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THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2016

from the editor



This issue of the *Christian Leader* includes an insert provided by the USMB Board of Faith and Life (BFL). This study guide, “God’s Community of Peace,” highlights peacemaking in our homes, churches, communities, nation and the world. It is one of several new resources developed by BFL as part of implementing Article 13: Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation. Other resources include an online discussion forum (www.usmb13.com) managed by Trent Voth, a recent Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary graduate, and “Living as People of Peace,” the latest addition to the BFL Pamphlet Series; pamphlets are free, and copies are available from the USMB Midwest office.

We long for peace in our nation and the world. And yet we sometimes forget that big-picture peace begins with you and me. We also sometimes forget that active peacemaking sometimes generates hostility and thus requires courage. A recent example of a local community working for peace and encountering resistance is Garden City, Kan.

In mid-October, Garden City made national news when three men were arrested for threatening to blow up an apartment complex that is home to approximately 120 of the 500 Somali-born residents of this western Kansas city of about 25,000. The goal of the attack, planned for the day after the presidential election, was to draw attention to a perceived Islamic threat and to inspire other militia groups to commit similar acts.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the men also discussed targeting the community churches that help settle immigrants. Garden Valley MB Church is one of those congregations. In an October 17 interview, Pastor Steve Ensz told *USA TODAY* that his congregation will continue to collect household supplies for distribution to immigrants settling in their community.

“This is a tense time in our community,” Ensz said, “but we want to move forward with building friendships and being the neighbors God has called on us to be.”

Ensz described Garden City as a receptive community that is friendly and welcoming to the immigrants that live there and work at local meat packing plants. He and other community members that talked with *USA TODAY* repeatedly spoke of their support for the Somali-born residents.

Working toward peace and understanding in our communities is not easy. The people in Garden City that work with immigrants and refugees acknowledge that there are members of their community who fear Muslims and sometimes mistakenly associate them with militant groups in their home countries.

In spite of the challenges, our call as followers of Jesus is to be peacemakers. May God grant us the wisdom and courage necessary to do so. As the BFL study guide says, “We seek peace because Jesus calls us to be peacemakers that are obedient, not necessarily successful. We obey Christ’s command to love ... and leave the results to him.”

“

In spite of the challenges, our call as followers of Jesus is to be peacemakers. May God grant us the wisdom and courage necessary to do so.

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Connie Faber
Editor

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Gaylord Goertzen

We all know what it's like to get in the car and turn the key only to hear a groaning or clicking noise. The car won't start. Why? Because the car battery has been drained of power for one reason or another. The solution is to call a tow truck. It has a battery with power and can jump-start our car.

In the early church there was a man named Joseph whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). The disciples called him Barnabas because he was a spiritual tow truck. Why? The Greek word encouragement means "come alongside to help." That's what a tow truck does, and that's what Barnabas did.

The early church was a family and shared their possessions. Barnabas sold a piece of land and gave the money to the church so the church wouldn't be drained of all of its funds. Barnabas came alongside those in the church who were drained by physical needs and gave.

After Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he tried to join with believers in Jerusalem but they were afraid of him. Saul was discouraged and spiritually drained. Barnabas was not afraid but came alongside Saul and encouraged him, affirmed God's call, brought him to the church and told them how Saul's life and been changed. Barnabas jump-started Paul's ministry. Without Barnabas there might not have been a Paul.

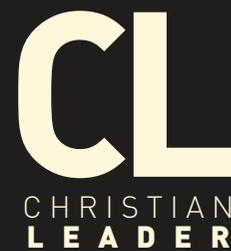
On their first preaching tour, Paul and Barnabas took a young man named Mark with them. Mark couldn't take the pressure and went home. He failed. Paul refused to give Mark a second chance, but not Barnabas. Barnabas came alongside Mark and encouraged him by taking Mark with him as he went one way and Paul went another. Barnabas jump-started Mark's drained career as a missionary. Later Paul affirmed Mark and Mark became the writer of the first Gospel. Without Barnabas there might not be a Gospel of Mark.

What happened to Barnabas? What happens to a tow truck after it jump-starts our car? Its work is finished so it disappears. After Barnabas was used to jump-start people with financial needs, to startup Paul's career and to jump-start Mark's career, Barnabas disappears from Scripture as the emphasis is placed on Paul's ministry.

Not all of us can be great like Paul, but we can be tow trucks like Barnabas. All around us are people who are drained of power due to sickness, circumstances, hurt, pain or loss and who need a jump-start. God's Word calls us to be Barnabas people and our churches to be Barnabas churches and come alongside hurting, needy, broken people to help and encourage them.

Gaylord Goertzen is a retired USMB pastor living in Hillsboro, Kan.

"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, which the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)..." Acts 4:36



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Jules Glanzer

Is it worth the price?

Four reasons why a faith-based college education is valuable

The regional conferences of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Church own two schools that have a strong commitment to Christ-centered higher education: Tabor College and Fresno Pacific University. Both schools are strong, faith-based institutions serving in a society that is increasingly post-Christian.

