

# CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022

TECHNOLOGY ■ CONNECTION



Help! We're  
surrounded  
14

USMB Gathering 2022  
highlights evangelism  
20

Summer camp offers  
new perspective  
26

## A new look

### CL review team recommendations implemented



I am in the process of getting new glasses. There are a couple of reasons for making the change. I definitely need a new prescription, and my current glasses aren't very comfortable. I'm not crazy about these glasses and am ready for something new. Once when my vision changed, I loved my glasses and didn't want to make a change. So, I kept the frames and ordered new lenses. It didn't take long for these cherished frames to look tired, and I regretted not updating both the prescription and the frames.

This issue marks a change for the *Christian Leader*. We've tweaked our content and refreshed the appearance for reasons similar to why someone gets new glasses. Our editorial perspective has changed

and the "frame" of our magazine—the design—will benefit from an update as well. This redesign reflects several changes the magazine is undergoing due to six recommendations made in late 2021 by the CL Review Team.

A significant change to our editorial vision is that a six-member Editorial Committee is selecting feature department themes, identifying specific topics within that theme and selecting writers to address those topics. This issue is the first to reflect this committee's work. Putting together this collection of essays on technology and the church showed us that to collectively make these decisions, these volunteers will be regularly meeting by Zoom and exchanging an abundance of emails. They will draw on their creativity and expand their familiarity with potential writers within our USMB constituency. We are still figuring out how best to make decisions as an editorial team and anticipate that meeting in-person in early 2023 will prepare us to work together more efficiently.

This redesign is also intended to help us better implement the purpose of the *Christian Leader*, as stated by the CL Review Team:

- Draw our churches together: connecting/informing/celebrating/telling stories/news
- Disciple our constituency within the Confession of Faith: inspiring people for action
- Direct our USMB family toward a unified vision: focusing on our three core commitments/mission

The Editorial Committee selected two new columns that we hope will connect and inform us as U.S. Mennonite Brethren and as members of a global church: the Church Spotlight column (p 5) that we expect will help us appreciate the diversity of USMB congregations and Around the World, a column that will introduce us to national conferences that are part of the global Mennonite Brethren community (p 9).

Just as I might need to have the nose pads and temples adjusted as I break-in my new glasses, readers might need some time to become comfortable with these changes. And, the editors and designer might fine-tune these "glasses" by which we communicate the USMB vision and stories of local churches and our shared ministries. We hope you enjoy this new view.

Connie Faber, Editor



# Table of Contents



20



17

*"God anointed me—  
a poor refugee in a  
country not my own—  
and gave me his Word  
to preach."*

## FEATURES

**10** **How's the connection?**  
Three questions to ask about  
churches and technology  
By Chris Bennett

**12** **Virtual worship**  
Discerning what the metaverse  
means for the church  
By Matt Ehresman

**14** **Help! We're surrounded**  
Seven ideas for reducing  
kids' screen time

## ONLINE EXTRAS

**The digital soul**  
By Josh Shaw

**Reluctant enthusiast**  
By Megan Kinney

**Grappling generations**  
CL Interview

## COLUMNS

**2** **Editorial**  
Connie Faber

**4** **From the national  
director**  
Don Morris

**5** **Church Spotlight**  
Boone MB Church

**9** **Around the World**  
Disciples of Christ  
Kyrgyzstan

**17** **Testimony**  
God anointed me  
By Alex Mutabazi

**18** **Frontlines**  
Detail oriented  
By Stuart J. Curry

**19** **Mission & Ministry**  
Learning in partnerships  
goes both ways

## DEPARTMENTS

**6** **News in Brief**

**8** **5 Minutes With...**  
Bob Delk

**20** **BodyLife**  
• USMB Gathering  
2022  
• Ascent Camp

**28** **Church Life**





**As I reflected with God about ministry and what he would have me do in the near future, I was instilled with a sense of awe and honor that I have the privilege of serving this wonderful Creator**

## God knows me!

The Creator of galaxies, oceans talks with us

This summer my wife, Janna, and I were blessed to experience a seven-day cruise to the eastern Caribbean. We enjoyed wonderful food, including a very special meal for her birthday, ice skating shows, a musical, a comedian/magician and relaxing in the sun. There were island excursions as well. It was a great time.

One of the most valuable times for me was enjoying the small balcony off our room, which faced the sea. We were 14 floors up from the ocean, so the view was magnificent. I spent many hours on that balcony, looking out at the vast ocean, being reminded of the vast greatness of God and his creation. At night, the constellations of stars burst into view, reminding me how small I am in comparison to what God has created.

I found it to be a time when it was easy to pray, as God's presence seemed to be an integral part of the whole scene in front of me. Psalm 8:1 came to mind: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens."

The day we were on one island for a shore excursion started off sunny and beautiful. With our toes in the sand, we noticed storm clouds forming in the distance, and so we began making our way back to the trams that would take us back to the ship. However, the storm came suddenly and there was a cloudburst of rain. We—and many others—were absolutely drenched, shaking under flimsy towels as we tried to keep rain off our faces. The towels were of little help.

It reminded me of how quickly things can turn from seemingly perfect to exceedingly dismal. Psalm 135:7 says, "He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses." Although storms do come, God is still present. He sees us through the storm.

On this occasion, Janna and I just walked back to the ship through the rain—a fair jaunt. We decided the storm didn't have to ruin our day. So, smiling and giggling, we trudged back and were oh so glad to be back where it was dry.

On the island of St. Thomas, I had the opportunity to snorkel. I had some trouble because the equipment wasn't very good, but I was able to do enough to observe some interesting sea life. Small squid squirted through the water in front of me. Coral seemed to come alive. Small, colorful fish swam in schools. God's creative beauty was again on display, an underwater contrast to the beautiful vastness of the stars in the sky.

There were so many reminders on this trip about the marvelous God we serve.

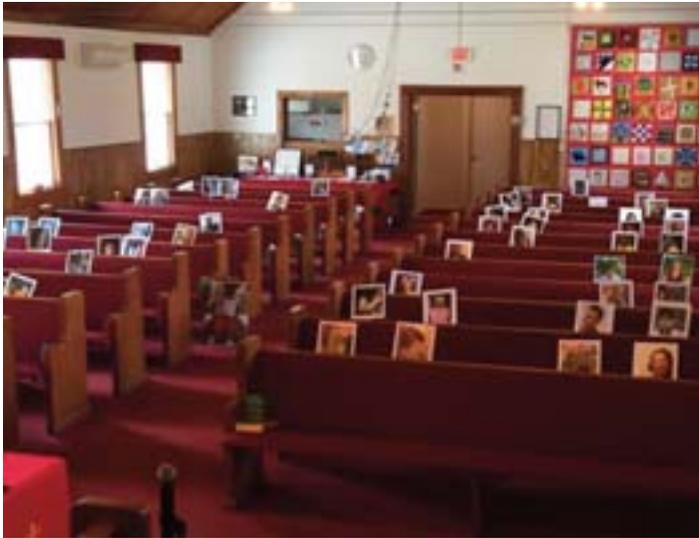
As I reflected with God about ministry and what he would have me do in the near future, I was instilled with a sense of awe and honor that I have the privilege of serving this wonderful Creator, the one who made all the things that had so moved me in recent days.

The one who created the massive galaxies and the smallest coral was speaking with me about life, my life. How amazing that he desires such an intimate, detailed relationship with me—and you.

"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me" (Psalm 139:1).



**Don Morris**  
don@usmb.org



## Boone MB Church

Boone, North Carolina • Established 1918  
Eastern District Conference • Attendance: 50  
Pastor Michael Mathes



**Our congregation in three words:**  
*Faith, Foundation, Fellowship*

**How can you pray for us?**

Pray as we begin work on a building renewal project.

**Connect with us!** [facebook.com/boonechurch](https://facebook.com/boonechurch)

Top left: After holding services on Zoom March 2020 until June 2021, returning to services post-Covid-19 was a highlight. It was a learning experience, but everyone became tech savvy enough to join service every week. They gained new members through Zoom and continue to do a hybrid service weekly along with online Sunday school and Bible study.

Top right: While the congregation is predominately Black, they are also a healthy mix of all things Appalachian Mountains, as evidenced in everything from their programming to music.

Left: The congregation hosted a 50th wedding anniversary celebration April 30, 2022, for Michael and Venus Mathes, the church's lead pastoral couple.

# News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel

## Indonesia hosts 17th MWC Assembly

The 17th Assembly of Mennonite World Conference brought together Anabaptists from 44 countries in Central Java, Indonesia, July 5-10, 2022.

The global church reunion—

typically held every six years—was postponed to a seventh year because of the coronavirus pandemic. MWC capped attendance at 1,000 because of pandemic-related government regulations for large gatherings. On-site registration numbered 1,144, including 594 people who came for the week and 550 for one day. At least 789 registered to watch the live-stream online.

The event included morning and evening worship led by an international ensemble, featured speakers and testimonies surrounding the theme, “Following Jesus Together Across Barriers.” Tim Geddert, New Testament professor at Fresno Pacific University, gave the opening message. Workshops and tours filled the afternoons.

Earlier in the week, the General Council affirmed the reception of two new national member churches: the Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi and Communauté Mennonite de Kinshasa, DR Congo, bringing the global membership to 109 national churches and one international association.—*Meetinghouse*



Musicians perform gamelan music at the opening worship service. Photo by Kresna Kurniawan/Meetinghouse

## ICOMB summit held in Brazil

After two years of virtual meetings, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) hosted a face-to-face summit May 17-22, 2022, in Curitiba, Brazil, bringing together nearly 100 global MB delegates from more than 20 countries, along with Multiply staff and global workers.

Ed Boschman is the USMB representative to ICOMB. Don Morris, national director, and Bob Davis, ICOMB U.S. advocate and Multiply staff member, also attended.

The summit included plenary talks from conference and ministry leaders, sharing, workshops and a foot-washing and communion service. To build global connections, each national conference was paired with another conference. Boschman drew Kyrgyzstan, while Orlando Panta of Peru drew USMB.

Representatives affirmed Darío Ramírez of Paraguay as the new ICOMB chair, and Andreas Isaak of Germany as the new vice-chair. Boschman will continue to serve as treasurer, and the executive committee will fill the vacant secretary position.

