

CL

CHRISTIAN
LEADER

13

Waiting for
Christmas

20

Ministry
Quest

27

Learning from
obituaries

A Family (on) Mission



THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

DECEMBER 2011 / JANUARY 2012

from the editor



“

When God looks at me, he sees the ugly, stinky sin that is gleefully growing. Call it soul mold.

”



Connie Faber
Editor

In late October, a clogged sewer pipe created several miniature shallow ponds in the Faber basement. We quickly cleaned up the dirty water, hired a plumber to clear the pipe and assumed we had solved the problem.

But looks can be deceiving. Dirty water had crept into the unused bedroom and seeped underneath the bathroom flooring, creating the perfect environment for growing mold. We quickly learned that you don't mess around with this fungus. Before we fully comprehended the need for speed, the basement became a destruction zone thanks to a largely unseen destructive enemy: paneling and dry wall gone, sections of the carpet cut out and the bathroom floor tiles gone.

Which got me thinking about what's underneath my own exterior. Most days, I clean up pretty good. I put forth the effort to look nice and to reflect a Christ-like spirit in my interactions with others. I think of myself as a "clean" person, when in fact that isn't the truth. When God looks at me, he sees the ugly, stinky sin that is gleefully growing. Call it soul mold.


Just as it is impossible to get rid of all mold and mold spores in our homes, it is impossible to rid our world of sin. My life is impacted by my own sin and the sin in the lives of those I love and in those of anyone and everyone I encounter. Sin, like mold, is here to stay.

But sin does not have to take root in my life. Just like mold spores will not grow unless moisture is present, sin will not flourish when I create an environment that inhibits its growth. When it comes to sin, I must purposefully cultivate a rocky soil that discourages attitudes and actions that are contrary to God's Word. Jesus says in Matthew 12:34b-35: "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."

This month we celebrate the birth of Christ, who came to save us from stinky, moldy sin. God's wonderful love for us compelled him to send his Son to live for just over three decades on a planet riddled with sin. The baby Jesus grew into the man who died with the sins of the entire world crushing him. This year, thanks to mold, I am rejoicing in the knowledge that God's perfect and holy Son waded into the mess of our lives to clean things up.

contents

CONNECTING ONE Family

- 
- 2** From the editor
- 5** Conference Call
By Ed Boschman
They like us
- 6** Chat Room
Letters to the editor
- 28** Church Notes

SERVING ONE Lord

- 
- 4** By the Book
By Jeremiah Betron
- 10** Incredible smallness
By Mike Spinelli
Christ's birth reminds us
that big things come in
small packages
- 13** Waiting
By Amy Walker
Advent can be a season of
expectant waiting
- 15** Life, politics
and Jesus
By Kurt Willems
What happened when I
embraced my spiritual
heritage

PURSUING ONE Mission

- 
- 7** News Briefs
- 17** Body Life
- Heroes for justice
 - Better to give
 - MQ: Win-win-win
 - Districts meet
- 24** Mission USA:
Connection
- 26** First Person
By Amberly Hulzebos
A Japanese Christmas
- 27** On My Mind
By Wally Kroeker
Learning from obituaries

*Partnering as one family to serve one Lord on one mission, for
the transformation of individuals, families and communities.*

www.usmb.org

Jeremiah Betron



On those evenings when I come home after the sun has set, while driving north and looking to the west, I can see a bright light hovering just above the horizon. It has the brilliance of a star shining in the dark of the night. It glimmers just as any bright, white star on the backdrop of God's midnight stage. In fact, the first time I saw this shimmering light I thought it was a star, but, truthfully, it is not. Rather, it is a standard mercury light mounted at the top of a farmer's grain bin. That fact dampens the wonder of the light. Until you realize that it is eight miles due west from the position of my car as I travel up our gravel road.

Whether a brilliant star or a mercury bulb, Jesus identifies believers as "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). He goes on to instruct believers in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16 NASB).

There are many ways to describe "light." Light makes things visible, such as the light of the sun. It is a source of illumination, like a light bulb. There are bright lights, like a spotlight, but some light is subtle, for instance, the flickering light of a candle. It doesn't matter if it's a spotlight or candlelight, all light changes darkness. When light is introduced to a dark room, the room is no longer dark.

In the spiritual darkness of the world, Christ-followers are to be that piercing light. As you go about your life, your words, thoughts and actions are to change the darkness because you are the light of the world.

Since you are called by Jesus to modify the darkness, you must let your light shine. When a lampshade covers a light bulb, its radiance is restrained. If you cover that bulb and shade with a bath towel, the light almost has no effect. The greatest amount of light is seen when the shade and towel are removed.

When Jesus says, "Let your light shine," he means that you should not cover it up, but let the whole world see it. When someone whose life has been radically changed by Jesus does good things in the world, like caring for the poor, defending the voiceless and standing for truth, the darkness of the world is changed. It becomes a little less dark. And the result is that, when the darkness is penetrated by light, when the world sees the good things you are doing, God is glorified. Our heavenly Father gets the glory when light shines in darkness. You are the light of the world; let your light shine.

Jeremiah Betron is senior pastor at Bethel MB Church of Yale, SD.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"
~ Matt. 5:16 NASB

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The Bolthouse family stands in front of the Angkor wat set built for the final scene of the movie.

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They like us

They like you,” declares the cover of the August issue of *Christianity Today*. A survey about the attitudes of ordinary folks concluded that we Christians are generally liked. CT is aimed at Americans who believe in and follow Jesus and are a part of the church he inaugurated. This little sentence on the cover is arresting. Since we are a band of Christians that describe ourselves as Evangelical Anabaptist and some say that CT aims to be the voice of “respectable evangelicalism,” I wonder if it is true of us.

Not that it should matter what an unbeliever thinks of you or me. It is predictable that differences in beliefs, core values and priorities will set us apart. Critique and evaluation of those of us who have ultimate allegiance to the Lord is inevitable.

What is true, however, is that the Bible reports that the early Christians had favor with people and that resulted in people being saved. Also true is that we are to live among and interact with unbelievers respectfully and peaceably and, in fact, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And these words of Jesus take us right back to Senior Managing Editor Mark Galli’s clarification that the survey offered some important conclusions about how prebelievers view us: “...people don’t care if we are cool. They don’t think it is an improvement to call ourselves ‘Jesus followers’ instead of ‘Christians,’ let alone ‘evangelicals.’ (Personally, I’d want to push back on that.) ...What people care about is whether they are loved. By God. And by others.”

Well hello! The second greatest commandment stands not only as a commandment but also as an undeniable criterion for what really matters once we have entered a faith-follow relationship with Jesus. What question does this beg?

Had I written the CT editorial, I’d have posed the same question Galli did: “How can we love the

people for whom Jesus died?” Additionally, I would ask: How can we as a conference discern, train and deploy a hundred new effective kingdom-driven leaders and start 100 new churches that become life-transforming mission organisms? Getting that done would demonstrate some love, right?

But let’s start with what we can do as individuals. Without meaning to be anything but helpful, my first idea is to “do something.” I’ve been thinking recently about the phrase, “Action trumps everything.” There is a lot of truth to that. So here are some ideas on how to love your neighbor, teammate, coworker or soccer mom friend.

Eat with someone. Out for lunch or in your own home, how about good old-fashioned hospitality? Some of the best connections ever made occur when we reach out to people who are starving to be loved by taking the time to share a meal with them. Maybe even cook that meal.

Hobby with someone. Maybe you have been thinking about getting involved in a personal interest activity, to stretch yourself or to learn a new skill. Check the community options that are available and get in there and love on someone.

Volunteer for a charity or service club. Just a couple of weeks ago a friend was reporting on how his involvement with a service club in the business world is opening doors for him to show and tell how God has captured him and given his life a center and stability that couldn’t come from anywhere else.

Serve your neighbor. Pray for an insight as to how you could help out someone in your neighborhood: a meal or offering a skill that you have for repair or upkeep.

Since they already like us, don’t you think it is a good risk to love them? It would make a great Christmas gift.

How can we as a conference discern, train and deploy a hundred new effective kingdom-driven leaders and start 100 new churches that become life-transforming mission organisms?

Celebrating our spiritual heritage

Alan Peters of Fresno, Calif., spoke Oct. 14 to our Learning in Retirement group at Tabor College. His theme was, “Finding our family’s role in church and in history.” As the book of Hebrews mentions, a “cloud of witnesses” has been part of the process of finding our role in Christ’s church and in the world that observes us Christians.

There are various groups and denominations that have influenced us in our Christian life. Many people supported us, cheered us on and prayed for us. Some have sacrificially given towards our spiritual growth and God’s direction in our lives. Many have risked themselves for our support spiritually and materially.

Peters spoke to a large group of people who are active Christians in different Anabaptist churches, many of which call themselves Mennonite. However, there were many Anabaptist groups in Europe and Asia before Menno Simons. All Anabaptists come from these different groups and are spiritually united. Peters told us that in a true sense all Anabaptists are related and we can call each other distant cousins.

I was not part of these people until 1954 when I came to know Alvin and Ruth Neufeld who at that time were part of an amazing team of missionaries and Christian school teachers sent to South Texas by the Southern District Conference home mission board and who had a vision for an unchurched area in Starr County. They began evangelizing the upper western part of the Rio Grande Valley. The rest is history—how the churches and El Faro School were established and blessed of God to produce spiritual fruit in the lives of the pre-

cious Latin Americans whose ancestors had been living in that area since before Texas became a state. Today the LAMB Conference is a vibrant growing work of God’s Holy Spirit and the power of God’s Word.