Recently I was asked to participate in a higher education leadership round table focusing on the value and contribution of higher education to the economic and greater good of society. I represented faith-based institutions. In preparation for the conversation, the moderator of the roundtable asked me to speak to the value of a faith-based college and if it was worth the price. From my vantage point, the answer is yes. Here is why.

1. The focus of an education at a faith-based college is developing the student's mind, soul and spirit. There is an intentional integration that works at shaping a committed heart, a meaningful soul and an inquisitive mind. In a speech to presidents of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, David Brooks, *New York Times* columnist, best selling author and Yale professor, said, "You [Christian colleges] have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion and intellect.... Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it." He went on to say, "You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind and a purposeful soul."

2. The intent of an education at a faith-based college is on a transformed life. A faith-based education is more than acquiring knowledge or learning a set of skills. Our intention is to see a transformed life that is prepared for continued learning, meaningful work and dedicated service. In

today's society, it is in vogue to claim that transformation comes from whatever product one is selling. Even the sign on the shoeshine stand in the Denver airport claims that the experience of having your shoes shined will change your life. A Christian college creates an environment where God's transforming work can happen. And there is a whole lot more at stake than shined shoes.

3. The outcome of an education at a faith-based college is a heart and life of service. When we are at our best, we send graduates into the world with a mindset for service and an understanding that their chosen vocation is a way to participate with God's mission in the world, making the world more as he intended it to be. If we do our job, our graduates will enter the marketplace understanding that giving ourselves away in the service of others in the name of Jesus is how we are to live. Instead of being concerned about ourselves, we are concerned for others, and we demonstrate that by entering a life of service. Each day I walk onto the Tabor College campus, I pass Centennial Plaza where a sign reminds me that I have been "Called to Serve." That sacred space on campus embodies the intended outcome of an education from a faith-based college.

4. The influence of an education at a faith-based college is a better society. In today's American society having a strong evangelical faith labels one as extreme and irrelevant. Yet I believe that our faith-based colleges across the nation contribute to the common good of society. And if you want to know if it is worth the price, ask the people touched by our graduates. Ask our graduates who are serving others, touching lives all over the world.

Jules Glanzer is president of Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college with campuses in Hillsboro and Wichita, Kan.

Our intention is to see a transformed life that is prepared for continued learning, meaningful work and dedicated service.

Walking in someone else's shoes

What I learned about building bridges while living in the inner city

One winter day, I bundled up and walked the two blocks to our ministry center. A typical walk—except this day I almost got arrested.

I am white, and my neighborhood was 98 percent black. Our family was living and working with an inner-city ministry in St. Louis, Mo. The four years we spent in the hood challenged my worldview, exposing the innate differences resulting from growing up in middle-class, rural Oklahoma.

For example, my childhood was carefree and innocent. For my best friend in St. Louis, it was much different. As a young boy, he was hanging out in an abandoned house when suddenly a cop broke through the door. Handcuffing them all, the police searched the place and found a small bag of weed and a handgun. “Whose gun?” was met with silence. So the officer put all the kids in a circle, spinning the gun like “Spin the Bottle” at a junior high party. “Whoever it lands on, that’s whose gun it is!” One kid, chosen at random, forever has “possession of a firearm” on his record.

To my friend, this was a story of simple happenstance. He wasn’t appalled. He was simply relating a typical story of childhood. He went on—racial profiling, suspicion, unjust accusations. All were merely part of growing up as a black youth in inner-city St. Louis. Honestly, as a white outsider, this reality was hard to grasp.

Until that winter day. As I walked, a police car turned and began tailing me slowly. Me. The one walking from the home we’d made with our little girl. The one who had moved hundreds of miles to serve in the zip code with the highest homicide rate in that year’s “Most Dangerous City in America.” The one who was trying to make a difference.

“Where are you going?” I responded, “That way,” and kept walking. “Where exactly?” Frustrated, I repeated, “Up there.” Now, the cops became forceful. “Listen, we’ve got a report of a white male who just robbed a place, and he matches your profile. So we

Jason Phelps, second from left, and his newborn daughter stand with friends in St. Louis.

need to know where you’re going and where you came from...now!”

On that day, in a neighborhood where I was the minority, where all white people looked alike, I experienced profiling. My friends’ stories of being followed simply because of the color of their skin suddenly had a new meaning. Stories of the stares and the instant suspicion.

A bubble broke for me. Sadly, we once joked that in our part of St. Louis, the police wouldn’t respond in under an hour unless someone was shot. I don’t have enough fingers to count how many times we called 911 after a drive-by shooting or event, only to get a recorded message.

And yet I look at those years as a gift. A gift of being the minority. Of glimpsing the other side of the racial and economic divide in America. Of walking a mile, or simply two blocks, in someone else’s shoes.

We all have fears. But most fear is based on ignorance, a fear of the unknown. Because I cannot fully experience your reality, I am ignorant about your world. However, if we can share freely and honestly, we begin to understand. We open our lives and engage with the other, listening and seeking different perspectives. By learning from each other we build bridges together rather than walls between.

Jason Phelps is co-pastor of Watershed, a USMB congregation in Kansas City, Mo.