Despertar (Awakening) 22 followed the summit and aimed to stir attendees' love for God, his church and the lost. Friday afternoon through Sunday, local church members and international ICOMB delegates participated in worship, plenary sessions, small group prayer, discussions, meals and workshops. The conference was held at the first Mennonite Brethren church to be planted in Brazil.

The ICOMB gathering concluded with several excursions, some of which were primarily recreational

## LEAD Cohorts starting in September

The fall lineup of LEAD Cohorts is coming in early September and will include old favorites and new titles, with topics including youth ministry, contemplative conversations, walking in step with the Holy Spirit, encouragement for pastors' wives and a new cohort for new and seasoned pastors.

LEAD Cohorts offer meeting spaces for small groups of MB pastors, leaders and anyone connected to an MB church. Cohorts meet twice monthly for an hour via Zoom and are free with the exception of books if recommended by the cohort leader.

For more information or to register, visit [www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts](http://www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts) or contact Janae Rempel at [admin@usmb.org](mailto:admin@usmb.org).—*USMB*

| Read longer versions of these and other articles at [christianleadermag.com](http://christianleadermag.com) |

while others facilitated ongoing outreach among indigenous people groups in Brazil. —CL

## MWC Peace Sunday set for Sept. 18

U.S. Mennonite Brethren congregations are invited to observe Peace Sunday Sept. 18, 2022, with brothers and sisters in the global Anabaptist church family. Worship and resource materials prepared by Mennonite World Conference are available. The theme for this year's Peace Sunday is "Being a new creation in the midst of external turmoil."

"Through Matthew 5 and Mark 7:24-30, this year's Peace Sunday resources will explore the ways in which people throughout our communion give expression to God's new creation during difficult circumstances," says Peace Commission secretary Andrew Suderman.

The MWC 2006 Peace Commission chose the Sunday nearest to the International Day of Peace, established by the United Nations in 1981 as Sept. 21, as a Peace Sunday to be observed by MWC member churches.

Congregations are encouraged to contact MWC with their stories, reports and photos that will be shared with the global community. These can be sent to [photos@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mwc-cmm.org). To download Peace Sunday resources, visit <https://mwc-cmm.org/peace-sunday>. —MWC

## MPC tour follows the path of migrants

During a week-long pilgrimage in June, 28 young adults and leaders, including U.S. Mennonite Brethren, followed the path people coming into the U.S. from Mexico might take to central California. The tour began at the border wall between Tijuana and San Diego.

This was the second Multicultural Peace Collaboration (MPC), a joint effort of MCC U.S., West Coast MCC, and Fresno Pacific University's Center for Anabaptist Studies. MPC engages young people through experiential learning to grow their understanding of and commitment to Anabaptist peace-building.

Dina González-Piña, executive director of West Coast MCC and part of the trip's leadership team, says

the purpose was to help the group understand the migrant experience. Seven daily themes—borders and bridges, human dignity, creativity, hospitality, storytelling, justice and accountability and transformation—reflected the values Jesus portrayed.

The group visited Chicano Park, Homeboy Industries and the Cesar Chavez National Monument. Two USMB churches hosted the group in Los Angeles and Bakersfield. The trip concluded at Fresno Pacific University.

Leaders included González-Piña; Saji Oommen, executive director of Kidstown International; Terry Hunt, EDC minister; and Jes Stoltzfus Buller, MCC U.S. Peace Education coordinator.

MPC will offer three different journeys on a three-year cycle. MPC 2021 highlighted the Black experience and the Civil Rights Movement in the South. The preliminary plan for next year's pilgrimage is to explore the history of First Nations communities in Oklahoma. Trip organizers say they hope peace pilgrimages demonstrate that an important way to love is to first understand and walk alongside neighbors in their struggles.—MCC

## SDC holds summer camps

More than 600 students and staff participated in the two Southern District Conference summer camps. "Resilient" was the theme for junior high camp and Kids' Camp, and speakers focused on the book of Daniel.

More than 375 students and youth workers gathered June 1-5 at Sky Ranch Cave Springs near Quapaw, Okla., for junior high camp (photo right.)

Kyle Goings, student ministries pastor from Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., was the speaker. In addition to sessions, activities included team games, a zipline and fellowship. Dustin Dick, youth pastor at Buhler (Kan.) MB Church, was the camp director.

Nearly 250 people, including 167 campers having completed third through fifth grades, came to Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kan., June 28 to July 1 for Kids' Camp. District Youth Minister Russ Claassen served as speaker.

The schedule included two chapel sessions, activities—each camper chose three, time together as mods, games and all-camp activities. Interim director Cynthia Young, kids ministry director at Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., says popular activities were swimming, spa day, dodgeball and crafts. —CL



## FPU celebrates reaccreditation

Fresno Pacific University is celebrating an eight-year reaccreditation by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), which reaffirmed the university's status at its meeting June 24, 2022, after a site visit March 15-18.

The university has been accredited by WSCUC since 1965, which means FPU meets academic and other criteria that assure its quality to other educational institutions, employers, potential students and supporters. Accreditation applies to all FPU campuses in Fresno, Merced, Visalia and Bakersfield.—FPU

## Historical Commission publishes book, awards grants

During its annual meeting June 17-18, the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission awarded three project grants, including a new grant named in honor of Professor Alfred Neufeld (1955–2020), a Paraguayan MB theologian and Anabaptist advocate with Mennonite World Conference. The commission also announced the release of its latest publication, *On Holy Ground: Stories by and about women in ministry leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church*, edited by Dora Dueck, who lives in Delta, British Columbia.

The MB Historical Commission is a ministry funded by the U.S. Conference of MB Churches and the Canadian Conference of MB Churches.—*Historical Commission*

## TC receives grant for residence hall

Tabor College has received a \$750,000 grant from the Sunderland Foundation, helping to meet funding for its new residence hall, a project totaling \$5.55 million. The grant is the largest gift the college has received from the organization. Previously awarded grants helped fund the Shari Flaming Center for the Arts, the Shari Flaming Welcome Center and the Townhouses of Hiebert, Loewen and Wiebe Hall. The new residence hall will house 86 students.—TC



## 5 minutes with... BOB DELK



*Bob Delk was born in 1922 into a family of musicians. Now 100 years old, he and his Les Paul Gibson guitar are still found once a month jamming with the other musicians at the Senior Center in Hillsboro, Kan. When Bob was a teenager, the Delk family's neighbors invited them to a revival at their church. The whole family responded to the call of salvation and were baptized in 1938. He has been a part of Ebenfeld MB Church in Hillsboro ever since. This summer he celebrated his 100th birthday with a couple of concerts for the church and community.*

### How did you get started playing?

I was 12 when my dad showed me a few chords on the ukulele or banjo and it wasn't long before our family had a little group. Dad played violin, Mom played dobro, my sister Betty played piano, and I played a four-string banjo. In those days there was no TV or other entertainment so the school districts would have a program once a month. Our family played for every school house around. When we joined the church we started playing almost every Sunday, too.

### What's your favorite kind of music?

I play country western, gospel and big band. I like them all and know a lot of songs. I could play all night and never play the same song.

### What kind of groups have you played with?

I've played with some top-notch gospel quartets, and I was in the band for the Mennonite Men's Chorus for about 15 years. Early on, The Peabody Plainsmen invited me to play with them at the Marion County Fair. I stayed with that group for some 60 years. I accompanied The Singspirationals, a mixed

vocal quartet, and we traveled around eastern Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma almost every weekend. We even played in Lansing women's prison and Leavenworth men's prison.

### Is it hard to play at 100 years old?

I'm getting arthritis. Sometimes I soak my hands to get them limbered up. I have to practice for a half hour to an hour every day. If I wouldn't play for a week I'd be done.

### What keeps you going?

I got connected with a lady who plays in the symphony and has played her cello all over the world. She wanted to get together to jam. We've played for meetings and at Starbucks and Wendy's and we did a Senior Center fundraiser concert for my birthday. I might have quit by now, but playing with her gave me this new excitement.

### How does music connect with your faith?

In Bible times they'd always celebrate special things with music. We're not so far off from that with our gospel music. I hope heaven will have a lot of music. I want to try to take my guitar along.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

## Maschayaktyn Jamatty (Disciples of Christ)

### *National Mennonite Brethren conference in Kyrgyzstan*

The peoples of Central Asia are among the least reached in the world. The story of the Mennonite Brethren church in Kyrgyzstan dates to 1880, when about 25 Mennonite Brethren families from Ukraine and Volga region moved to Turkestan, the region where Kyrgyzstan is located today.

Hermann Jantzen and Martin Tielmann were the first Mennonite missionaries to the Kyrgyz people. Many became believers, but because they lived scattered in rural places and did not have strong church communities, World War I and the Communist Revolution extinguished this small fire. After World War II, the country became a refuge for many forcibly displaced Germans, including Mennonites and many churches were planted. By the end of the 1980s, most ethnic Germans had emigrated back to Germany.

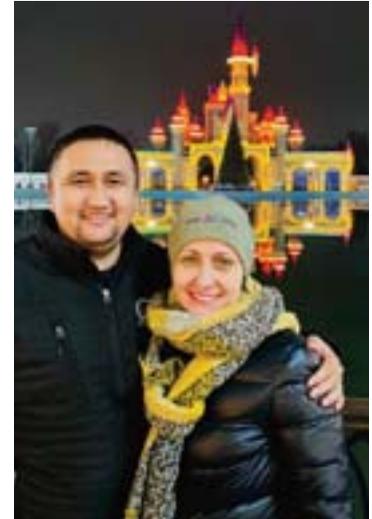
Heinrich and Annie Rempel, originally from nearby Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, were among the missionaries that in time returned to the region. Heinrich, currently Multiply's director of operations in Europe, has been engaged in the area for nearly 30 years, including 14 years in-country. Rempel's vision is to initiate new church planting efforts, as well as to help scattered churches join in mission together.

One day Rempel was reintroduced to Timurlan Abdyldaev, whom he had known as a child. Timurlan and his wife, Irina, are a respected pastoral

couple, and Timurlan was recently ordained as a Mennonite Brethren pastor. Timurlan and Irina (pictured) have planted a church in Tokmok, the first Mennonite Brethren church in the country.