Miracle of miracles, my family became part of the South Texas mission. Many people took risks putting their trust in God and their love for us. Not only did these people become precious to us, but greater than that, our family became a part of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and we inherited a Latino culture and people who remain in our memories and our hearts to this very day.

I came away from that meeting at Tabor rejoicing that I was truly adopted into this branch of the family of God. I praise God for the many Anabaptist believers and martyrs who have gone before me and for the great cloud of witnesses over the ages. I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God.

*John Savoia
Hillsboro, Kan.*

The *Christian Leader* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be 300 words or less and on one subject. Letters must be signed and include writer’s city and state. Letters will be edited for clarity, appropriateness and length. Letters will be published, as space allows, unless marked “not for publication.” Readers wishing to respond to articles published electronically can post comments on our Web site (www.usmb.org/christian-leader) and can also leave comments on the CL Facebook page.

Correction:

In the essay “Connecting the Dots” by Michelle Welch published in the Oct/Nov issue, it states that Lowell Ens of The Grove Community Church, Fresno, Calif., and his two daughters delivered the gift card to Susan, a mother in need of assistance who was with her daughter at a Fresno area hospital. It was actually Ens’ daughter, Mikaela, and his son, Toby, who made the delivery with him.

Leadership Board *enthusiastic about future*

While there were minimal decisions on the agenda when the U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB) Leadership Board met Oct. 8-10 in Denver, Colo., board members and staff left believing that the conference could well be on the verge of significant growth.

This sense of anticipation can be traced to the addition of three USMB staff positions, including a director of development, and the vision staff members have for their areas of responsibility, specifically Mission USA director Don Morris' goal to plant six new Mennonite Brethren churches in 2012.

Ed Boschman, executive director, set the stage Friday night when he asked the board and staff to imagine how **communities would be transformed if 35,000 U.S. Mennonite Brethren would love God, love God's church and love the world.** Staff reports were given by Morris, Aleksandr Borisov, who began working Aug. 15 as Slavic ministries director; Derk Madden, who began Sept. 15 as the director of development; and Myra Holmes, who began Sept. 16 as social media coordinator, replacing Justin Salters who first held the position; CL editor Connie Faber and Donna Sullivan, USMB administrative assistant. Board members gathered around Borisov, pictured left in photo, to pray for him and did the same for all staff members following their reports.

The Leadership Board took action on two matters. They asked Sullivan, who serves as the USMB event coordinator, to explore sites for *Conexion* 2014 and approved a revised budget based on prior authorization of new staff positions. The board discussed how best to select its appointees to the Fresno Pacific University Board of Trustees as part of the seminary's move to FPU. The board also talked about the upcoming convention, *Conexion* 2012, reviewed the new church-giving plan for funding the national conference and providing appropriate resources to staff members as they communicate the USMB's new vision for growth. Jon Wiebe, MB Foundation CEO and president, spoke to the board about ways in which MBF is prepared to work with potential donors who want to financially assist the conference.



Fall enrollments up at MB schools

Mennonite Brethren institutions of higher education in the U.S. report increased enrollments for the fall semester.

The 3,603 students in class at Fresno Pacific University in the fall of 2011 represent an increase of 9 percent over this time in 2010 and 51 percent over the last three years. FPU is a Mennonite Brethren-owned university with a main campus in Fresno, Calif. The official 16-day census marked increases in traditional undergraduate, bachelor's degree completion and graduate programs, including the seminary. Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary has an enrollment of 116 students, up from 111 in fall 2010.

Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren-owned liberal arts college headquartered in Hillsboro, Kan., announced a fourth consecutive year of record enrollment. When combining both graduate and undergraduate programs, 734 students are pursuing degrees on the Hillsboro and Wichita, Kan., campuses, the highest enrollment ever. —FPU/TC

MWC encourages celebration

Mennonite World Conference is inviting Anabaptist-related churches around the world, including U.S. Mennonite Brethren, to worship around a common theme on World Fellowship Sunday—the Sunday closest to January 21. On that date in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland. Churches are encouraged to plan a worship service around the theme, "Hands Reaching Across Borders."

Suggested biblical texts, prayers, songs, sermon ideas and stories are available at www.mwc-cmm.org. MWC is a global fellowship of Anabaptist churches. —MWC

Convention speakers confirmed

By day, delegates to Conection 2012 will be immersed in stories of God's transforming work among U.S. Mennonite Brethren churches and the ministries with which we partner. By night they will be entertained and inspired by a comedian and a movie producer/actor.

Friday night delegates will laugh with Kenn Kington, a comedian who entertained pastors at the 2006 National Pastors' Conference. Kington is known for his ability to blend sidesplitting comedy with life-changing content.



Kenn Kington



Alex Kendrick



Saturday evening Alex Kendrick, associate pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., will talk about his work as co-founder of Sherwood Pictures and as writer, director and actor for four Sherwood Pictures

movies, including the newly released *Courageous*. Kendrick will also talk about living as faithful and authentic followers of Jesus.

Read more about Kington and Kendrick at www.usmb.org/conection2012.

byTheNumbers

How do MB churches use social media? How does this compare to the national average?

92.5% MB churches with a Web site

78% Protestant churches with a Web site

76.3% MB churches that actively use Facebook

47% Protestant churches that use Facebook

Sources: CL survey of MB churches and Lifeway Research

5 minutes with...

Orie & Ina Roth

Eighty-eight-year-old Orie Roth and his wife, Ina, have worn out two sewing machines and four irons in their eight years of making comforters for people in need through Mennonite Central Committee. Orie recently delivered their 521st comforter to the MCC center in Reedley, Calif. They are members of North Fresno (Calif.) MB Church.

1 Did you set out to make more than 500 comforters?

No, it was just one of those things that started happening, but for some reason I began a little note on my desk where I write down when I take a load to MCC.

2 How long does each one take?

We've been at it for eight years and it comes to about one per week.

3 Where do you get all the fabric?

I never know where it's going to come from, but it just keeps coming. Our church quilters bring me their scraps and donated fabric that they can't use. I guess when it stops coming in I'll quit.

4 Why don't you sell your comforters?

If they're nice enough to sell, they're nice enough to give. I've often wished I could hand them out someplace. We visited Haiti once and saw poverty such as I'd never seen in my life. I hope some of our comforters were in the 10,000 MCC sent after the earthquake there.

5 What motivates you to keep making comforters?

In our 65 years together our goal all along has been to help people with their needs. I've been a pastor so our resources are limited, but this is something we can do.

6 Is there a story that inspires your work?

One day a lady who had been a refugee told us they would put the children to sleep by warming them with the comforter, and then the parents would use it. The comforter was the most valuable thing they got from MCC.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Tabor boasts “best colleges” listing

Tabor College has again earned a national, Tier 1 ranking in the 2012 edition of Best Colleges by U.S. News Media Group, being ranked 45th in the division of regional colleges in the Midwest. This is the eighth consecutive year the MB liberal arts college in Hillsboro, Kan., has been recognized. The annual Best Colleges listing provides insight as to how more than 1,400 accredited four-year schools compare on a set of up to 16 widely accepted indicators of excellence. View the complete report at <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>.—TC

FPU opens MERCED CENTER

Fresno Pacific University, the MB-owned school on the West Coast, opened a new regional center in Merced, Calif., in September. The center opened with 49 students enrolled in the bachelor's degree in early childhood development program. A bachelor's in liberal arts and a master's in business administration with an organizational leadership emphasis are coming in spring 2012. All programs are targeted to working adults with some college credits. FPU has a main campus in Fresno, with other regional centers in North Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield.—FPU

MBs reflect on 150 years

Kindred Productions has released *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years*, a collection of papers presented at the *Renewing Identity and Mission: A Mennonite Brethren Consultation* that took place July 12-14, 2010, in Langley, B.C. prior to Celebration 2010, the North American celebration of the 150th anniversary of the denomination. Seventeen presentations from the consultation are included and have been arranged around themes of history, theology and mission. For more, see www.kindredproductions.com.—KP

ICOMB releases Spanish study guide

Hispanic MB pastors in the U.S. will be among those who benefit from a new Spanish-edition study guide released by the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), a global fellowship of Mennonite Brethren. Jose Elizondo, assistant district minister for the Pacific District Conference, pictured left, plans to use *Convociendo & Viviendo Tu Fe* (Knowing and Living Your Faith) for in-service training of Hispanic pastors in the PDC. He also will be making contact with Hispanic pastors in South Texas and Omaha, Neb. The study guide, first published in English in 2008, offers commentary and questions on the Confession of Faith adopted in 2004 by the 19 member conferences of ICOMB.—ICOMB





**Incredible
smallness**

**Christ's
birth
reminds
us that
big things
come in
little
packages**

A tiny fist gripped my pinky over 16 years ago, and I was soon wrapped around her finger. Eighteen months later there was a new fist, but the experience was the same. From the day our daughters were born, we dreamed about their futures—their hopes, their dreams and their contributions to the world.

While we dreamed about the great things our daughters might do when they were older, could we have missed all the greatness that was in front of us already? All I needed to know about God's great love, the greatness of his majesty and the miracle of life lay wrapped in a tiny baby.

As we enter into Advent and move toward Christmas, we revisit this reality again. In the baby Jesus all the fullness of the Deity was pleased to dwell. It wasn't about who Jesus *would* become. It was all about who Jesus was in the form of a servant babe in the manger. And that is how God seems to work most often, not just at Christmas. It pleases the Lord to take the small and seemingly inconsequential and to do big things. He doesn't necessarily make the small into something great. He rather lets the small thing remain small and does something incredible in the smallness.

