South Jordan Campus has now doubled in size, while SMCC's Spanish-speaking International Campus has begun using the West Jordan location.

"The building we own in West Jordan has had a few different signs out front," Robie says. "But SMCC has had a commitment to the community and kingdom expansion there for a long time."

## CLEARINGHOUSE

### Local Church Openings

**Pastor:** Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., is seeking a full-time pastor who will be responsible for leading the congregation in its mission to “Gather, Grow, Go.” Ebenfeld is committed to an Anabaptist-evangelical theology as articulated in the MB Confession of Faith. To apply, please send a resume to [search@ebenfeld.org](mailto:search@ebenfeld.org)

**Pastor of Worship/Family Ministries:** Shafter MB Church is currently in the search process for a full-time pastor of worship and family ministries. The community of approximately 20,000 is located in the southern San Joaquin Valley of California, 10 miles northwest of Bakersfield. Responsibilities include overseeing and implementing blended worship services as well as family ministry programs. A full job description and additional information is available at [www.shaftermb.org/pastoralposition](http://www.shaftermb.org/pastoralposition)

**Associate Pastor:** Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., is seeking a full-time associate pastor with responsibilities for 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 a 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](mailto:jimwanke@rosedalebiblechurch.com). A full job description is available at [rosedalebiblechurch.com](http://rosedalebiblechurch.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](http://www.enidmb.com) or email to [emb-searchteam@gmail.com](mailto:emb-searchteam@gmail.com)

### 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](http://www.dba-search.com) or contact Ron Infinger at [ron@dba-search.com](mailto:ron@dba-search.com).

From TESTIMONY, page 9

paint a mural. We also sent \$1,700 to Kapchorwa to purchase land on which to build their orphanage, and brought additional money with us to purchase cows to provide milk for Kapchorwa children.

We brought an adult tricycle for an 11-year-old boy with a lame leg. As an infant, he received a shot in his sciatic nerve while being treated for malaria. For two years I’d prayed we could get him a bike. He’s had surgery now and is pain free. We’re helping him get physical therapy.

Equipped with a glasses kit containing 500 frames from Multiply—the MB ministry which facilitates church planting locally, nationally and globally—we also held three days of vision clinics, providing screenings and giving away free glasses. It was the perfect opportunity to share our faith.

GodWill Ministries is growing and now has 501(c)3 status with a board in place. Often in my prayers, I ask God to show me where he wants me to use the money. After all, God has, God does and “GodWill.”

From VANTAGE, page 27

Getting to know people in Dell Rapids is hard since we do not have children in school and haven’t joined any clubs or organizations. Our list of people we know in Dell Rapids is short and no one knew of our loss.

So, when the garage door shut behind us, we felt not only grief but a deep sense of loss and loneliness for community. There would be no one bringing us a casserole or giving us a hug in the aisles of our Dell Rapids hardware store. The cashier at the local grocery store would look over us to the next customer not knowing the anguish of our souls.

This experience causes me to reflect on how we are to make disciples as Jesus instructs in Matthew 28. I am convinced that it must be done in community. Not just any community but an incarnational, in the flesh, life on life, local community that intentionally seeks to be like Christ.

This type of community is what we seek in our USMB vision statement for “each local Mennonite Brethren church to reach its full, God-given ministry potential within the framework of our evangelical and Anabaptist distinctives.” This is a pretty

high standard—to intentionally structure our faith communities to be evangelistic, transparent, vulnerable, codependent, disciple-making communities, modeling and calling out the next generation, which cannot be accomplished without the gifts and presence of the Holy Spirit.

This faith community is fluid. The cast of characters will change constantly. Not only because of new growth, but also because of death and life transitions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans will move 11.4 times in their lifetime. In 2017, 11 percent of the population moved and of those who moved, 34 percent moved to different cities.

This means we need to have our eyes and hearts open for those who are also transitioning from one faith community to another.

With my ministry, it will always be difficult to participate in a local church. We realize that our choice of living in a community where we are unknown created a vacuum within our souls. We need to be a part of an incarnational, in the flesh, life on life, local community intentionally seeking to be like Christ.

## We value life

How do we demonstrate our support for human life?

According to a recent CBN News report, New York state leaders have determined through The Reproductive Health Act, which passed with a 38-28 vote, that it's now legal in certain circumstances to end the life of human babies in the final trimester of pregnancy even when a baby could be viable. I can think of few things that make me shudder more than this. In fact, for me it is sickening.

Our MB Confession of Faith says this about life: "God values human life highly. Ultimate decisions regarding life and death belong to God. Therefore, we hold that procedures designed to take life, including abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide, are an affront to God's sovereignty." We value life that God has created, especially human life which he made in his image.

According to a 1972 amendment to federal law, destroying one bald eagle egg before it hatches carries potential penalties of a maximum of two years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. I'm all for protecting bald eagles. But it is unreal that to destroy one eagle egg carries this kind of penalty, yet a human baby can be killed, and it is heralded by some. What has become of us as a nation when we tolerate this kind of insanity? How can we expect God to bless us as a nation when we have this atrocity as a testament of our collective behavior?

Allow me to be clear: I know there are those reading this who have had an abortion. I also know that God does not condemn you for this as you seek him, and I certainly am not going to condemn you either. Sometimes we make choices that are extremely difficult. I would be concerned that if you are troubled about a past action that you find peace about this, as I know God wants you to experience peace. If you are reading this and contemplating having an abortion, please, please do not do this. This is a precious life God has created and he or she has much value in God's eyes.

As our confession says, "Each person is created in the image of God and ought to

be celebrated and nurtured." This includes those with terminal illnesses, the elderly and those with extreme disabilities. All human life belongs to God.

What can we do as Christians in a nation that not only allows abortion but even helps fund it? One of the best questions we can ask is: Why do women seek abortions? Pro-life proponent and author Angie Weszely writes, "At this time [when pregnant and fearful of the future], women feel incredibly alone and isolated. They can only hear and internalize messages that help them resolve their fear of loss of self. This emotional barrier makes women facing an unwanted pregnancy largely incapable of hearing appeals to sacrifice their identities to save the child."

Women in these situations need our support as the church. The lack of resources and practical support can make a woman feel as if she needs to choose between abortion or resigning herself to struggle as a mother. But support can break the power of hopelessness and change the way a woman sees her future—and the future of her child. Knowing there are resources available and people who will support her through her pregnancy and beyond can make all the difference. Are we willing to get involved? If we really do want to help alleviate abortions, then we must help provide answers.

Weszely adds, "Sure, the politics around abortion seem to be at a stalemate. But maybe this will force us as Christians to ask God for a solution that accurately reflects his heart." This reflects our confession of faith as well. We collectively say, "In all complex ethical decisions regarding life and death, we seek to offer hope and healing, support and counsel in the context of the Christian community."

So, the next time I'm appalled by our national stance concerning the ending of life via abortion, I should pause and reflect about what we—I—can do to help offer hope, healing and a different path—a path of preserving life.■



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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