The young Mennonite Brethren conference, "Maschayaktyn Jamatty" (Disciples of Christ), has five churches, two church plants and home groups that wish to become churches. The churches are spread throughout the country, including the capital of Bishkek. Some of their ministries include pandemic relief, a rehabilitation center, youth work and a ministry to the blind. They pray for opportunities to witness of Jesus in neighboring countries, which are also among the least reached.

The seeds planted decades ago have been watered, and it seems we have now reached harvest time.



*At the 2022 International Community of Mennonite Brethren summit, each conference was matched with another national conference as a way to think of and pray for the global church. USMB was paired with Kyrgyzstan.*

#### **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

- **Places to meet.** Renting is difficult because landlords do not approve religious activities on their property. Two churches will be homeless in winter.
- **Boldness and wisdom** for planting new churches in unreached areas.
- **Protection** of believers who experience persecution in their families and communities.
- **Income opportunities at home.** In this poor country, the only stable income is to be a guest worker in Russia, Kazakhstan or Europe. This means the best people leave the churches.

### **Did You Know?**

• Kyrgyzstan is one of the world's least crowded countries, with just 29.5 residents per square kilometer of land.

• With 85 mountain ranges, some call Kyrgyzstan the "Switzerland of Central Asia."

• Favorite traditional foods include tea (lots of it!) and horse meat and milk, consumed far more than cow's milk.

# How's the Connection?



**O**ne summer during my early teens our church vacation Bible school organizers recruited me to modernize our VBS program using a computer, projector and other technology. For a 13-year-old who had never used PowerPoint before, I was excited.

My task was to create lyric slides for the songs selected by the music team. I played with word art, animations, slide transitions and other fancy features that I wouldn't dream of using now because of how distracting it can be during worship.

I relished the time and freedom to learn and explore technology in a relatively low-risk environment. That early experience became a lifelong fascination with audio and video technology, a space that has so much potential for connecting us in many ways. I used every subsequent opportunity to engage with these technologies to learn and refine a skill set that has proven to be tremendously valuable.

## **Connection is the benefit**

Technology, neither good or evil on its own, takes on the intentions and desires of the user. It can divide people or bring them together. It's in that ability to connect that we see the real benefit to technology. Because we can connect with people in the furthest corners of the world, it has never been easier to live out the command in Matthew 28:19 to "go and make disciples of all nations."

I consider technology to be any tool used to interact with the world around us. Often, technology is something that has an accelerated curve of advancement and for which the lifespan of cutting edge to obsolescence is surprisingly quick.

I never limit this definition to computers or electronics because there are forms of technology so commonplace yet more complicated than most of us realize. For example, many of us learned paper folding techniques to craft airplanes or various shapes utilizing origami. Those same paper-folding practices, when refined and expanded, recently allowed the James Webb Space Telescope's solar shield to be efficiently packaged and then unfurled to protect the delicate instruments from being destroyed by the sun.

This broad definition is helpful as we consider ways that technology can be used in our churches as well as in our efforts to tell people about Jesus.

## **Churches using technology**

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 thrust us all into a situation that left us feeling isolated and disconnected. We quickly learned and utilized forms of communication technology that had until then been limited to the workplace. We became familiar with virtual meeting tools like Zoom that helped us to see and talk to loved ones in ways that kept us healthy.

Our churches utilized similar tools to be able to either pre-record or live stream some semblance of a worship service even though none of it felt quite right. Pastors and worship leaders learned to preach and sing to empty sanctuaries or sitting at their desks staring into a camera even as that very act felt so hollow. The ways in which we struggled to remain connected to each other during a global pandemic shone light on our engrained need for connection and the importance of community. Zoom Bible stud-

# Three questions to ask about churches and technology

By Chris Bennett

ies and worship gatherings were fine but left us unsatisfied.

Because connectedness is at the very core of our being, we can ask three questions

when it comes to

churches engaging with

technology: How does technology

connect us to our community, to the global church and to God? Technology that doesn't do these things is not inherently bad, but these questions help frame ways for churches to engage with technology in a healthy manner.

**1. Does this technology connect us to our community?** For better or worse, today a church's online presence is probably the first experience potential visitors will have with our churches and could be a deciding factor in their decision to visit. While social media seems like an impersonal way of making a first impression, these online engagements can be windows into the life and activity of our churches.

We need to make sure that the things that make our churches unique and beautiful representations of Jesus's love are clear and evident in these digital spaces. If all we have online is a digital announcement board, we're missing a tremendous opportunity to draw people into our worship spaces.

Vibrant images and video effectively show the ways that we are engaging with our communities. Instead of telling people about the food distribution or the after-school tutoring club, give a glimpse into those interactions. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook and TikTok are where people are spending significant amounts of time, so maybe we should also be using these places to better connect people to the heart of who we are.

We need to give pertinent details on where and when our services happen, but we also need to make sure the information is current, relevant and allows people to see what it looks like to engage with people the way that Jesus would.

**2. How can technology connect us to the global church?** Several years ago, as part of my seminary studies, I traveled to DR Congo and saw and heard energetic and vibrant Mennonite Brethren brothers and sisters singing praises to the same God that I worship in Fresno. It was an amazing and perspective-altering experience. Today, with the prevalence and accessibility of technologies like Zoom, it is an experience that doesn't take

a trip to the other side of the world to experience!

As we move into the future, what are the various ways to become more connected to the global church through the technology we have at our disposal? At Butler Church, for the last few years during our Sunday morning services, we've heard live reports via Zoom from our missionaries serving in Thailand. What started as a stuttering, challenging interaction has progressed to something that feels no different than connecting to family in another state. Everyone on both ends of these calls walks away feeling more connected and encouraged because we were able to hear from and converse with one another in real time.

**3. How can this technology connect us to God?** Holding a Bible in our hands and flipping through those delicate pages is special. Having the pastor ask us to turn to a passage and hearing the rustle of pages as the congregation frantically works to get there sits in a special place in my memory. Despite the fondness of these memories, I am excited by the sheer power available to us in the forms of smartphones, tablets and similar devices.

We have at our fingertips nearly limitless translations of Scripture for efficient cross-referencing as well as commentaries, concordances and other written resources that allow us to connect with God in ways that were impossible in previous generations.

Many churches are also live streaming their services and so we have video archives from hundreds of teachers and preachers from every walk of life. These voices can help stretch us to engage with views and life experiences that can be utterly foreign to us but a beautiful part of God's work in our world.

Technology will continue to evolve and advance at a pace that is probably faster than most of us like. Still, when we view these tools through the lens of fostering connectedness, technology can serve us in healthy and meaningful ways.

*Chris Bennett is the IT manager at the AIMS Center at Fresno Pacific University and worship leader at Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.*

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Read more:

*iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives* by Craig Detweiler; Brazos Press, 2013.

*From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* by John Dyer; Kregel Publications, 2011.



# Virtual worship

Discerning what  
the metaverse  
means for  
the church

By Matt Ehresman

**T**echnology moves fast, and keeping up with the latest inventions, apps and services is challenging. Breakthroughs like the internet are immensely helpful and important tools. But for every new tool like the internet, there are also “revolutionary” products that don’t live up to their bold, world-changing promises. For example, when was the last time you rode a Segway? Most of us probably have accounts on Facebook and Instagram, but do you remember Google+?

It’s impossible to predict which inventions will become part of our daily lives and which will be laughable flops, but if the last few months have been any indication, I think decades from now we’ll remember 2022 as the birth year of the metaverse.

## What is the metaverse?

The term metaverse is difficult to define, in part because the technology is still being refined. *Wired* magazine says that the metaverse “doesn’t really refer to any one specific type of technology, but rather a broad shift in how we interact with technology.”

Most people use metaverse to refer to the use of virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR). These are similar but not the same. Virtual reality refers to the ability to be completely immersed in a digital environment, often with the use of a VR headset. Augmented reality often uses a set of glasses or an app on your phone to superimpose digital elements on top of the actual physical world around you. The mobile game Pokémon Go is probably the most popular use of augmented reality.

Another defining characteristic of the metaverse is the use of avatars. Avatars are cartoon-like representations of yourself, similar to the “Miis” of the Nintendo Wii game system.

It’s hard to avoid technical jargon in these conversations, but the key thing to understand about the metaverse is that it allows you to interact with people around the world—in real time—in surprisingly realistic and immersive atmospheres. While you might be looking at and talking to an avatar instead of your friend’s actual face, in these digital spaces you can walk around together, play games, attend events, watch Netflix or simply sit in your virtual house for an in-depth conversation.

If you haven’t experienced this yet, it’s hard to describe how realistic this world feels. It takes some getting used to, but once you become comfortable, it is possible to forget that

everything around you is simply a complex combination of pixels and high-speed internet.

### **What about the church?**

Whenever there are significant advances in technology, every organization must decide if and how they will invest time and resources into it. The church is no exception.

Over the past year or so, several large churches have experimented with hosting worship services in the metaverse. Think of metaverse church as the next evolution of online church. Just like an online service, metaverse churches bring people together at the same time to engage in a worship service with music, prayer and a sermon.

What's different about metaverse services is you can actually "see" other people attending. These rooms are filled with avatars representing people attending from anywhere in the world, likely with the real person wearing a VR headset in their home. If you walk up to one of these avatars, you can talk with them.

Some metaverse churches stream video of their physical gatherings on a virtual screen, so it looks and sounds a lot like what you experience if you watch church online. Other churches have their pastors present in these rooms as their avatar, giving a sermon, praying and otherwise leading the service.

We are in the early days of the metaverse, and many of these experiences can be awkward and clunky. There are a lot of technological bugs to work out and we are collectively figuring out what the culture of this online space should feel like.

Still, there are some powerful stories coming out of metaverse churches. Home-bound individuals can experience the church in ways that have never been possible before. People with handicaps are being baptized in VR, with their avatar body being submerged in ways their physical body never could. Authentic communities form where people make friends around the world that they'll never meet face-to-face. And ironically, a lot of people feel more comfortable being honest about deep and difficult faith questions when they are represented by an anonymous avatar.

Most people would say there are some interesting possibilities and encouraging examples of people experiencing Jesus in these new digital spaces.