“Too little”

Consider the promise the Lord made to Bethlehem, the home of David who slew the great giant when he was a youth and grew to be the archetype of the kings of Israel. When Judah was threatened with certain destruction, the Lord promised through Micah that he would rescue the nation. If this promise raised the nation's hope, the place

their leader would come from raised their eyebrows.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, *who are too little to be among the clans of Judah*, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2, ESV, emphasis added).

Bethlehem was backwoods. It did not rate a dot on the map, a zip code or a sentence in the travel guide. The Lord declared the village was so small it did not rate its own entry in the clan listing of the nation. Yet from *this* city would come the one to lead his people, a promise declared from old about one who lived before the world was born.

We know from the Gospels that the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of this promise and would grow to be Messiah. We know he would make the supreme sacrifice through his death and give us supreme hope through his resurrection. Yet, his existence as a baby was great in and of itself. A handful of people understood this from the beginning. Foreign seers adored him, a threatened king tried to kill him and two wise and faithful seniors saw in the baby all the hope their nation was seeking.

“The day of small things”

Micah was not the only prophet to proclaim the message that small was great to God. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had their hands full motivating the newly returned exiles to build the temple and to not give up under the pressure of their enemies. The people thought it was not a good

time to build the temple. Though they laid its foundation, what they started seemed insignificant to them. Certainly they could use their time more wisely than rebuilding something that would be less glorious than it used to be.

Haggai pushes a few buttons. “Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it as *nothing* in your eyes?” (Haggai 2:3, ESV, emphasis added). The Lord promised to take their effort of rebuilding and “fill this house with glory” (Haggai 2:7, ESV). The Lord was going to use something seemingly paltry to do great things for his name’s sake.

Zechariah echoed that theme when the Lord told him that Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple and his hands would complete it. As a word of caution, the Lord told Zechariah, “For whoever has despised *the day of small things* shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel” (Zech. 4:7, ESV, emphasis added). Though the people looked at the temple and thought it was so small—not worth the effort to rebuild it—the Lord surprised them. He took their effort and filled it with his glory. Something great was going to be packaged in something small.

It pleases God to package greatness in small things and to bring greatness out of tiny places. To what does Jesus compare the kingdom of God? He points to a mustard seed barely visible on the tip of his finger. He talks about a little yeast making lots of flour ready for baking. He uses a small boy’s lunch to feed thousands.

Great things from our midst

He still brings great things out of the small places in our midst.

My friend Steve grew up in the Carson MB Church of Delft, Minn. This church no longer gathers for worship, but from its place off the beaten path that congregation impacted the world for God’s kingdom by sending out around 200 full-time Christian workers as pastors and missionaries. Carson MB, though you were small among the churches of the Brethren, from you came people who made a kingdom difference in Minnesota, North America and the world.

Hannah served in Central Asia on a short-term mission. She told me how small she felt in that land. How could she make a difference in such a short time? On their last night, Hannah’s team met with a group of girls with whom they had spent time living and laughing. One of these girls said

that this small team HAD to come back because they showed these girls true love. If they did not come back, they all needed to go somewhere in the world and show the same love to someone else. Hannah, though you and your team were small with little language skills and little time, from you came love and peace and the message of the kingdom to Central Asia. We have yet to see what all will come from it. From what you shared, your small gift carried greatness in it.

My then-elementary school daughter wanted to learn how to play guitar for worship. Soon, four other kids wanted to join in. The group grew to include 25 elementary, middle school and high school students learning together. They are all still young, yet they are using their gifts and skills now. Almost all of them lead worship in their various church youth groups or have been integrated into their Sunday morning worship teams. A group of siblings formed a band that sings Christian music at two pizza parlors in their city. Both of my daughters now lead other students in worship and prayer on their high school campus. You students, though you are young and are still learning and growing, even now praise and witness comes from you and will bring comfort, peace and joy to others as you use your gifts to spread the good news of Christ in the world.

Society awaits the next big thing. We long for breakthroughs that are life-altering. Even at Christmas, we wonder what can top last year’s festivities. Could it be that, this year, something small will top them all? By all means, rejoice and be glad with all your heart and soul. The Good Word has taken on flesh and moved in next door. May this be a year of small things that take our breath away. May it be so because we see the great gifts God has wrapped in the small things around us, and we have made our eyes able to see them revealed.

Mike Spinelli is a 1995 graduate of MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and pastored in San Jose, Calif., and Eugene, Ore. Some of the inspiration for this article came from conversations with members of the North Fresno MB Church family, where the Spinelli family was worshipping until November when Spinelli became the choir director at Bethany MB Church, Fresno, Calif.

Share your “small greatness” stories—times when you have seen great things come from something small—at usmb.org/incredible-smallness or on the CL Facebook page.

Waiting

by AMY WALKER

Waiting is not a popular concept in our high-speed, express lane culture. Between McDonald's and Macy's we expect to get what we want when we want, and that usually means now. But perhaps there is something to be learned in the waiting. Could it be that God is growing something within us during the seasons in which we are called to simply wait?

Advent is a time of expectant waiting for the coming celebration of Jesus' birth. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and is observed as not only a way of entering more fully into the Christmas story but also of anticipating Christ's glorious return.

As I think about this time of waiting, my thoughts drift back to the first of all Advents: the waiting months for Mary in between the angel's visit and that quiet, incomprehensible night in a stable. How did Mary fill those waiting days? I wonder if she saw those nine months as a gift: a time for her to prepare her heart, her life, for the unknown adventure ahead. Did she busy herself with work and preparation? Did she have days of quiet and stillness as she felt life growing inside her? How did she experience God in the waiting, and did she believe that he was moving and working far beyond her wildest dreams?

I don't know exactly what waiting looked like for Mary—perhaps there were moments of stress and doubt, perhaps there were times of confusion, surely of disbelief. But when I think of Mary's words in response to the angel, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). I get the impression that Mary had been waiting for something her whole life: something big, something God-breathed, God-dreamed.

I recently had a conversation with a good friend about waiting. We both have and continue to journey through long waiting-on-God seasons in our lives. And the older I get the more I see how often we are called to wait. But waiting is hard. Living in a culture where everything is now and fast and right when we want it, to wait—even patiently and hopefully—is seen as something akin to suffering.

But I believe God does some of his most gracious and loving work in the wait. The times when you and I believe nothing is happening, no growth, no life, it is then that he is lovingly making all things new and working in a way we often do not see, feel or imagine.

In his book *The Path of Waiting*, Henri Nouwen writes that “to wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.”

Mary’s openness and willingness to receive led her to a place “far beyond her imaginings.” Much of this Christian life is a daily surrender of control, a surrender of worries and fears and certainly of expectations. I have come to realize this only too well. Perhaps so have you.

In this world where so much seems to be wrong and broken, it can be difficult to believe a story of redemption is being written. But it is. Paul writes in Romans 8:19, “That’s why I don’t think there’s any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens” (*The Message*).

Often times waiting has been burdensome and painful for me, not so much the joyful anticipation that Paul writes of. I have found myself waiting on God in different seasons of my life: healing for broken hearts from my parents’ divorce, waiting on the decision if our family should move and when to go, needing to find a home when I was eight (yes, eight!) months pregnant, a desperate plea for my husband’s healing, crying out for a friend’s salvation.

What I have found to be true is that a part of me is always waiting. Not for easy answers but for perfect and complete relationships, not for band-aid solutions but for freedom from suffering and pain. Could it be that what I am most deeply waiting for is the return of a Savior? Paul writes of everything in creation being held back, and there are times I feel it.

There are times when the waiting for Christ’s coming and the deep sense of certainty that I was made

for more feels like it will burst in my chest. When the mere idea of “yonder breaking into a new and glorious morn” is enough to bring me to tears. And I wonder if it would all be the same way if it were not for the waiting. Would *I* be the same if it weren’t for the long wait?

And so as Advent approaches, we have the opportunity to enter into a season of expectant waiting. We get to experience a season where the joyful anticipation of a Savior deepens and grows in our hearts. But this too is hard. The Christmas story has become so commercialized and stressful that it takes a fair amount of work to focus on the deeper, true meaning of Christmas.

Somewhere between the angel and the stockings hung by the fireplace our hearts have ceased waiting. Or perhaps our hearts are still waiting, hoping, dreaming, but we are often too busy and too absorbed in the Christmas season (quite different than the Christmas story) to notice or to really care.

As we enter into this Advent season, ask yourself: What is it that I am waiting for? Is it presents, food, time with friends and family, time off of work? Or is it something bigger. Could you stop for a moment, enter into the story of Christmas and discover you are really waiting for something glorious, something life changing, something new? What if you could look through Mary’s eyes and really behold the quiet wonder, the awe of it all?

Can you hear it? The silver bells ringing, being moved by the words of an old Christmas hymn, wishing a stranger Merry Christmas. *Can you see?* The stillness of falling snow, the reminder in nativity scenes and the joy of children. The Christmas story is in the person ringing the Salvation Army bell in the freezing cold, it is in sacrificing *some* so that others have something, it is looking people in the eye and telling them you love them or that you are listening or that you care.

Advent is a season to practice waiting with anticipation and hope and to hold this hope out to the hurting world around us. To let what we see and hear this Christmas stir our hearts in new ways as we wait for the celebration.

Can you hear it? Can you see? *Christ is coming.*

Amy Walker is a wife, mom to two girls and keeper of the home, where the practice of waiting is easier said than done. She is passionate about writing, teaching and meeting with women. She attends Trailhead Church, a

LIFE, *Politics* and JESUS-SHAPED LOGIC



PATTY DECKER

15

DECEMBER 2011 / JANUARY 2012

For the past several years I've prayed that God would bring friends into my life that aren't "churched." That God would move me beyond the bubble of the church so that I can interact with folks from various walks of life. And then 18 months ago I struck up a conversation with a guy named David as I was sitting in a Starbucks.