### **Is this church?**

Understandably, metaverse churches are met with skepticism and criticism. This feels very new, and the tech is hard to understand. It's easy to wonder whether this "counts" as a real church. Concerns about safety are legitimate, and it's true that 2,000

years of church history included face-to-face interactions. Clearly the Bible does not discuss these specifics, just like Jesus also didn't talk about online giving, church databases, air conditioning, parking lots, bulletins or high school lock-ins.

However, there is an interesting story in Luke 7. In the story, an unnamed centurion has a highly valued servant who is sick and about to die. The centurion asks Jesus to heal this servant, but instead of inviting Jesus to his home "in person," the centurion asks Jesus to heal him now, from a long distance away.

Jesus has never done "remote" healing before. Luke records that Jesus is "amazed" at the man's faith for raising such a bold request, and after traveling home, they find the sick servant miraculously healed.

Now, jumping from Jesus-healing-from-a-distance to church-in-virtual-reality is a big leap. Still, in the early days of the internet, most people would also be shocked to hear about an online church service streaming to a phone that fits in your pocket.

Since a relatively small percentage of the population is utilizing VR today, the metaverse doesn't need 10,000 churches, just like a small town in rural Oklahoma doesn't require 200 churches. Smaller or midsized churches can let others move first, taking advantage of staff and volunteers already familiar with the technology to work out bugs and explore possibilities.

Wherever you land on the spectrum from excitement to outrage, I think we would all be wise to be "quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19) when we encounter new technology. Wisdom tells us not to jump on every new bandwagon "just because." At the same time, shrugging off new ideas because of unknowns and controversies also does not sound wise. I think a "middle of the road" approach is helpful here, where we intentionally adopt a "not so fast, not so slow" mindset.

We should be cautious about discounting technology simply because it feels new and foreign but also cautious about investing significant time and resources into a difficult medium that may flame out quickly (hi, Segway!). Most importantly, we should invest significant time discussing the theological implications.

Culture and technology move fast. Whenever these issues arise, do your research, be authentic to who your church is called to be and move forward with prayer and discernment.

*Matt Ehresman is the media director at Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan. He also hosts LEAD Pods, the USMB podcast series.*



# HELP!

## We're surrounded

### Seven ideas for reducing kids' screen time

**W**e live surrounded by tablets, smart phones, smart watches and smart TVs. Screens are increasingly unavoidable, and in a recent survey, 84 percent of parents say their kids' tech use is a top parenting concern. Kids' screen usage has doubled in the past 20 years. The first iPhone came out in 2007, so the ability to watch, read or listen to anything, anytime is a relatively new phenomenon.

Today's kids and teens spend an average of more than seven hours a day in front of screens, and everyone agrees that is way too much. But what is an acceptable number?

Much of this research is in its early stages, and most studies have focused on children under 5 years old. Still, a recent American Heart Association study gives us a target of two hours per day for children ages 8 to 18 and one hour per day for children ages 2 to 5. The World Health Organiza-

tion (WHO) recommends no screen time for children less than one year.

These goals may sound impossible and going from seven hours down to two would be a significant shift for most families. Remember, these are best-case-scenario suggestions. So how could you possibly get to that number? Here are some suggestions and things to remember.

**Have dedicated unplugged time.** Set up family rules about specific times and places when everyone will ditch the devices. Maybe you say no one—including mom and dad—can have phones at the dinner table, and everyone commits to putting them away an hour before bedtime.

One fun idea you could try: Set up a family charging station somewhere in the house other than bedrooms. Make a family rule that all phones and devices go in this station at whatever "regular" times you set, and maybe you consider one device-

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Adapted from "The Guilt-Free Parenting Guide to Screen Time" by Ridgepoint Church creative arts staff. Read the full article online at [www.christianleadermag.com](http://www.christianleadermag.com)

free Saturday a month where you intentionally spend time together without Instagram or YouTube.

**Put the kids in charge.** Some experts recommend giving kids a total allotment of screen time for the week, and then challenging them to come up with a plan of how they want to divide up the hours. Have them take ownership of the time, and teach them to deal with consequences and time management.

**Check stuff out first.** Keep tabs on the content your kids are engaging with. If they regularly talk about specific shows or famous YouTubers, watch the shows yourself. Check out their apps and occasionally play their favorite games. This provides a few benefits: You can keep an eye out for inappropriate content. You can learn and keep up with their lingo and vernacular when they talk with friends. You can have further conversations.

**Take learning off-screen.** Talk with your kids about what they're watching, especially if they are watching even moderately educational content. Try the game or app yourself first and then play it with your child. Afterward, ask your child what he or she learned. According to researchers, the educational value is enhanced when parents and children interact together with media.

**Stick to your guns.** Set rules for your family and stick to them. Don't bend, and don't give in to

the temptation to let kids go further than your agreement just because it's easy. This is easier said than done, but an important part of parenting. Teach your kids that you are in charge, you have rules and there are consequences when they veer away from those rules.

**Don't feel guilty.** Parenting is an adventure in constantly doing the best you can. If there are days and moments when you need a break and nothing else is cutting it, it's ok to let your kids veg and watch an episode or two of whatever they're into on YouTube. As with most things in life, moderation is the key. If you're being intentional enough to read this article, you're probably also intentionally setting enough limits to where you won't ruin your kids' lives. We know you want what is best for your kids, so keep up the good work, mom and dad.

Yes, screen time can be harmful, but so can just about anything else. Find ways to motivate your kids to go outside and unplug. Set a few rules, stick to them the best you can and give yourself (and your kids) a little grace. And don't worry about those perfect Instagram moms who seem to judge and shame you. They're in the exact same boat you're in, and no one has mastered this yet.

## Viewpoint Reluctant enthusiast

*This mom has concerns, yet says social media can enrich life*

At first, I was reluctant to join any social media platform. I never had a Myspace account and got Facebook to follow an old friend I was curious about. But it didn't take long, and I was all in, posting pictures of my husband and kids and sharing a parenting hiccup, baking fail or funny quote from one of my kids. For an attention seeker like me, Facebook is my jam.

Social media can waste my time and encourage me to compare my ordinary life to others' highlight reels. It is a place where predators and trolls lurk. My husband works in law enforcement, so we're aware of the pitfalls of social media. We are stricter than most parents, but we have seen how easily kids can fall into bad situations because of technology. Kids bully, predators

groom and the malevolent influence the innocent through social media and texting.

Social media has shaped the current culture in ways I never could have imagined as a child whose major form of communicating with my friends was through creatively folded notes. Although I hesitantly joined the various platforms, social media also enriches my life. I am blessed by this new way of connecting with old and new friends, strangers and most importantly my own children.

*Megan Kinney attends Bible Fellowship Church in Rapid City, S.D.*

Read Megan's complete essay, online at [www.christianleadermag.com](http://www.christianleadermag.com)

Parents—and grandparents—are concerned about technology’s impact on children and teens. CL associate editor Janae Rempel talked via Zoom with three members of one extended family—grandmother Norma Warkentin, who attends Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, daughter Shelly Spencer and 16-year-old granddaughter Ellarie Spencer, who attend Butler Church in Fresno (Calif.)—about “screens.” Here are excerpts of their conversation.

### **What comes to mind when you hear the word “screens?”**

**Ellarie:** Honestly, I think of my old phone or tablet just laying there collecting dust in my electronics drawer.

**Shelly:** When I think of screens, I think of all the negotiating that has to happen between, “Did you get your homework done?” and “What do you want to watch now?”

**Norma:** My husband said when he thinks of screens, he thinks of window screens, but this kind of screen is just the opposite. A window screen is a filtering mechanism, where a (technology) screen opens you up to a world of possibilities, some of which are good and some which aren’t.

### **What are your house rules for screen time?**

**E:** They’re different depending on what day of the week it is and what time of the day it is. Often at night, for my little sister, it’s “If you’re ready to go to bed, then we can watch a video while we brush your hair.” For my other sister, it’s more like, “Get your homework done and go to bed before 10.” For me, I make my own decision about when to go to bed, and I know when it’s getting too late. When my parents think I’m having too much screen time, they’ll tell me.

**S:** On school nights, you have to have your homework and your responsibilities done in order to earn some screen time. At least for the younger kids, they have a limit. When your time is up, you have to earn a little bit more and also go to bed at a decent hour. It’s hard to stick to. I want to be mindful of each person’s specific context, but it makes it hard to be equitable.

**N:** We don’t have any rules.

### **What are your concerns about screen time?**

**S:** My kids didn’t grow up playing outside. It’s so sad. They’d rather be sitting in front of a screen than

make up their own play. I wonder what they’re taking in from a screen when I’m not with them.

I ask myself, “How does our screen time lineup with what we were created for?” This question helps me to watch out for when screen time becomes a negative while trying to fill a need—to not miss out on something good, to feel more secure by being informed or to avoid a certain task or situation. Sometimes it’s just a way to “recharge” but can leave us no more filled than when we started. I often need to heed the small voice to reclaim a boundary, put it down and walk away.

If we’re strong enough to set healthy boundaries and make healthy choices for ourselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, then I don’t think that a screen is anything to be afraid of.

**N:** I think it can be addictive. It takes away from being outdoors for kids. I think it limits social interactions. I’m concerned about how it is influencing their view of life, especially in the climate of culture now. It’s distracting from our mission. It can be a tool used for positive, definitely, but Satan wants to use it the other way.

**E:** For myself, other than headaches or being frustrated with some friend issues, I don’t necessarily think that I have many concerns about screen time. I do sometimes feel like as kids become more exposed to screens the younger they are, then the harder it is to connect with them or establish boundaries with them.

## God annointed me

Everything is possible  
when you listen to  
God's calling

**M**y name is Alex Mutabazi, son of Pastor Rugombangabo Philipe, originally from Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. I received my calling from God in Uganda, where I lived for 11 years as a refugee. This is my testimony.

As a result of war in my country, my wife, Alice, and I fled on foot to Uganda with our two daughters. We left without travel documents, fearing arrest or even death.

With good hearts, the Ugandan people welcomed many refugees like us. We settled in a one-room house, which bustled with activity as our family grew to include seven children, including a set of twins.

I didn't have a job, so we didn't have enough money. To make ends meet, I sold clothing, traveling 9 hours from home because of the shame I felt. Without money for a hotel, I slept outside, knowing that if I didn't sell anything, my family and I wouldn't have food. But God provided.