David has attended a major California university and identifies as a spiritual agnostic. I tried to avoid revealing that I'm in ministry—it can be an instant non-Christian friendship blocker—but then David asked about my job. In spite of learning about my occupation, David agreed to hang out the next week to talk about life and politics.

The following week as I sipped on my iced grande non-fat white mocha, the conversation quickly turned toward Christianity in America. I think David was attempting to shock me into showing my true colors when he said this about evangelicalism: "When you mix religion, nationalism, imperialism and fear—people do really bad things." I had his full attention when I told him I couldn't agree more and talked about the Jesus of Anabaptism.

When I was a teenager and into my early 20s, David's statement would have offended me. At that time my con-

viction was that America is a Christian nation and that the purposes of Jesus and our country often go hand in hand. This core conviction included the belief that the role of the church—among other important issues like evangelism and discipleship—was to support the most "Christian" country on the earth. Essentially, I believed that American nationalism reflects a God-honoring worldview and that although violence and war is terrible, they ought to be supported. These two issues summarize David's critique of his perception of evangelical Christianity.

Changing my views

Four years ago something began to change. As I read the New Testament with fresh eyes, I realized that the early church found herself in the midst of the great Roman Empire. In this empire, nationalism and religion also went hand in hand. Except instead of using a Deist version of the Christian God, the emperors were worshipped as gods. In fact, we have evidence that Caesar Augustus was referred to as "son of god," "savior," bringer of "peace" and "salvation," and the full embodiment of the "good news" for society. What was good for the empire's agenda was good for the incarnate deity king—and therefore good for

by **KURT WILLEMS**

worshipping peasants who believed that appeasing the gods would lead to prosperity.

Connecting nationalistic zeal with religious practice created a climate in which the Caesars could continue to order the world in oppressive ways that marginalized the poor and powerless. With the threat of violence always looming and with the warmongering nature of imperialistic Rome, people didn't rise up against the empire. The easiest way to demonstrate allegiance was by participating in the religion of the nation. Otherwise one could be viewed as a revolutionary and everyone knew such people ended up hung on a cross.

What belongs to God?

This climate is significant when we read Luke's gospel, especially the birth narrative of chapter two and the question of paying taxes in chapter 20. Luke intentionally subverts the philosophy of nationalism and *pax romana* (peace through strength) by demonstrating that the true King of the world was born in a manger. And when asked about paying taxes, Jesus says that we give to Caesar what is his and to God what is his.

This begs the question: What exactly is God's? Just as Caesar's image is on a coin, God's image is on humanity. We give God our whole selves and that makes a greater impact in the world than any coins we'd want to refuse to pay to the kingdoms of this world. As I began to understand the political situation of Jesus and the early church, I started to ask new questions. And my particular questions led me to embracing Anabaptism.

I grew up Mennonite Brethren but it took me 23 years to fully agree with our Confession of Faith and to cherish it.

Article 12 of our Confession of Faith reminds us that "the primary allegiance of all Christians is to Christ's kingdom" and that "Christians are called to resist the idolatrous temptation to give to the state the devotion that is owed to God." We therefore are called to "...cooperate with others in society to defend the weak, care for the poor, and promote justice, righteousness, and truth" while maintaining our distinctness.

Article 13 complements the former by making clear that "violence in its many different forms (is) contradictory to the new nature of the Christian" because "the evil and inhumane nature of violence is contrary to the gospel of love and peace." Not only so, but during times of war, "we believe we are called to give alternative service" and in so doing, we "alleviate suffering, reduce strife and promote justice...."

Questions and crossroads

Historically, Mennonite Brethren communities opposed both nationalism and violence with the hope of living as a counter-cultural kingdom of God communi-

ty. Today we Mennonite Brethren find ourselves at a crossroad. The next generation asks similar questions to David's. Most Christian mission experts agree that our urban centers are becoming less Christianized in their ethos. In other words, the days of the institutional church being the dominant influence in society is quickly fading.

In these situations, the only bit of Christianity that many people know is the caricatures they see in the media. Non-Christians associate Christianity with power, violence, nationalistic agendas and scandal. But we Anabaptists have a better story to tell! When we embrace the fullness of what it means to be Anabaptist in these areas we are no longer part of the typical evangelical stereotype.

During our first full-length conversation, David intended to shock me with his disdain for the way American Christianity and America's nationalism often go together. Instead, he was surprised to hear about a Jesus who calls us to radical ways of living—promoting justice for the oppressed, speaking truth to power, forsaking violence and giving our full allegiance to the kingdom of God. I shared with David my frustrations with the bad press that Christianity gets and how the Jesus I follow invites me to join in his mission to bring peaceful restoration to all creation. David was nearly speechless. By the end of the conversation he said, "I think that we were supposed to meet...like it was meant to be or something."

David is not a Christian at this point—I certainly hope that he will become a follower of Jesus one day—but we have a mutually beneficial friendship that continues to grow. When we visit over coffee and attempt to solve the world's problems, David wants to hear my "different kind of Christian" ideas. In this case, my Anabaptist heritage is not something to shy away from but an entry point into someone's life.

I'm convinced that countless numbers of "Davids" exist in our changing culture. Anabaptists in general, and the Mennonite Brethren in particular, have a story to tell that beautifully defies the logic of nationalism and violence. Jesus-shaped-logic, the folly of enemy love modeled to us in the non-retaliation of the cross, invites us to show the world a better way. May we who come from the Anabaptist stream of faith choose to embrace the richness of our tradition as we ourselves continue moving into the mission of God. Our impact on tomorrow's culture may depend on being true today to who we are.

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Heroes for justice

Colorado family takes on human trafficking

It looked innocent enough. Sitting around a restaurant table, three blond American girls balanced spoons on their noses and made silly animal sounds, eliciting giggles from seven Vietnamese girls. But looks can be deceiving. Beneath the giggles, the hearts of seven girls opened a crack to their new freedom from the nightmare of sexual slavery while the hearts of three girls—and their parents—were flooded with pain.

Four years ago while traveling in Cambodia, the Bolthouse family—Bill and Laurie, then 11-year-old twins Madison and Meredith and nine-year-old Molly—came literally face-to-face with the injustice of human trafficking. The meeting was a turning point for the family, who attend Trailhead Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Centennial, Colo.

"We've met them; we see them," says Laurie.

The Bolthouse sisters were very quiet when the family returned to their hotel room following dinner. Then came a storm of tears. The wrong they had just encountered was overwhelming. That night the family prayed angry prayers. And they asked God, "What can we do? Can we do something more?"

Four years later, "something more" is coming to the big screen as *Trade of Innocents*, a feature-length film that the family hopes will put a face on the issue of human trafficking for a much wider audience. So that one more girl will find freedom.

When Bill and Laurie married some 22 years ago, they promised never to "fade into the obscurity of normality," as Bill says. They wanted their life together to make a difference. Their dedication to living on mission has spilled over onto their daughters, now teenagers. "I want to hand our kids a heritage of being involved," Bill says. "You can do this kind of stuff and have fun!"

Over the years, the family has served together in places like Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Zimbabwe and India. So when Bill, a retired family physician, served short-term in Cambodia, the family naturally went with him. That's where they became better acquainted with the work of International Justice Mission (IJM), a human rights agency that advocates for victims of human trafficking, and met those seven newly rescued girls.

According to IJM, 27 million people are held in bondage around the world, forced into inhumane working conditions or into prostitution. That number includes children: Each year, 2 million children are exploited through the commercial sex trade. And it isn't a



Top: Molly Bolthouse looks on as make-up is applied to Trieu Tran, who plays "Duke," the evil brothel owner.

Bottom: The Bolthouse sisters, pictured bottom, eagerly absorb every aspect of their once-in-a-lifetime experience on the movie set of *Trade of Innocents*.

problem only "over there." Laurie points out that human trafficking is prevalent even in the United States; beneath the glitz of major events such as the Super Bowl or the National Western Stock Show, people are bought and sold.

"If you live in a major city anywhere in the world you are within miles of someone who's locked in a room," says Bill, "maybe a young girl who's locked away and going to be raped."

After their experience with IJM in Cambodia, the Bolthouse family learned about human trafficking, prayed and waited. Then friend and motion picture writer and director Christopher Bessette asked them to help produce a movie about the issue of human trafficking, *Trade of Innocents: Justice Needs a Hero*.

It was the right opportunity, and thanks to a successful family business they had the means to help. As is their habit, the Bolthouses embraced the mission together. This time it meant spending three months in spring 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand, for

on location filming. Listed among the film's producers, they provided funds and creative input. They were closely involved in everything from planning to casting to costumes. The girls helped with office work and errands, filled in as extras and soaked up the once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Sitting in on the filming of fictitious scenes brought the reality of trafficking closer to home. Laurie says that even though she knew the scenes were contrived, even though the filming took place amidst crowds of film crew folk and even though no girls were ever in danger, "It can bother your heart."

Sometimes Madison wanted to push the intensity of the experience and the issue far away, but resisted. "So many people are pushing it away when it really needs to come out," she says.

Molly, who battled nightmares during the filming, says the experience "made me want to fight even more." She hopes that *Trade of Innocents* will capture viewer's hearts. "They have to face the fact that (human trafficking) really is real."