One night in 2009, as I lay sleeping in my little house, a man appeared to me in a vision. He told me to start a ministry and call it His Grace Christian Life Church.

I knew I didn't have the money to register a church, so I journeyed to what is known as Prayer Mountain to listen for God's voice. For three days I fasted and prayed in the presence of God. God answered my prayers and gave me faith that despite my poor condition, he had called me.

When I returned home, I joined hands with my wife and children and prayed over my calling. I needed their support before starting the work. Despite my confidence in hearing God's voice, my wife lacked that certainty. I fasted for another three days, asking God for a physical sign in my body. On the third morning, my right hand looked like it had been touched by fire. I said, "God, glory be to you. That's what I wanted." When I showed the burn to my wife, she affirmed my calling. The next Sunday, we started a church in our home.

God anointed me—a poor refugee in a country not my own—and gave me his Word to preach. People supported me. I gained the trust of community and government leaders who allowed me to work even though I did not have all my paperwork. As the ministry grew, we placed a tent outside our home, eventually moving to larger homes in which to meet.

When, in 2016, God opened my way to come to the United States, I ordained a pastor to stay with the church, and I moved to Nashville, Tenn.

I now pastor His Grace Christian Life Church in Nashville, while supporting two branches in Uganda, including the original church and

a new one in a different province. We recently bought land and built a temporary structure for the first church and bought a house for the pastor.

When I started the ministry, it felt like a burden to me. But God has provided for me and my family. I cried when I got my first vehicle. I have a mortgage under my name. It's a miracle. I am thankful to be connected to Mennonite Brethren now. God is teaching me that everything is possible if you listen to God's calling.

**When I started the  
ministry, it felt like  
a burden to me.  
But God has provided  
for me and my family.**



*Alex Mutabazi is founder and lead pastor of His Grace Christian Life Church International, with branches in Nashville, Tenn., and Uganda.*

## Detail oriented

God takes care of us,  
down to the details

**E**arly in our marriage, my wife and I had a pickup truck. It was an old and ugly thing. Its paint job resembled modern art with flat gray house paint and multiple color "squirts" all over it.

Because of an inoperable gas gauge, we carried a filled five-gallon gas can. When we ran out of gas, we'd empty the gas into the tank and then promptly stop at the next gas station. In parking lots, nobody would park by this truck, but it was ours. We drove it everywhere. We loved it, and it fit our family.

Late one night, we were returning home to our summer camp ministry in California. As I followed the winding roads, I rounded a corner and then realized I no longer had steering. The steering box had gone out. On this winding road, on a dark night, I coasted across the road onto a side road perfectly aligned to my driving path. I walked back to the camp, borrowed another vehicle and got my family home safely.

Some might say that these were all small things. Still today, I recognize that God had set all the details in order before I needed them. For this young husband and father, small details mattered. The side road was in the perfect spot. The truck broke down less than 5 miles from camp, so I had free towing. I couldn't find the parts anywhere, but then a neighbor had the exact part I needed for the old truck. I got the truck on the road again, and we drove it for many years until it finally died a much older, but still ugly, truck.

Fast forward many years, with many more examples of God's care for my family. God moved us to South Dakota to pastor a church—1,500 miles away from family and friends. God provided the money for us to buy an old farm with pole buildings and grain bins on what seemed to us like a lot of acreage. We loved it. It was our home and it fit our family.

But in May, a 400-mile-long path of destructive winds blew through the area. The storm destroyed the outbuildings, grain bins and garage. It severely damaged the house. We're still 1,500 miles from family, but we're not far from our church family and friends. They've stepped in to be the hands of God, to help pick up the pieces. We're

still recovering. I rest in knowing that the same God who protected a young family on a dark, winding road will still guide this older husband and father.

Lamentations 3:22-24 says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"

Currently we are rebuilding. It's hard work, but my hope is in the Lord. The Lord continues to show his sovereign hand in all of this. How will it end? I don't know, but God knows. I can rest in a God who takes care of the details.

**I rest in knowing that the same God who protected a young family on a dark, winding road will still guide this older husband and father.**



Straight-line winds damaged Stuart Curry's farm.



*Stuart J. Curry is the pastor at Salem MB Church, rural Bridgewater, S.D.*

# Learning in partnerships goes both ways

CORD program will connect USMB churches

It's been a busy year for the Congolese Task Force, a sub-group of the USMB National Strategy Team (NST). This task force was formed a few years ago when several Congolese pastors and leaders approached USMB district leaders for connection and resourcing. Several of these Congolese churches, mainly in the Central District (CDC) and Eastern District (EDC), have become USMB member churches. There is also a new member church in the Southern District. There is realistic potential for several more churches to join within the next year or two.

Several things have led up to this burgeoning new immigrant ministry. Many Congolese, including many Christians looking for a "family" to belong to, have made their way to the U.S. in just the past five years. Also, our missionary efforts in DR Congo, initiated about 100 years ago, have resulted in a huge national Congo MB Conference, the second largest MB conference in the world. Many of the Congolese pastors and leaders in MB churches who are now in the U.S. began looking for MB connections here. And finally, Henri Ngolo, a Congolese leader living in the U.S., who has a passion for ministering to these immigrant leaders, has been instrumental in connecting many of them with USMB.

Rick Eshbaugh, previous CDC minister, and Terry Hunt, current EDC minister, have spent much time with Congolese leaders, providing tangible assistance to them and their congregations by delivering food and necessities during the height of COVID-19, helping to

locate meeting places for worship and giving advice about navigating life in America. Deep relationships have been established through these interactions.

This ministry is now maturing. The Congolese Task Force is pro-

posing a program called CORD as a collective response to this very special reality that God has brought to our USMB family. It's intended to initially give significant attention to a few churches, with the hope that the plan can soon be expanded to more churches.

a relationship with new Congolese member churches. "It would be a long-lived give/give partnership with both churches giving of themselves to the other over a period of many years," Morris says. "Our current

**We have the resources here in the U.S. to engage on either a national level with immigrant churches or on an international level in places we may have never heard about before.**

The program's premise is that USMB will partner together with like-minded immigrant churches and leaders to provide:

- biblical training and educational resources focused around the USMB Confession of Faith,
- assistance with establishing a stable place of worship,
- development of pastors and key leaders capable of shepherding a healthy church, and
- connecting each church to available resources and other like-minded congregations.

USMB national director Don Morris says he feels called by God to be "an unrelenting advocate for developing lasting relationships among our churches—for partnering together to maximize ministry potential."

Morris would like to see long-term USMB churches cultivate such

MB churches would greatly benefit from learning from these Congolese churches about vibrant worship. Immigrant churches can learn more about how to do effective ministry here in America. Perhaps it means sending teams back and forth to resource each other. The rewards for each church in this kind of symbiotic connection could be enormous."

Morris is convinced that USMB churches have the resources to make such partnerships happen.

"When we get excited about something, like this kind of international bond, the resources needed for such an endeavor will materialize," he says. "We have the resources here in the U.S. to engage on either a national level with immigrant churches or on an international level in places we may have never heard about before."

Morris invites individuals and churches to pray about these sorts of relationships. "Pray that God might reveal the church he intends for your church to engage with over time. Relationships: they matter—they matter a lot!" —*USMB news story*

## USMB Gathering 2022 highlights evangelism

Overview: Three events comprise weeklong biennial assembly

When U.S. Mennonite Brethren gathered July 26-30 for USMB Gathering 2022, they were encouraged to develop relationships with people who don't yet know Jesus as their Savior, heard personal testimonies of God's care and leading, celebrated Congolese congregations that are affiliating with USMB and discussed agenda introduced by the national Board of Faith and Life.

Over the five days, four keynote speakers and numerous workshop presenters delved into the theme of "Increasing Impact: Reaching the lost." Musicians from Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., led singing.

USMB Gathering 2022 included three events—the National Pastors' Conference held Tuesday evening through Thursday noon, the National Convention that began Thursday evening and concluded Saturday noon and a Congolese gathering held Saturday afternoon.

The National Pastors' Conference included six sessions with speaker Gary Comer whose goal was to both challenge and encourage his listeners.

"The pastor's calling is big," Comer said. "You set the tone. You guide where the church is to go. You can change the church culture to be more effective at what Jesus is calling us all to do."

Following the Wednesday evening session, attendees met in affinity groups for coffee and dessert. During afternoon free time, pastors and their families could enjoy area attraction, including an afternoon Royals baseball game.

The National Convention schedule was packed with four worship sessions, two business sessions, 11 different workshops offered during two

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Musicians from Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., led Gathering-goers in singing.

*Photo: by Janae Rempel*

time slots and two one-hour "family" discussions hosted by the Board of Faith and Life.

Comer, apologist Hillary Morgan Ferrer and USMB pastors Jeff Hubrich and Jeff Bell were the keynote speakers. USMB national director Don Morris was slated to speak in the Saturday morning business session, but additional time was needed to finish the scheduled reports.

The Congolese gathering Saturday afternoon included lunch, introductions, music and an energetic and passionate message from Claude Tambatamba, pastor of New Jerusalem Temple, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Children who came with their parents to USMB Gathering 2022 were involved in activities planned by volunteers from Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan. Kris Gerbrandt led the team of 21 volunteers who cared for infants through children age 11. CBC mission and youth ministry leader Josh Lewis and three volunteers involved youth ages 12 through 17 in various activities.

A new feature for the biennial USMB Gathering was Whova, an event app that encouraged attendees to interact with one another by shar-



ing photos, posting comments and organizing free time outings and ride sharing. The app also gave organizers the ability to share announcements and event updates in real time. Speakers presentation slides were posted on the app. Because the agenda and all USMB and inter-Mennonite agency reports uploaded to the app, there was no printed convention booklet. Voting took place using the app.

The app also highlighted USMB Gathering 2022 sponsors Fresno Pacific University, MB Foundation, Mennonite Central Committee, Multiply and Tabor College. Sponsors' display tables as well as exhibits from other ministries lined the hallways outside the meeting rooms.

USMB Gathering 2022 was held at Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center in Independence, Mo. —Connie Faber

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To read full coverage of USMB Gathering 2022, visit <https://christianleadermag.com/category/news/>

## Pastors' conference focuses on evangelism strategies

Comer urges leaders to promote mission culture

Nearly 100 pastors and spouses attended the National Pastors' Conference July 26-28, that featured author and speaker Gary Comer in six sessions.

Comer exhorted pastors to help their congregations be more effective at evangelism by, as Paul did in Galatians 1, remembering and returning to their calling.

The problem, Comer said, is that in a changing culture, biblically literate Christians are ineffective at reaching nonbelievers and making disciples. Presenting a need for a shift in paradigm strategy, Comer said spiritual formation must include

mission. The sermon is just one part of discipleship, and church members need feedback on their evangelism and discipleship efforts.

Comer listed four pillars to shape mission culture: the pattern is missional discipleship; the permeation provides mission training people can assimilate; the posture is authenticity and the process puts into practice principles to help mission unfold effectively.

"We have to have a kingdom wisdom," Comer said. "We are here on mission to redeem the world. I want the conversation to be about Jesus, and I know you do too."

Reaching nonbelievers involves building long-term, authentic and honest relationships that lead to spiritual conversations, identifying people's needs and moving people from an openness to hearing the message to a place of accepting it.

Creating buy-in of this mission requires clarity of vision, conviction of leadership and credibility of content, Comer said, adding that evangelism is more than a token class or service day. Relationships take time.

"We can't just let people come to faith and ignore them," Comer said. "We're called to make disciples."

—Janae Rempel

## Testimonies: Sharing Our Stories



### Trusting God's daily provision

Chandelle Claassen has practiced noticing everyday holy moments while on a journey with bladder cancer. Claassen said she merely existed in 2020, a year with three surgeries, a pandemic and a son stationed out of the country.

"I started to look for manna everyday," she said of what she called a holy and dark season. "I trusted in God's promise of daily provisions."

Claassen invited the audience to consider their own portion from God.



### Walking through grief

Larry Smith's first wife, Yvette, died from colon cancer in 2018 after 44 years of marriage. Smith, together with his second wife, Benita, who also lost a spouse to cancer, minister through GriefShare.

"The Lord has blessed us to share our testimony and give spiritual advice to those dealing with grief," Smith said.

"Grief is a process that you have to go through whether you want to or not. ... Look to Jesus. All our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth."



### God has been faithful

Daniel Rodriguez, new Central District Conference minister, came to the United States at age 14. He intended to return to Mexico, but after meeting his wife, he stayed in Omaha, Neb., eventually pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees and pastoring Iglesia Agua Viva.

"My parents taught me the importance of teaching the gospel to people," Rodriguez said. "God has been so faithful to me and my family, always providing for everything we needed."

## Delegates discuss family business

Delegates pass recommendations, discuss issues, hear church planting updates

The National Convention featured a packed schedule that included several business-related highlights: passing two recommendations, meeting new USMB staff member Brian Harris and two “family discussions.”

### Election confusion

Delegates affirmed a slate of 24 names to fill openings on the USMB Leadership Board, Board of Faith and Life, USMB Youth and MB Historical Commission as well as Multiply, MB Foundation, International Community of Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Health Services.

But the voting process was complicated by the recommendation from the Leadership Board that the “the election and/or affirmation of the presented nominations to be voted on as one group.” The need for a second vote to complete the election/affirmation process was raised while Luke Haidle, USMB Leadership Board chair, was commissioning the newly elected and continuing board members. Once a second vote was taken to finalize the affirmation of the 24 nominees, the commissioning and prayer resumed.

There was also some confusion stemming from the Whova event app used for voting. Haidle apologized,

noting the learning process involved in using the app for voting.

### Book prompts MOU change

Delegates voted in favor of the MB Historical Commission Memo of Understanding, with 92 in favor of and seven opposed to the updated MOU that includes a new sentence affirming that the commission’s printed material “must be consistent with the U.S. Conference Confession of Faith.”

Discussion focused on how the commission would be expected to handle historical writing that did not support the Confession of Faith and the events that precipitated the recommended addition. Haidle and Don Morris, USMB national director, explained that the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) and the U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB) executive boards asked the HC to re-edit *On Holy Ground*, a book of personal stories by 15 women in church leadership that was released this summer. The book was re-published without three pages of one chapter because the author’s understanding of same-sex marriage is contrary to the Confession of Faith and “not appropriate for the book,” Morris said.

Haidle and Morris said the decision to reprint the book caused controversy.

“It was not our intention to silence women,” Morris said. “Content that goes against our Confession of Faith does not need to be in a book with our stamp on it. We have worked with the Historical Commission and they know why we are adding the verbiage to the MOU.”



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Don Morris (right) introduces new USMB Church Planting Mobilizer Brian Harris during Friday's evening session. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

### Church planting push

Since evangelism was the Gathering theme, church planting was highlighted.

"Church planting is a big deal," Morris said. "We haven't been doing all that well for the last few years. But now we're getting ready for a big push."

Friday evening, Morris introduced Brian Harris, former lead pastor of Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., as the USMB church planting mobilizer who will work with the Church Planting Council. Harris shared his dream of establishing 20 networks of USMB churches across the U.S. in which four or five churches gather and pray together about planting churches.

Christian Kohs, Redemption Church in Minnesota; Phil Wiebe, Lakeview Church in Utah; and Andy Owen, Ridgepoint Church in Kansas, gave church plant updates. Their testimonies, scheduled for Friday evening, moved to Saturday morning when the

evening program ran long.

Due to time constraints, the financial report was abbreviated, and Morris' keynote address was omitted.

Ed Boschman, USMB representative to the International Community of Mennonite Brethren; Kyle Goings, USMB Youth chair, Tim Sullivan, chair of the national Board of Faith and Life; and Jon Wiebe, MB Foundation president and CEO, gave short verbal reports during the business sessions.

Throughout the convention, delegates heard from Fresno Pacific University president André Stephens, Tabor College president David Janzen, Multiply general director Bruce Enns and Mennonite Central Committee Central States executive director Michelle Armster.

### "Family" discussions

During the two-hour free time Friday afternoon, attendees could participate in two discussions that Board of Faith and Life chair Tim Sullivan characterized as "family" time.

Sullivan moderated the first conversation dealing with the recommendation of the Restoration Team regarding Gary Wall, former pastor and Pacific District Conference minister.

Sullivan distributed a written statement from the Restoration Team recommending that "PDC/USMB leadership revoke Gary Wall's Mennonite Brethren ordination and credentialing and update his ministry status to state that he is not suited to serve in a district, national or international role in the Mennonite Brethren denomination unless and until he chooses to re-engage in a satisfactory reconciliation process with denominational leadership."

Questions and discussion focused on understanding the events surrounding Wall's departure and concerns for Wall's family and his current ministry at a Presbyterian church. Leadership boards have not yet acted on the recommendation.

The second session, moderated by Morris, dealt with the reversion clause in the U.S. Conference bylaws, which states that when a member church withdraws or dissolves, its capital assets go to its district. However, district conferences do not follow the same practices in these situations. The discussion allowed district leaders to explain their practices and for the group to wrestle with the challenges represented by the reversion clause. —Connie Faber

## Workshops highlight evangelism

National Convention delegates chose two workshops to attend Friday afternoon. Most popular in Track 1, based on attendance, were Hillary Morgan Ferrer's workshop about linguistic theft and a question-and-answer time with Multiply's new general director Bruce Enns originally scheduled for Thursday evening.

In Track 2, which carried an evangelism theme, highest-attended workshops were a question-and-answer session with Ferrer and "Ethnic Evangelism" with Congolese pastor Henri Ngolo and Doug Hiebert, who serves with Multiply.

Other workshop presenters included Ron Klassen with Rural Home Missionary Association, Central District Conference minister Rick Eshbaugh, MB Foundation president Jon Wiebe and USMB pastors Phil Wiebe, Tim Thiessen, Jeff Bell, J.L. Martin, Kyle Goings and Russ Claassen. —Janae Rempel

## Building bridges and breaking barriers

Convention speakers emphasize relational nature of evangelism

Four keynote speakers addressed the USMB Gathering 2022 theme, “Increasing Impact: Reaching the Lost,” during the National Convention.

Author Gary Comer cited Jesus’ example in John 4 as a model for drawing people to Christ. Jesus positions himself at the well and connects with the woman by asking for water. Starting where the woman is, Jesus reads her need, invites a response and ignites movement.

Evangelism happens by framing conversations with dialogue, stories or questions; spending time with people and establishing safe relationships.

“Relationship is where influence is today,” Comer said.

Hillary Morgan Ferrer, founder of Mama Bear Apologetics, said many self-proclaimed Christians live with a nonbiblical worldview, and nonbelievers often hold false views of Christianity.

The ROAR method seeks to build conversational bridges: Recognize the message by naming the foundational truth claim, Offer objective discernment, Argue for a healthier approach and Reinforce ideas through discipline, discussion and prayer.

“The way we interact needs to be different from culture,” Ferrer said. “We are not on any of these sides, but we are on the side of Christ.”

Jeff Hubrich, campus pastor of Lakeview Church in



Author Gary Comer spoke during the Pastors' Conference and National Convention, encouraging attendees to rethink evangelism through the lens of relationships. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

Grantsville, Utah, shared statistics showing a decrease in professing Christians.

“Christians have slipped into a bad habit of introducing people to religion and church culture instead of introducing people to Christ Jesus,” said Hubrich, who shared his story of meeting Jesus.

## Testimonies: Sharing Our Stories



### Fanning the flame

A descendant of tribal head-hunters evangelized by Welsh missionaries in India, Amy Gelatt intended to be a single missionary, so she attended Bible school in the U.S. Instead, she married and raised a family. Fearing a loss of her earlier vision, Gelatt recognized a need to die to self

and invest in God’s kingdom while working in a school and hospital.

“When it’s God’s fire, it doesn’t die even if it’s smothered,” Gelatt said. “It smolders and awaits for a fresh wind to fan the flame.”



### Settled by God’s grace

Jean Pierre Sabimpa fled from DR Congo to Burundi in 2004 after rebels attacked his village.

Three years later, Sabimpa’s family came to Kansas City through a refugee resettlement program. Sabimpa attended

college and started a trucking business.

“It was by God’s grace that we were resettled in the USA, and my heart was at peace” he said.