The film offers resources and ideas for action, leaving next steps in the hands of each viewer. Imagine a girl locked in a room, waiting to be raped, says Bill. "This movie will hand you a key," he says. "You can choose to do with that key what you want. If you put that key in your pocket and walk away, you become her jailer. But if you take that key and unlock the room through the opportunities available after the movie, you will be allowing that girl out of that room and giving her freedom. That's why we're making this movie."

The plot of *Trade of Innocents* revolves around Alex and Claire Becker, a couple grieving the loss of a child when Alex takes a job in Southeast Asia as a human trafficking investigator. Academy Award-winning actress Mira Sorvino plays Claire; Dermot Mulroney plays Alex. Viewers will also recognize supporting actor John Billingsley, who has appeared in over 100 films and television shows. Up-and-comer Trieu Tran joins the cast in the role of the villainous brothel owner.

Admittedly, it's not a warm, fuzzy topic for a film. The subject matter alone may draw an "R" rating, although producers are hoping for "PG-13." But even against the backdrop of incredible evil, the story offers hope and redemption. Bill and Laurie say *Trade of Innocents* is not a "Christian movie" in the sense that many people would think: There is no overt gospel message, no "praying grandmother character." But they point out that the movie is very much in line with God's heart for the oppressed, and, they say, Christians should be the first to embrace these themes.

"This is God's story. It's our story; it's our kids' stories," says Laurie. "And we're hoping it's going to be the world's story."

The expected release date of *Trade of Innocents* is in early 2012 with broad distribution throughout the U.S. For the latest on release dates and local showings, see www.tradeofinnocentsmovie.com or search for the *Trade of Innocents* page on Facebook. For more on human trafficking, visit IJM's Web site: www.ijm.org. —Myra Holmes



Better to give

“Joy of Giving” reflects spirit of Christmas

On Christmas morning this year, as for the last dozen years or so, families from Laurelglenn Bible Church (LBC), Bakersfield, Calif., will gather in the LBC parking lot for a bit of organization and some prayer, then scatter to several nursing homes to deliver gifts to seniors who might otherwise spend the holiday alone. They call it “Joy of Giving,” and it’s become a Christmas tradition for 150 to 200 LBC people.

It didn’t start that big, of course. It began as a small project of a women’s Bible Study group who desired to center their holiday on giving, not receiving. Dana Yarian, a member of that women’s group, was hesitant at first to participate: How would her family react? Would they willingly give up part of their Christmas day? “But once you go, that’s when you really catch the vision,” she says. “My family can’t imagine not going now.”

Joy of Giving really has very little to do with the gifts the LBCers hand out. The gift bags contain a few small practical items—socks, lotion, tissues—and a stuffed animal. The stuffed animal gives something comforting to hold on to, triggers memories of childhood and serves as a conversation starter. The bag is just an excuse to visit with the seniors, hear their stories and spend some time with them. And that’s the real gift.

Tim Hardy, care ministries pastor at LBC, says Joy of Giving is about presence, not presents: “The reason that we’re here is to give tangible love.”

Families often bring small children and senior-friendly dogs, both of which draw particularly joyful responses. LBCers are encouraged to pray with the residents, and Hardy says the seniors often reach out to clasp hands as they receive such expressions of love. He says that last Christmas, one senior received Christ during a visit by an LBC family.

Hardy says they’ve learned to focus their visits on facilities where residents tend to be, for whatever reason, forgotten and alone on the holiday. Currently, they work with

four facilities, coordinating their visits with the activity directors. Privacy laws prevent the directors from giving out any names, so LBC provides gifts for every resident. Last year, they distributed gifts to and visited with about 500 seniors.

The LBC congregation has embraced Joy of Giving as part of their church Christmas tradition, donating the gift items, participating in a “packing party” to prepare the bags and praying for the Christmas morning interactions.

This year, LBC will be participating in Advent Conspiracy, an effort to think about Christmas giving in fresh ways, but Yarian says LBC already has a head start through Joy of Giving. She says the tradition is a perfect example of the true meaning of Christmas, when Christ gave himself as an expression of love. “He quickly pours that love back into our hearts as we pour into others,” she says.—Myra Holmes

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Win-win-win

Tabor invests in the next generation through Ministry Quest

Think of it as a win-win-win: Young people gain help determining their call, local churches gain committed workers and the larger church gains a new generation of leaders.

Ministry Quest (MQ), now a program of Tabor College, partners with the local church to help identify and affirm high school young people with ministry leadership potential. MQ began as a program of MB Biblical Seminary, the Mennonite Brethren school for graduate-level theological training located in Fresno, Calif., under a grant by the Lily Foundation. But when the seminary came under the umbrella of Fresno Pacific University, the MB-owned school on the West Coast, MQ found itself a program without a home.

Wendell Loewen saw an opportunity. Loewen, associate professor of youth, church and culture at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren-owned liberal arts school located in Hillsboro, Kan., recognized the value of investing in the next generation of leaders and made a bid to bring the program to Tabor. Tabor embraced the vision, and, with the support of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren (USMB) Leadership Board, adopted MQ. Loewen now serves half-time as director of MQ for Tabor.

Steve Schroeder, chair of the USMB Leadership Board, says the Board considered leadership development a necessity, not a luxury. "Without it, we have no future," he says. The Board also recognized MQ's good track record and felt it was a quality program.

Ed Boschman, USMB executive director, says that the USMB vision—dozens of churches planted and countless lives transformed—will require a generation of leaders. "We have to start thinking about our nation as a mission field," he says. "As a national leadership team, we must do everything we can to help our young leaders get that."

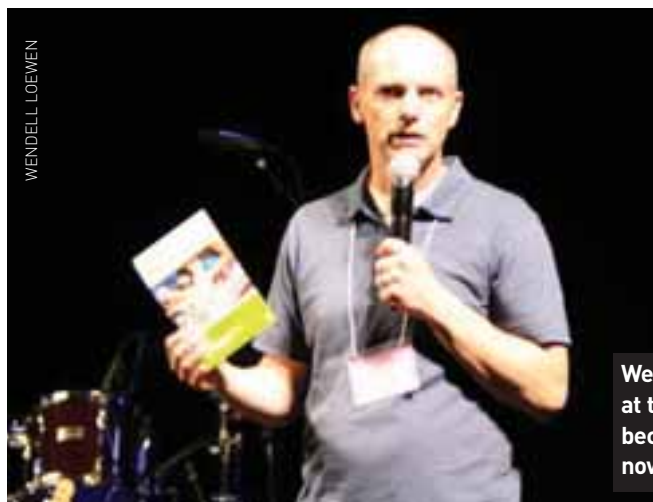
So what's a college doing with a program that targets high school youth? It's a perfect fit, Loewen says. And not just as a recruiting tool, although it's true that the college benefits from MQ alumni who then attend Tabor. More importantly, Loewen sees the program as a service to Tabor's constituents, a good partnership with USMB and a chance to invest in the future. "We feel good about not only the potential students that could come our way but the opportunity to partner with the denomination as we look to the future of the church," Loewen says.

MQ was known as an effective program when it was owned by the seminary, so Loewen says Tabor will keep the "heart" intact, with some new nuances. While the seminary focused on potential pastors and missionaries, Ministry Quest will now broaden the interpretation of ministry leaders to include those in any occupation. "We're running with a broader understanding of ministry, mission and leadership," Loewen says.

Although Tabor College is owned by Mennonite Brethren in the Midwest, Loewen says MQ will continue to view itself as a national program. He says Tabor values MQ as a "denominational service—a way to help churches all across the country think about tomorrow's leaders."

The components of Tabor's MQ program will look nearly identical to the former program, with two "stages." The first, "Charting Your Course," explores the primary calling of Christians—vocation. The second, "Setting Your Sail," explores how to live out that call individually—occupation.

The year-long program is bookended by retreats. Both students beginning the program and students concluding the program will attend the six-day intensive retreat



WENDELL LOEWEN

Wendell Loewen, director of Ministry Quest, invites students at the National Youth Convention this past spring to consider becoming involved in this leadership development program now lodged with Tabor College.

simultaneously, setting up rich interactions between the two sets of students. The incoming students will listen to the call stories from others and explore what it means to be called. At the same time, those finishing the program will consider how they will live out their call and be sent out to serve. The first retreat for Tabor's MQ is being planned for late June 2012 in Denver, Colo.

During each of the two stages, the MQ student will be mentored by a leader from their home church for 13 sessions. This "life on life" piece is key, Loewen says, because it secures the program back into the local church. MQ has no intention of taking students out of their local church; rather, the program aims to plant them back into their congregation with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to serve. In that way, the local church wins.

The second stage includes a significant mission experience, designed by the student. It's a chance for students to get beyond the walls of their church, put their gifts to work and see God at work. It might be a short-term overseas experience or something more local—"something that whets their appetite and inspires them or urges them to want to go and do and be a part of what God's doing," as Loewen describes. Along the way, journaling and other assignments will help students process their learning.

The ideal MQ applicant will be 16 to 18 years old, with a growing relationship with Christ, already active in the church and looking toward service. Candidates must be nominated and affirmed for the program by their local congregation because, as Loewen says, it is the task of the local church to identify and call out leaders; MQ's goal is to come alongside the church in that task.

Boschman and Schroeder both remember being nudged toward ministry during high school by someone in their local church. "That's my story," Boschman says. "I know it works!"

For Schroeder, a few words of affirmation after church were so significant he remembers the occasion in great detail even several decades later. It was for him the starting point for a lifetime of service. He says, "I think we can be doing that in our churches, and Ministry Quest can help with that."