Hubrich and his wife, Heather, were up-and-coming leaders in the LDS Church but secretly doubted their faith and considered divorce. Eventually, the Hubrichs left their faith and quit their jobs. A friendship with another couple led to both Jeff and Heather placing their faith in Jesus, attending church and eventually, pastoring at Lakeview.

Jeff Bell, lead pastor of Mosaic in Denver, Colo., encouraged people to never allow barriers to get in the way of others who need to see Jesus, referencing the friends who lowered the paralytic through the roof in Mark 2.

A barrier-removing Christian chooses relationships over rights, sees interruptions as divine appointments, pays the price and never loses sight of the barriers removed for them, Bell said, challenging attendees to be spiritual tsunamis whose impact continues for years like waves on a lake.

"We spend so much energy living in the know, we neglect the go," Bell said.

During the convention, delegates were introduced to four new ministry leaders who each spoke briefly.

- In May, Bruce Enns began serving as Multiply general director, having served 17 years as lead pastor at Forest Grove Community Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

- Brian Harris assumed the role of USMB church planting mobilizer on Aug. 1, 2022, having served nearly 18 years as lead pastor at Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla.

- David Janzen was inaugurated in September 2021 as Tabor College's 14th president, having served 15 years as a full-time faculty member at California Polytechnic State University.

- André Stephens assumed the presidency of Fresno Pacific University July 1, bringing 30 years of experience in Christian higher education, most recently as vice president for student development at Biola University.

Additional high points were the Friday evening session that highlighted Congolese churches that are becoming part of USMB as well as USMB church planting efforts in the U.S. and the closing communion service Saturday morning.—*Janae Rempel*



Claude Tambatamba (left) and Henri Ngolo (right) translated for Don Morris, USMB national director.

## A Congolese celebration

The Congolese Gathering, held Saturday following the National Convention, drew 70 people, including representatives from nine churches, USMB Congolese Task Force members and ministry representatives. The gathering included lunch, introductions, music, information about USMB's new CORE program and a message.

Henri Ngolo of Royal Family International Church, Fairfield, Ohio, and Claude Tambatamba of New Jerusalem Temple, Sioux Falls, S.D., challenged those present to see themselves as missionaries.

"We are not here as refugees; we are here to fulfill God's mission" said Tambatamba, switching effortlessly between English and Swahili as he spoke.

A rotation of translators speaking in English, French and Swahili allowed everyone to understand the various speakers.



A choir from Mlima Wa Sinai Church from Kansas City, Kan., and a trio from Ohio that included dancing were musical highlights.

## National summer camp offers new perspective

Fiester encouraged students to be bold and resilient

**A**scent, USMB Youth's annual national high school camp, brought together 350 high school students, youth leaders and staff in Glorieta, N.M., June 10-14, 2022. Students representing 21 churches traveled from five states—California, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah—for four days of worship, learning, activities and fun.

While last year's inaugural camp was hampered by COVID-19 protocols, Kyle Goings, USMB Youth chair, says Ascent 2022 moved the planning team closer to their goals for the new national senior high camp.

"Last year was so tainted with COVID restrictions that the planning team's vision didn't come to fruition until this year," Goings says. "We have a lot of stuff to work on, but we are excited by all the amazing stories we heard about how God moved at this year's Ascent."

### Pursuing resilience

Jon Fiester, lead pastor at Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., addressed the theme of "Resilience" from the book of Daniel. Fiester shared stories about Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) and Daniel and the lion's den.

At the end of each session, Fiester gave a "Life Challenge" to encourage action. Following the Daniel 3 passage about Hannaniah, Mishael and Azariah, Fiester challenged campers with a question: "Are you willing to be resilient in your faithfulness 'even if'?"

This message resonated with camper Kara Reichel from Heritage Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif.

"The most impactful thing that I learned at Ascent was the importance of being bold in your faith and following God 'even if' we are sacrificing everything," Reichel says.

Each session kicked off with fun ac-

tivities and games led by emcees Jenn Tarbutton from Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., and Dalton McAlister from Crosspoint Church, Enid, Okla. Presence Worship returned to lead worship through music.

Representatives from partner agencies shared, including Multiply, Tabor College, Fresno Pacific University, FaithFront and Mennonite Central Committee. Both FPU and Tabor presented scholarship opportunities for students.

### Times to learn, reflect

Sunday morning, students chose two workshops to attend from the seven offered. Topics included: evangelism, understanding mental health through a biblical lens, learning how to share your testimony, worship, being empowered to serve and understanding prayer.

Monday, students experienced a new avenue of learning in an inter-



Community-building, including at meals, was a focus of Ascent 2022, USMB Youth's annual national high school camp held June 10-14 in Glorieta, N.M.

*Photo by Michael Klaassen*

active setting outside the traditional “classroom” environment of workshops. Interactive tracks sought to connect students’ hobbies and interests to the everyday kingdom of God and included: advanced hiking, mountain stroll, writing and journaling, painting and art, photography, rock stacking, video games, basketball, disc golf and kickball.

Before breakfast each morning students and staff could attend “J-Time”, or Jesus Time, led by Stephen Humber from Multiply. Humber offered a short passage and gave time for attendees to individually read and reread the passage, then listen and journal what stood out to them about what God might be saying. Students then gathered in small groups to share and pray.

“One morning when I read Romans 8, the weight of the words hit me hard,” says camper Trudy Hein from Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church. “The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, which is the foundation of our Christianity, literally dwells in our hearts. We are so unworthy yet have access to the Spirit. I no longer want to lead myself.”

### Free time and activities

Each day included free-time activities. Options included a mountaineering obstacle course, tree rappelling, drift trikes, a zip line with a drop, waterfront activities, sand volleyball, gaga ball, mini golf, disc golf and a super swing.

Each evening included a late-night activity: coffee house and ultimate team trivia, a foam party, illusionists Bryan and Karla Drake, talent show and a missions and prayer time.

New in 2022 were Rally Games, planned by organizers to build community between youth groups. Campers and staff were randomly put into teams to compete against each other in a variety of games.

Youth worker Jayme Gooding from Heritage MB Church, Bakersfield, Calif., appreciated the effort at community-building.

“Mixing of churches for Rally Games was uplifting,” Gooding

says. “The seating of groups with other groups at meals was refreshing.”

### The descent back home

For many campers, the four days of camp was more than just a break in their daily routine. It was an opportunity to learn and take steps forward in their spiritual journey.

“The thing that impacted me the most were the ways that I felt the presence of the Lord, and it made me feel so free and happy,” says Chevi Leslie from Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D. “It made me want to actually seek for his Word and learn about him, and I’ve been trying to teach my family a little more from what I know.”

Grant Shewey, youth pastor at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, sees camp as a catalyst to grow and change campers’ lives that continues

as they re-assimilate in their home communities.

“Camp is such a unique opportunity to get to engage in conversations with students that may not happen as easily otherwise throughout the year,” Shewey says. “I love giving students the opportunity while at camp to encourage and learn from each other. We have some incredible young leaders among us, and camp is a great avenue to build them up and give them tools to help reach their peers, schools and communities for Christ and his kingdom.”

Camper Lilly Smith from Hesston (Kan.) MB Church says Ascent provided a new perspective for everyday life: “As soon as I came home, I started a devotional and it just gave me a new hunger for the Word. I wanted to absorb everything and process it the way I was taught to at camp.” —Michael Klaassen

## For Christ & His Kingdom

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# Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel

## MILESTONES

### **Baptism/Memberships**

Paul Keener and Ava St. Clair were baptized at **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, July 31.

Jordan Muldoon and Stephanie Buckingham were baptized at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, July 17.

Noah Hansen was baptized at **Butterfield (Minn.) Community Bible Church** July 10.

Ella Samuel and KiKi Dee were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, July 3.

Jordyn Kloss, Samantha Peterson, Lia Thompson and Sophie Bayles were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, June 26.

Butch Oswalt, Sharon Oswalt, David Suderman, SueAnn Suderman, Dwight Wilson, Rita Wilson, Valyn Anderson, Jean Anderson, Ginger Clark, Murray Friesen, Paula Friesen, Amy Joyce, Sue Joyce, Joshua Murrell, Sarah Murrell, Richard Sylva and Lona Sylva were received June 12 as members at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**

Jessica Palotto, Jacey Bronson, Berkeley Bronson, Elizabeth Hartline, Michael Hartline, Bart Kohler, Thor Kohler, Achilles Kohler, Broderick Clark, Kayson Quayle, Olive LaFranchi and Teagen Cheetham were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus** June 12.

Stephen Kennedy, Parker Lyons, Andrew Barlow, Andrew Yee, Nancy Eberhardt and Christian Eberhardt were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus** June 5.

## Workers

Mike Knight is serving as interim pastor at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.** Spencer Williams is serving as interim youth pastor.

Eric Nelson was installed June 26 as lead pastor at **South Mountain Community Church in Utah.** Paul Robie concluded his service in that role.

Helen Gaede concluded her service teaching and directing Kiddie Kollege at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** after more than 40 years. Julian Bloemhof served as a summer intern.

Frank Wichert and Millie Sechrist served as summer interns at **The Greenhouse, Saratoga Springs, Utah.**

Jeanette Warkentin concluded her service as church secretary at **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.).**

Jill Goertzen began serving as office manager at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, May 16.

Loren Dubberke concluded his service as associate pastor for outreach at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** June 30 to give additional time as executive director of Fresno Area Community Enterprises.

Aaron Garza began serving as senior pastor at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, Aug. 1. Randal Kay concluded his service as interim pastor June 26.

Evelyn Lax began serving as worship leader at **Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif.**, April 17.

## Deaths

**Bartel, Donnivon Earl**, Haven, Kan., member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, Sept. 20, 1950—April 27, 2022. Spouse: Kathleen Siebert (deceased), Linda White.

Child: Jeffrey; two grandchildren. Step-child: Stacy Lynn Burke.

**Dick, Arthur Kenneth "Art,"** Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, March 2, 1920—July 26, 2022. Spouse: Dorothy (deceased). Children: Deborah Cramer, Thomas, David; six grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren.

**Epp, Rose Ethel Funk**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Oct. 7, 1926—June 13, 2022. Parents: David D. and Elizabeth (Suderman) Fast. Spouse: Cornelius J. Funk Jr. (deceased), Harold Epp (deceased). Children: Janice Smith, Mary Trego, Laura Peterson, Joel, Mark; 17 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren; Stepchildren: Beverly Sullivan, Nancy Belknap, David Epp, Paul Epp; 12 step-grandchildren, 12 step-great-grandchildren.

**Fast, Elfreda Penner**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, July 2, 1917—May 2, 2022. Parents Abraham F. and Katie (Gaede) Penner. Spouse: Chester Fast (deceased). Children: Janet van Houten, Dale, Steve, LaVon Sperling; nine grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren.

**Goentzel, Marcia Kaye**, Valley Center, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., Aug. 9, 1945—June 1, 2022. Parents: Lando and Katherine (Nickel) Hiebert. Spouse: James Goentzel. Children: Jarrod, Melonie Godbold; four grandchildren.

**Jost, Marvin Dale**, Hesston, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., June 28, 1944—June 22, 2022. Parents: Marvin Gerhard and Rosella Franz Jost. Spouse: Katheryn Shirley Dick. Children: Travis, Bruce; two grandchildren.

**Loewen, Judith "Judy"**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 25, 1933—June 28, 2022. Parents: Henry and Susana

(Fast) Schellenberg. Spouse: Johan Loewen (deceased). Children: Peter, Susan Murphy, Tina Loewen Merklinger; four grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

**Lohrentz, Viola Faye**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, June 28, 1943—Aug. 2, 2022. Parents: Frank and Martha (Franz) Peters. Spouse: Ray Lohrentz. Previous spouse: Norman Funk. Children: Jerry Funk, Karen Funk, Kristy Funk, Arlin Funk (deceased); seven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

**Mason, Mollie Elaine**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Sept. 7, 1935—June 19, 2022. Parents: Robert III and Muriel (Goodrich) Nelson. Spouse: David Mason. Children: Tim, Jane Schmidt, Mark, René; 18 grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

**Mendel, Thelma**, Peoria, Ariz., member of Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., June 29, 1931—May 28, 2022. Parents: Peter J.S. and Adina Hofer. Spouse: Dennis (deceased). Children: Lynn, Denise Lockwood, Kent; two grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

**Mendel, Thomas**, Huron, S.D., of Bethesda Church, Huron, Sept. 29, 1947—May 19, 2022. Parents: Noah and Louise (Glanzer) Mendel. Spouse: Carla Decker. Children: Shawn, Ernest, Clare, Christina Guthrie; 12 grandchildren.

**Penner, Randall J.**, Sanger, Calif., member of Shafter (Calif.) MB Church, Aug. 2, 1952—June 12, 2022. Parents: Art and Donna Penner. Spouse: Pamela Riffel Penner. Children: Brian, Nathan, Allison Munoz; four grandchildren.

**Redekop, Calvin Wall "Waldo,"** Harrisonburg, Va., Sept. 19, 1925—July 20, 2022. Parents: Jacob and Katherine Redekop. Spouse: Freda Pellman

(deceased). Children: Bill, Ben, Fred; one grandchild.

**Reimer, Janice Lynn**, Hesston, Kan., of Hesston MB Church, May 11, 1933—June 16, 2022. Spouse: LeRoy. Children: Tim, Tom, James, John; eight grandchildren.

**Siemens, Floyd Lewis**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Feb. 15, 1930—July 7, 2022. Parents: Harry and Helen (Esau) Siemens. Spouse: Marie Strauss. Children: Cynthia Koehn, Mark, Tom, Christine McFerrer; eight grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

**Stahl, DeLor Alfred**, Yale, S.D. member of Bethel Church, Yale, Dec. 16, 1928—June 28, 2022. Parents: Joshua B. and Anna Stahl. Spouse: Delores (deceased). Children: Delvin, Delphia Wiebe, Delroy; seven grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

**Voshage, Carol**, San Jose, Calif., member of Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Nov. 8, 1929—Sept. 1, 2021. Spouse: Harold. Child: Lisa Tedesco.

**Warkentin, Stanley Ray**, Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, April 13, 1948—June 1, 2022. Parents: Ben and Tina (Wiebe) Warkentin. Spouse: Donna DeRemer.

**Wichert, Gary**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, July 14, 1955—March 26, 2022. Parents: Marion and Ann Wichert. Spouse: Bonnie Willems. Children: Eric, Brent, Estelle; eight grandchildren.

**Wieting, Melvin George**, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, Dec. 30, 1932—June 6, 2022. Parents: George and Anna (DeVries) Wieting. Spouse: Kathleen Wells. Children: Sherry Edwards, Mel, Jodene Decker, Rochelle Wipf, Terry; 15 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren.

**Willems, Harry**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 7, 1922—May 31, 2022. Parents: George and Elizabeth (Dick) Willems. Spouse: Elvina Willems. Children: Paul, James, Randy, Sandra Reimer, Connie Koop; 12 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

## REACHING IN

### Discipleship

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** launched a new intergenerational discipleship program, CORE (Centered on Radical Essentials) in September.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a 10-week prayer mentoring program designed to help people grow in their conversational relationship with God and teach people basic ministry skills needed to disciple others.

**Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, hosted a conversation following the July 24 service to talk about spiritual gifts, including what they are and how and when one gets them.

### Fellowship

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted Breakfast with Bob Goff Aug. 27. Goff is a lawyer, speaker and New York Times best-selling author.

**Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted its second annual family date night Aug. 27. Teams had two hours during Drive-thru Adventure to complete challenges to earn points.

**The Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** men's ministry hosted a "Golf & Grub" event Aug. 14 with food, golfing, prizes and homemade ice cream.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, celebrated its ninth birthday Aug. 7.

**Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** celebrated Christmas in July with traditional holiday food, singing and gifts July 25.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a "Flip It" Upcycle Challenge where teams designed a repurposed item to be sold at the MVC auction. Proceeds benefitted the church's kids and youth ministries.

**Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn.**, celebrated the 50th anniversary of its building dedication June 5.

## REACHING OUT

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, helped with a block party organized by inCOM-MON Community Development Aug. 12 and distributed water with an invitation to church.

**Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** hosted 30 campers for its annual wrestling camp July 11-15.

**Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D.**, worked with area churches to serve neighbors during City-Serve May 31-June 4. Service opportunities included paying for and doing laundry at a local laundromat, sorting donated clothing for a women's program, delivering meals and cheering on a baseball team for children with physical challenges.

**Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, hosted 39 children for vacation Bible school and raised \$2,164 for Family First Uganda. The congregation collected a special offering for the Alpha Center in Sioux Falls to be used for ultrasounds.

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, partnered with the Bakersfield Angels to host a foster care awareness and mobilization event Aug. 20.

Nearly 100 kids attended vacation Bible school at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.** They raised more than \$1,000 for a local charity supporting young families in need.

**The Greenhouse, Saratoga Springs, Utah**, hosted its eighth summer Bible adventure with 145 kids participating throughout the week. The church also hosted 130 athletes for a character-based sports camp.

**Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, hosted a neighborhood car show and barbecue Sept. 10. The event included kids' games and a bounce house.

**Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb.**, hosted 85 participants for vacation Bible school and raised more than \$1,500 for vacation Bible school at The Greenhouse in Utah.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, hosted 143 children for vacation Bible school. Nine young people and six sponsors worked with MDS in Paradise, Calif., July 24-29 to restore homes damaged by recent fires.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** sponsored a free school garage sale Aug. 20 for the local school district, with used or new clothing for preschool through fifth grade students. The congregation donated 200 school kits to MCC.

**Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, participated in 24-hours of prayer for Fresno July 11.

**Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn.**, hosted a block party for the neighborhood with food, lawn games and a dog play area July 7.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted neighborhood block parties June 30, July 7 and Aug. 11.

**North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, invited people to donate to Backpacks for Kids to help provide school supplies.

**Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, opened Aroma Coffeehouse as a ministry of the church.

**Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, filled 31 baby bottles with money for the Plus One Pregnancy Guidance Center's baby bottle fundraiser.

**Hesston (Kan.) MB Church** provided \$4,000 to support Camp David International, a local mission startup summer camp for children of prisoners and children in foster care.

Volunteers from **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, painted street bumps to slow down traffic June 18.

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, gathered items for MCC care kits for asylum seekers at the U.S. border.

# Classifieds

## LOCAL CHURCH

**Pastor:** Iglesia Agua Viva (Living Water Church) is looking for the next pastor to follow the mission that God wants in the community of Omaha, Neb. Iglesia Agua Viva is a Spanish-speaking community, and its members represent Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and the U.S. The mission of Iglesia Agua Viva is "to fulfill the commandment of Jesus, go and make disciples, and together as a family grow and mature in the Word of God." To learn more about the church, visit [www.aguavivaomaha.com](http://www.aguavivaomaha.com). For more information or to apply, contact Search Committee chair Tony Contreras, 402-201-6807 or [tony-cmc25@gmail.com](mailto:tony-cmc25@gmail.com). Leer en español: <https://christianleadermag.com/classifieds/>

**Pastor of Student Ministries:** Shafter (Calif.) MB Church is searching for a full-time pastor of student ministries to oversee junior high, high school and college ministries. Shafter is a community of approximately 20,000 located in the southern San Joaquin Valley of California, 10

miles northwest of Bakersfield. A full job description and additional information is available at <https://www.shaftermb.org/psm/>

**Lead Pastor:** Bethany MB Church is seeking a man who has a dynamic relationship with Jesus and a proven pattern of Spirit-led, theologically sound, Bible-based teaching and preaching. The lead pastor will champion the mission, vision and values of Bethany Church and must be an effective communicator who is both relational and relatable, skilled at empowering members to serve in roles of leadership within the body of Christ and committed to the power of prayer. To learn more, visit <https://www.bethanychurchfresno.com/Pastoral-Search>

**Worship Director:** Good News Fellowship is seeking a part-time worship director to lead the church body in musically celebrating God. The worship director provides leadership by creating an inviting, worshipful atmosphere, a space in

which people can meet with God; leading the congregation and the members of the worship ministry in growing their relationship with the Lord through worship; and developing a rotating team of worship leaders. More information: <https://www.goodnewsfellowship.org/worshipdirector>. Interested applicants: send cover letter, résumé to [office@goodnewsfellowship.org](mailto:office@goodnewsfellowship.org).

### Statement of ownership, management and circulation

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