Loewen points out that the year-long MQ program is a starting point, not an end, for students who participate, since living out God's calling is a journey with no end. For many, it will involve education. For others, it may be a job or other opportunities. "They see their life as a mission opportunity," he says.

Students, parents or church leaders interested in applying or nominating can find information and forms at www.MinistryQuest.com. Loewen notes that the program is limited to 40 participants, and those spots fill up fast. "Apply sooner rather than later," he encourages. —
Myra Holmes



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Three districts hold fall conventions

Gatherings highlight growth, church plants

Three of the five U.S. Mennonite Brethren districts gathered for business and inspiration this fall. The North Carolina District Conference (NCDC) was the first to meet, gathering Sept. 16-18 in Lenoir, NC. Both the Central District Conference (CDC) and Pacific District Conference (PDC) met the first weekend in November, creating challenges for national staff and agency representatives who wished to attend both.

An air of excitement was evident as the NCDC convened at The Life Center, the district's newly-completed multipurpose building, with the largest convention attendance in recent history, says Chris Eidse, a NCDC pastor. A new youth component added fuel to the enthusiasm. District youth heard an energizing address Friday evening, stayed overnight at the church and participated in youth seminars on Saturday.

This past year, NCDC churches have either maintained attendance or are experiencing growth, according to church reports given Saturday morning. Several churches have recently completed building renovations and expansions. Seminars by a variety of guests filled Saturday afternoon.

A record-breaking 278 people attended the Sunday morning "Unity Service," which included worship led by a combined choir and "Acts of Praise," greetings from Ed Boschman, executive director of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren, and encouragement to remain faithful from district moderator Terry Hunt. Hunt also talked about upcoming changes: a new model for giving to the national conference, a switch to a biennial convention schedule and a reassigning of pastors to their current churches. Wendell Loewen, from Tabor College, the MB school in the Midwest, wrapped up the weekend with a keynote address.

A total of 86 delegates and guests met Nov. 3-5 at Grace Bible Church in Gettysburg, SD, for the CDC's 101st convention. Church planting is a high priority among the 26 MB congregations in Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, and the conference budget reflects this.

Saturday delegates affirmed a budget of \$238,000, 60 percent of which is for church planting. These funds will assist four congregations and provide financial assistance for Hispanic pastors to attend church planting resource events.

In addition to accepting a new budget, delegates heard oral reports from district minister Roger Engbrecht and six CDC committees and elected new committee members. Engbrecht was the convention speaker and addressed the convention theme: "In a changing world: be grounded...be relevant." The Church Planting and Renewal Committee planned the Friday evening banquet program. Rod Anderson, CDC church planter and pastor, was the speaker, and Omaha, Neb., church planters Chad Stoner of Stony Brook Church, and Jose Guerra of Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva gave updates.

When the PDC gathered for their semiannual convention Nov. 4-5, delegates and guests from the westernmost branch of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren did business and swapped stories of God at work.

Trinity Church of Portland, Ore., a one-year-old MB church plant that exemplifies the kind of success stories celebrated, hosted the convention. The emotional centerpiece of the weekend was Friday evening's home missions banquet, during which church planters from Portland; Salt Lake City, Utah; Clovis, Calif.; and Selma, Calif., told inspiring stories of changed lives. Brad Klassen, pastor of Copper Hills Community Church, Phoenix, Ariz., introduced the newest PDC effort, which targets young adults and is led by Copper Hills intern Gavin Linderman.

PDC delegates affirmed new leaders, approved a fairly flat budget for the coming year and heard reports from district ministers, boards and Fresno Pacific University, the MB school owned by the PDC. They also recognized two new PDC congregations: Eagles Harbor Community Church, Clovis, Calif., and Trinity Church. —From reports by Chris Eidse, Connie Faber and Myra Holmes

Mission USA

Celebrating God's Faithfulness



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Don Morris
Mission USA director

Praying for the impossible

What an amazing reality: God wants us to ask him for the impossible—things that only he can accomplish. Jesus says to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt. 17:20).

I struggle with this. Isn’t asking God to do the impossible a little presumptuous on my part? Why would he do this for me? Why do I have the right to approach the maker of the universe with such requests?

Why? Because our prayers are pathways for God to act in powerful ways. Jesus says, “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:24). Amazing. Because I am his child, God expects me to ask him for big things. God delights in displaying his glory.

So I’ve started asking God for some things that seem impossible. In fact, they are impossible—for me. In particular, I’m humbly asking God for something very specific pertaining to Mission USA and the planting of new Mennonite Brethren churches.

I was walking on a beach, gazing at the ocean, when God impressed this on me: “Ask me for what seems impossible to you. Ask me to help Mission

USA reach people in my name. I can create oceans. Ask me.” I stumbled when God said this. I stammered. I couldn’t get the words out for quite some time. Do I dare ask for six church plants and for the money to get it done? If this would come to pass, it would result in more new churches being established in any one year than we have seen happen since the early years of our immigration from Russia. Wow!

For hours I walked and listened. This would almost be like Joshua asking the Lord to stop the sun from setting so he could vanquish the Amorites (Josh. 10). It would be a “sun stand still” kind of request.

Before I could pray for six new churches, I asked myself: Would this glorify God? Yes, he obviously wants to reach people who don’t know him yet. Would some see this as just a plea for more money? I don’t know, maybe. But maybe it would truly energize some that have a passion for reaching the lost. Would I be able to relate this “sun stand still” prayer to others with the right motives and with a true heart? Oh, how I pray so!

So, Lord, I ask, I pray, this “sun stand still” prayer: For Mission USA to have an integral part in planting six new MB churches by the end of 2012, and for the money it will take to get this done.

It is impossible to say how many Christians there

are in China today, but no one denies the numbers are exploding. A conservative figure is

60 million.

Did YOU know?

There are already more Chinese at church on a Sunday than in the whole of Europe.

Source: BBC News Magazine

Church plant celebrates one-year anniversary

Trinity Church of Portland, Ore., celebrated one year of public ministry and worship with a banquet Sept. 17. Trinity Church is a Mennonite Brethren church plant supported by the Pacific District Conference and Mission USA, the church planting and church renewal ministry of the U.S. Conference of MB Churches. It is already a self-supporting congregation, now off of subsidy.

Following a catered dinner and musical entertainment, Art Azurdia, senior minister of word and worship, recounted God's blessings throughout the past year and members shared stories of their experience at Trinity Church. The celebration continued Sunday morning with five baptisms, accepting 15 people into church membership and appointing another elder to the leadership team. Trinity experienced its highest Sunday morning attendance, with 173 joining the celebration.

Sally Gentry was one of several members who spoke at the Saturday banquet of the Lord's work in their lives through Trinity Church.

"I am Sally Gentry, and I am married to Larry who recently turned 75. Why do I mention this? Because I am pretty sure that we are age-wise the oldest members of Trinity Church. In many churches, this would push us to the outer fringes of the circle of fellowship. We would be relegated to a box out here for the doddering elders who are somewhat eccentric.

Now, we may be doddering elders who are somewhat eccentric—and we perhaps don't always remember your correct names—but you have welcomed us into the center of your fellowship circle where we can joyfully share our lives together. This fellowship has caused us to stand amazed as we are continually deepened in our understanding of how wonderfully Jesus builds his church. I'll give you some examples:

Who would have thought we could have a serious conversation about the Heidelberg Catechism with a musician who is a Christian rapper?

Who would have thought that a 75 year-old guy would be invited to one of your bachelor parties?

Who would have thought that a young couple sitting next to us in Sunday worship would invite us on a double date?

I am not making these things up—they are evidence of how you have embraced generational unity in this family of faith. The leadership of Trinity Church has set the tone for loving one another, and we consider it a blessing and a privilege to fully share your partnership in the gospel. We observe you raising your families, laboring at your studies and your daily jobs and living in a fallen world that is hostile to God. We have walked in your shoes over the years, and I stand before you this evening as a witness to the truth that the God who chose us in love and called us into his kingdom is magnificently faithful, even when we are not. In every generation we find our refuge in Jesus. One day when you are 75, should the Lord tarry that long, you, too, will be a witness to another generation with your testimony of God's mercy and steadfast love in your life."

—From a report by Norm Thiesen



The Trinity Church worship band leads the congregation during their first anniversary worship service.



Amberly Hulzebos

Dreaming of a Japanese Christmas

“Is Santa Claus from the Bible?” This may sound like a funny question to most of us, but it wasn’t unusual coming from my English students in Japan. Most people in Japan believe Santa Claus is the reason for Christmas.

I had the privilege of teaching English in Japanese Mennonite Brethren churches for five years in Osaka, Japan. It was an amazing opportunity and at times very challenging.

Celebrating Christmas in another culture can be an interesting experience. Only about 1 percent of the Japanese population is Christian so Christmas is not a national holiday. The first year I was in Japan I remember walking through a train station on Christmas Day watching people go on their way as if it was a normal day. Businessmen talking on their phones rushing through the station, women shopping and children on their way home from school. As I watched everyone my eyes filled with tears and my heart broke for a nation that has little knowledge of Christ but is desperate for a savior.

Christmas is acknowledged in Japan but is still somewhat of a foreign concept. Many people try to emulate the ideas of Christmas shown in American movies. I was always baffled to hear Christmas carols ringing through the stores even though people cannot understand the lyrics. Most people celebrate at home and may give a small gift to their children.

Surprisingly, the traditional food eaten on Christmas is fried chicken and cake. In fact, many people order ahead or wait in long lines for chicken from a popular fast food chain. This comes from images in movies of families eating turkey on holidays.

There is also a romantic celebration to Christmas. Young dating couples will have a romantic dinner or go out somewhere special and exchange gifts.

Because New Year’s Day is the most important holiday, Christmas is only celebrated for one day. By December 26 all signs of Christmas are gone, and everyone is preparing for a new year. I always felt sad to see Christmas end so abruptly. While Christmas is important to Japanese Christians there is still a cultural pull to emphasize the New Year’s celebration.

Leading up to Christmas, churches will have many events to reach out to the community. As a teacher I did activities with my students to teach them about Christmas, including candlelight services during classes, pictured below. One student said to me, “I didn’t know Christmas is Jesus’ birthday. That’s why the church celebrates it!” I pray this Christmas season many more people will come to the realization that Christmas is a celebration of Christ’s birth to be celebrated every day of the year!

Amberly Hulzebos is an elementary teacher and a member of Community Bible Church in Mountain Lake, Minn. She served for five years with MB Mission in Japan as an English teacher in Japanese MB churches.



AMBERLY HULZEBOS



Wally Kroeker

Learning from obituaries

A young friend was surprised to hear that I usually scan the obituaries in our local newspaper. “You must be getting old.” I suppose so—I find more and more familiar names in the death notices. I read the obituaries because this is where I cut my teeth in the newspaper business. “Good place to learn reporting,” my first editor said.

I also check obituaries to see what they say about people’s work. A few read like a resume, with inflated litanies of professional achievement. Others do the reverse, skipping anything related to work. In effect, they say, “Look, this person had a life beyond work.”

Such was the case with my friend Jack. He ran a small music store near my home back when I was lurching through adolescence and dreaming of a career as a musician. I often dropped in to buy sheet music, records (remember them?) or a bottle of trumpet valve oil. Or just to chat.

A kind and wise older man who had played in a lot of big bands, Jack offered tidbits of counsel that helped stabilize my stormy youth. His little store, his means of livelihood, was more than a place of commercial transactions. For me, it was an inviting place of warmth and affirmation.

Then I moved away. When I returned many years later, Jack’s store was gone and he was dying. At his memorial service, I heard not a word about Jack’s long career or the place where he had mentored me. As I listened, I wondered if I had stumbled into the wrong funeral. Where was the Jack I had known? It was as if he had never worked. Perhaps those who planned his memorial service didn’t know his work was important. But it was important to me, at least.

Recently I heard echoes of Jack’s memorial when someone declared, “I’m going to write my own obituary to make sure it says nothing about my business.” What a pity—not only because readers will be deprived of vital information, but also because he thinks there is little lasting value in the activity that has consumed most of his waking hours for four decades.

There was a time when gravestones told tales of those who lay beneath. Like this one from many centuries back: “Here lies Dion, a pious man; he lived 80 years and planted 4,000 trees.”

“When I die,” says William Rentschler, former chair of Medart Corporation, “I hope whoever delivers the eulogy will remember me as one who sought always to provide steady, decent, challenging jobs, which allowed good people to support their families, build and retains their self-esteem and (quoting Teddy Roosevelt) ‘work hard at work worth doing.’”

Here’s a task to kick off the New Year: Why not write your own obituary? Ponder how you’d like to be remembered. Include the things most important to you. Let us peek into your soul. If you are bold, show it to some close friends. Does it ring true to them? If not, why not devote this year to becoming the person you want to be? And don’t forget to include your work.

Wally Kroeker, a former Christian Leader editor, edits The Marketplace, a magazine for Christians in business published by Mennonite Economic Development Associates. From Kroeker’s book God’s Week Has Seven Days. Copyright © 1998 by Herald Press, Harrisonburg, VA, 22802. Used by permission.

Many of us look for ways to reach out to those who are needy and hurting in an effort to make their Christmas season a little brighter. With so many organizations to choose from, selecting a trustworthy and reliable charity for your special Christmas project may seem overwhelming. Consider one of the following Mennonite Brethren or inter-Mennonite agencies.

In their Gift Solutions 2011 catalog, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) offers 12 suggestions that benefit small business owners in six countries. Visit www.giftsolutions.org to order your gift online.

Mennonite Central Committee (www.mcc.org/Christmas) has eight gifts in their 2011 Christmas gift list, ranging in price from \$10 to \$1,330. The inter-Mennonite relief, development and peace agency lets you download a printable card to send to the person in whose name the gift is being made.

For their 2011 Christmas gift list Family Life Network (www.flm.ca), a media ministry of the Manitoba MB Conference, has selected six projects highlighting half of the 12 languages in which they work.

re: charities

m i l e s t o n e s

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Bria Jasmer was baptized and received as a member Oct. 16 of **Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla.** Esther Howard became a member April 24.

Savannah Brown, Ariana Berk, Celine Stephan and Jeanie Maciel were baptized Sept. 25 at **Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif.**

Christie Baker, Isaac Dunn and Raphael Geddert were baptized and received as members of **College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.**, Nov. 6. Fay Nielsen was received as a member Oct. 9.

Sara Nehlich and Jesse Jonas were baptized Oct. 9 at **Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD.**

Stephanie Rempel, Brooke Doerksen, Alyssa Farrell, Scott Schroeder, Josh Schroeder, Spencer Brown, Kyndra Vix, Emery Schroeder, Staci Ens, Emma Wingert, Becky Spahr, Marc Haught, Shonda Haught, Kurt Holmes, Debbie Holmes, Kyle Stuart, Linda Stuart, John Cramer and Anna Klein were baptized Aug. 28 at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.** Garrett Holmes, Mitch Woltersdorf, Elise Woltersdorf, Tony Armstrong and Jane Armstrong were received as members Sept. 4.

Jim and Nancy Duncan, Judy Janzen, Bob Johnson, Dennis and Mary Newman, Alexandra Newman, Chris and Heather Moore and Sonia Zuniga were received Sept. 18 as members of **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Ginger Cahan, Michael Carrell and Vanessa Bond-Carrell were baptized Oct. 2 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper, Utah.**

Glen Decker, Laura Jost, Daniel Quiring and Brent Regier were baptized and received as members of **Henderson (Neb.) MB Church** Sept. 11. Lisa Kroeker, Loretta Decker and Dot Quiring were received as members.

Jeremy Ens, Emilee Giger, Austin Manring, Brooklyn Staats, Jonah Vainerere and Nennah Vainerere were baptized Oct. 2 at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.** Matt and Jennifer Paxson were received as members.

Karry Vaughn was baptized Oct. 2 at **North Park Community Church, Eugene, Ore.**

Aaron Bartel, Emily Bartel, Katie Bartel, Kourtney Schmidt and Jacob Wall were baptized and received as members of **Corn (Okla.) MB Church** Aug. 7. Tim and Jennifer Clever were received as members Sept. 25.

Makenna Cummings, Molly Enns, Emilie Garcia and John Grant were baptized and received as members Nov. 6 at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church.** William and Helena Born, Mark and Jeani Kendig, and Roger and Naomi Poppen were received as members.

CELEBRATIONS

The Heart, Tulsa, Okla., celebrated a 10-year anniversary Sept. 11.

Memorial Road MB Church, Edmond, Okla., dedicated a new classroom and gymnasium addition to their facility Sept. 25.

WORKERS

Mike Hiebert has accepted the call to join the pastoral staff at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church.** He will begin mid-January.

J. Edward Epp will be ending his tenure as lead pastor at **Henderson (Neb.) MB Church** Jan. 1, 2012.

Five interns served at **North Fresno (Calif.) MB Church** this fall: Ashley Irvine, Dustin Maddux, Katie Johnson, Nori Terashima and Phil Schmidt.

Scott Holman was affirmed Oct. 2 as the lead pastor at **Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif.** He will serve half-time in this position and half-time as pastor for Butler's Common Ground congregation.

Jerry Crain has resigned as pastor at **Martin Box Church, Marshall, Ark.**

Steve Bomar began serving June 1 as worship pastor for the contemporary service at **North Fresno (Calif.) MB Church.**

Robert Conn is the new youth pastor at **Shadow Lake Church, Papillion, Neb.**

Eric Young has resigned his position as director of youth ministry and communications at **Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash.** He began serving Oct. 9 as high school ministry director at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church.**

Elbio Carballo is the new pastor of Amor y Fe, the Spanish-language congregation of **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Darrin Eddy is now the **Youth Pastor at Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

John Ail has resigned as lead pastor at **Ulysses (Kan.) MB Church.**

Larry King has resigned as lead pastor at **Good News Christian Fellowship, Marion, Kan.**, effective Dec. 31.

Jarod Richardson is the new worship pastor at **Discovery Bible Fellowship, Collinsville, Okla.** Kelley Compton resigned as worship

Church sleeps in Cardboard Box City

In spite of chilly temperatures, about 30 youth and adults from Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, SD, slept in cardboard boxes Oct. 21-22 in order to better understand poverty. "Cardboard Box City" was set up in the church parking lot using large boxes, tarps and 11 rolls of duct tape.

In order to better identify with the homeless, participants brought only a sleeping bag, a flashlight, a Bible and the clothes on their back. About 70 people also participated in an evening program, which included worship, speakers on the topic of homelessness, prayer and a light meal. Two "testimony walls" invited participants to share their reflections and ideas.

Cardboard Box City is an indirect result of the National Youth Convention, held in April 2011 in San Antonio, Texas. Bible Fellowship youth who attended began to brainstorm about how to better impact their community.

"We didn't want to be lukewarm Christians just sitting and soaking in knowledge; we wanted to live it out," says youth pastor Kyle Goings. He hopes the event will be a launching board for future service.

Watch a YouTube video of the event:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXEKnyNBjxE>.



Love and bikes

A home group from Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif., took up a challenge from the pulpit to reach out by picking up their wrenches and offering a community Bike Repair Clinic Oct. 21. An estimated 30 people brought their bicycles—sometimes their only means of transportation—to the church parking lot for free parts and service. A local bike shop, Sunnyside Bicycles, sponsored the event by providing parts. “This was just us guys loving on people, fixing their bikes,” says organizer Eric Pauls. The clinic was so well received that the group hopes to plan another for spring or summer.

ROCKed by church plant

When someone from New Hope, the newest Mennonite Brethren church plant in the Salt Lake City, Utah, area, shows kindness to someone in the community, whether through buying their lunch at McDonald's or through a larger, church-initiated outreach effort, they call it a Radical Outbreak of Community Kindness. Such deeds are now accompanied by a card that reads “You’ve just been R.O.C.Ked by New Hope.” The card also includes some basic church information. “The card’s purpose is to show them that there is a church in town that truly cares about its community,” says church planer Josh Gonzales.

pastor to work with Project Hope Worldwide, a global outreach partner of DBF. Candace Johnson has also joined the DBF staff as director of children's ministry.

Garvie Schmidt has resigned as lead pastor at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** and has accepted a position with MB Foundation.

Chris Walsh has resigned as executive pastor at **First MB Church**, Wichita, Kan. He will be directing a Christian camp in Arizona.

DEATHS

Buhler, Venona, 79, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, died Sept. 5, 2011. Parents: Walter and Alvina Warkentin. Spouse: Johnny Buhler. Children: Kevin, Brenda Boldt, Gail Enns; six grandchildren.

Dick, Ella, 89, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, died Aug. 6, 2011. Parents: Michael B. and Lena (Muth) Brown. Spouse: Richard Dick, deceased. Children: Norma Schmidt, Gaylord, Doug, Michelle Kersten; 14 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren; five great-great-grandchildren.

Grauman, Glen, 84, Reedley, Calif., died Aug. 12, 2011. Parents: F.J. and Lydia Grauman. Spouse: Ruth Martens. Children: Lyndia Long; seven grandchildren; five great-grandchildren.

Hamilton, Grace Marie, 86, Garden City, Kan., member of Garden Valley Church, Garden City, died Sept. 26, 2011. Spouse: Roger Hamilton. Children: Kent, Bob, Jeanne; seven grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Janzen, Gus, 91, Okeene, Okla., member of Okeene MB Church, died Sept. 25, 2011. Parents: C.L. and Anna (Flaming) Janzen. Spouse: Annie Reimer. Children: Steve, Wayne, Danny; six grandchildren.

Loewen, Cary Wayne, 84, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno MB Church, died Sept. 17, 2011. Parents: Cornelius and Bertha Loewen. Spouse: Jane Hubert, deceased. Children: Douglas, Jerry, Nancy, Sheri; five grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

Neufeldt, Emerson W., 80, Buhler, Kan., of Buhler MB Church, died Sept. 4, 2011. Parents: Gerooge G. and Emma (Wall) Neufeldt. Spouse: Norma Ruth Enns. Children: Joyce Nelson, Diana (Dee) Rheingans, Philip, Michael; nine grandchildren.

Ratzlaff, ElRoy Harvey, 84, Reedley, Calif., of Reedley MB Church, died Sept. 14, 2011. Parents: Aaron and Ann (Penner) Ratzlaff.

Spouse: Erma Flaming. Children: Ken, Bob, Jean Penner; six grandchildren; six great-grandchildren.

reaching in

DISCIPLESHIP

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif. hosted a five-hour “Personal Renewal” seminar Nov. 5.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan. held a ministry fair Oct. 9 during the Sunday school hour. Booths were set up by various organizations and committees showcasing their particular ministries.

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church launched a new mentoring program this fall, matching adults with high school students.

Oksana Nelson, former recipient of an Operation Christmas Child gift box and current U.S. resident, spoke Oct. 1 at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.**

Sermons and small group studies at **Valleview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, were centered on the book *Radical* for an eight-week series that began Sept. 18.

FELLOWSHIP

Attendees of **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, enjoyed a night of comedy Oct. 29 with guest Dennis Gaxiola.

Women from **SMCC@Daybreak, South Jordan, Utah**, attended a one-day retreat this fall.

Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, SD, hosted a Fall Fun Night Oct. 30, including puppets, games, prizes, free hot dogs, chips and drinks.

Enid (Okla.) MB Church hosted a “Gospel Sing and Slurp” Aug. 21, with favorite hymns and root beer floats.

A men's breakfast Oct. 8 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, included a car show and a lesson on “Restoration.” Women brought their own projects or learned new skills, such as scrapbooking or knitting, at “Crafternoon” Nov. 5.

Women from **Valleview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, ate at a Mexican restaurant and played a trivia game Oct. 20.

The Christian Education Committee at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church** hosted “Casual Sunday” on the fifth Sunday of October. Attendees were encouraged to dress casually and come early for breakfast.

Women from **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** dressed in their most comfortable clothes

for "PJs and Pedis," an evening of pedicures, snacks, games and comedy Aug. 12.

Women wore hats to a Sept. 29 dessert event at **North Fresno (Calif.) MB Church**. Speaker Karen Jessing shared on "Overcoming Life's Adversities."

WORSHIP

Shadow Lake Church, Papillion, Neb., began a third worship service on Sunday evenings Oct. 2. Over 220 people attended the first service.

Oct. 2 was the first of three Celebration Sundays, designed to be especially welcoming to newcomers, at **Belleview Community Church, Littleton, Colo.** The service was followed by a cookout and activities for children.

The sanctuary of **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, is open on Thursday evenings for anyone wanting to spend some quiet time in prayer. This is an open prayer time with no formal prayer leader.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., held its annual Harvest Mission Festival Nov. 6 with guest

speakers Paul and Amanda Bartel, church planters from Kansas City who shared during the adult Sunday School hour, worship service and following the fellowship meal.

reaching out

LOCALLY

Youth from **SMCC@Daybreak, South Jordan, Utah**, spent an evening at the local rescue mission, providing a message, leading worship and serving a meal.

Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif., will be taking their musical skills to the streets for "Christmas Road Show" this December. Various choirs and ensembles will perform at a soup kitchen, a park, a rescue mission and two retirement homes.

Attendees of **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, purchased "Meals-to-Go" after the services Oct. 30 to raise funds for a local elementary school. Parents and staff at the school made and sold the meals, which featured chile

verde, chile rojo or quesadillas. Funds raised went toward school field trips.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church started a tutoring program this fall for children up to grade six. One-on-one sessions are held before the Wednesday evening Awana program and include help with schoolwork and memorization of verses.

Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif., and students from Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, partnered for "Meet and Treat," an Oct. 31 event that included candy, popcorn, bounce houses, cocoa and a hayride.

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a community Harvest Party in a local park Oct. 31.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., holds an adult Bible study every Tuesday morning at a local mobile home park.

Shorelife Community Church, Capitola, Calif., was among area churches sponsoring a community-wide prayer event focused on physical, emotional and spiritual healing Sept. 10.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Events

Church Anniversary: Kingsburg MB Church invites all former members, ministers and friends to join us in celebrating the church's 50th anniversary Feb. 11-12, 2012. For details contact the church office: 559-897-4162, kmbsc@sbcglobal.net or on the web: kingsburgmb.org (2X)

Agency Anniversary: Kings View Corporation's 60th Anniversary Dinner Celebration will be held in Fresno, Calif., Saturday, March 31, 2012. Please call Marilyn Janzen at 559-256-0100, ext 3004 or e-mail mjanzen@kingsview.org to reserve your ticket.

Job Openings

Agency

Planned Giving Advisor: MB Foundation is accepting applications for Planned Giving Advisor. This person, based out of the Fresno, Calif., office, will represent MBF programs and services to individuals and ministries throughout the West Coast. The advisor will encourage charitable giving through current giving, estate planning and lifetime gift plans and provide customer service in all other areas of MBF work. MBF is a service agency of the U.S. Conference of MB Churches. Salary commensurate with training and experience. If interested, send a letter and resume to: Jon C. Wiebe, President/CEO, MB Foundation, PO Box 220, Hillsboro KS 67063 (jwiebe@mbfoundation.com)

Local Church

Executive Pastor: First MB Church, a congregation of 950 people in Wichita, Kan., is seeking an Executive Pastor to coordinate and administer the vision of First MB Church by providing leadership and supervision, related specifically to the areas of staff development, church finances, policy development, facility administration and risk management. Please send resumes to Brent Warkentin, at bwarkentin@firstmbchurch.org.

Senior Pastor: Fairview (Okla.) MB Church is seeking a senior pastor. The mission of Fairview MB Church is to "Equip through the Word...Empower through prayer...Encourage through love and acceptance...In order to: Evangelize by bringing Christ and our community together." Fairview is a rural community of 3,000 people located in Northwest Oklahoma. Contact Mac Wahl, RR 1 Box 136, Fairview, OK 73737; Home 580-227-3001 or Cell 580-227-0507; macwahl@pldi.net

For Sale

Cookbook: Back by popular demand, we are reprinting the 1980 "My Favorite Recipes," Corn Mennonite Brethren Church, \$15/book. To order call 580-343-2274, Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. CST

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C·Link

An electronic biweekly newsletter
from the Christian Leader!

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details and
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If your homeowners premium is part of your monthly mortgage payment, you could be paying too much for insurance and not even know about it. We can save you money on your homeowners coverage if you attend a Mennonite church. So take a moment to compare your current premiums with ours in the examples below...

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