JASON PHELPS

(God at work in the mennonite brethren world)

Giving Tuesday to raise funds for USMB church planting

USMB is encouraging individuals to support Mennonite Brethren church planting with an online donation to Mission USA on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 29. Giving Tuesday is a day to inspire generosity that falls on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. This will be the third year Mission USA has participated, and funds raised the first two years have been a significant support for MB church plants in the U.S., according to Don Morris, USMB national director.

"Although additional funds are raised during the year, Giving Tuesday has become the major fundraising event for Mission USA and church planting in the U.S.," Morris says. "These funds are so important as we start new MB churches—churches that have the vision of reaching people who don't know Jesus yet."

Morris anticipates that Mission USA will be partnering in a total of 11 current and new church plants in 2017. Online donations Nov. 29 to Mission USA will directly support these church plants. For more information, visit www.usmb.org/GivingTuesday or follow #Together on Facebook and Twitter. —USMB



MB Foundation announces leadership fund

Beginning in 2017, MB Foundation, the stewardship ministry of U.S. Mennonite Brethren, will make \$50,000 available per year to encourage leadership development. Leadership Generation Fund (LeadGen) will grant annual scholarships ranging from several hundred dollars to \$3,000 to encourage leadership development through local churches, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, MB Mission and Tabor College. Other opportunities will be considered on a case by case basis.

The goal of Leadership Generation Fund is to serve as a catalyst to call out leaders, provide funding for leadership development and become a key component to providing more young people trained and ready for MB pastoral ministry. "We aren't interested in starting a leadership program, but want to provide funding to encourage utilization of existing MB academic institutions and leadership training programs," says Jon C. Wiebe, MBF president and CEO.

LeadGen will offer three progressively increasing scholarship levels, each requiring additional application requirements, to young adults in high school through graduate school who are exploring ministry leadership opportunities in the MB family. For more information, visit www.mbfoundation.com/leadgen or email leadership@mbfoundation.com. —MBF



ICOMB plans mission consultation

The International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), in partnership with MB Mission, will host an international consultation on mission and prayer, "The Church on Mission," March 7-11, 2017, in Chonburi, Thailand. David Wiebe, ICOMB executive secretary, says the hope is that each participating conference will leave with a renewed sense of calling, with several specific mission initiatives and with a com-

mitment to build a prayer movement in their national church. The by invitation gathering will be historic, since it is the first time that the global MB church itself is calling for such a meeting. ICOMB is a fellowship of 21 national MB conferences around the world; Ed Boschman of Bakersfield, Calif., represents the U.S. Conference. MB Mission is the North American MB mission agency. —ICOMB

C2C Network/MB Mission task force holds first meeting

A task force formed by the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) to explore merger options for the Canadian church planting ministry, C2C Network, and MB Mission, the North American MB mission agency, met for the first time Sept. 6-7. Don Morris, USMB national director, and Gary Wall, Pacific District Conference minister, represent U.S. Mennonite Brethren on the task force. At their first meeting, members became acquainted with each other and the mandate they hold; they will meet regularly over the next year. The CCMBC held its biennial convention in July 2016, and at that time delegates formed this task force and authorized C2C and MB Mission to collaborate with USMB in church planting. U.S. Mennonite Brethren first learned of the formation of this task force at the July 2016 USMB National Convention in Denver. — CCMBC

byTheNumbers

HOW MANY CHURCHES are needed to penetrate an area with the gospel?

- One church for every **1,000 people in URBAN areas**
- One church for every **500 people in RURAL areas**

Source: Allen Coe in "The Value of Church Planting," LifeWay.com

5 minutes with...

Shin-hee Chin

Recent visitors to George Washington University's Textile Arts Museum were treated to a piece by Shin-hee Chin, associate professor in visual arts at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kan. Chin's



invitation to participate in the museum's "Stories of Migration" exhibit is just one of many ways her fabric art has been recognized, both in the U.S. and in her native Korea.

EAST CHAT

1 Why have you chosen fiber as your primary artistic medium?

Fabric and thread used to be women's craft. Using a women's medium as an art form valorizes women's labor.

2 Where do you get the fabric for your work?

I recycle old clothes and cast-off material. When my children were young I would use the clothes they outgrew. Now my main resources are thrift stores and the MCC Relief Sale.

3 Your self-portrait was featured on the cover of *Surface Design* magazine. How do you feel when your work is recognized like this in the art world?

I used to be reluctant to tell people I am an artist. I thought of myself as a laborer, a maker. But one day I realized that claiming to be an artist is like claiming salvation—we are saved by Christ, but then we work out our salvation. My goal as the artist is not to get the fame but to use art as a tool witnessing to God's Word.

4 How does your womanhood impact your understanding of the artistic process?

Fiber art is tedious and time-consuming. Just like a pregnancy it takes time for a work to develop. It creates its own form and then I give birth. I have ties to my artwork and feel protective of it, but I also have to learn to let it go.

5 What is the meaning behind your diptych *Mother Tongue and Foreign Language* from the migration exhibit?

Mother tongue is an intricate aspect of the fabric of one's being. I use it to emphasize the critical role of language in defining, dividing, and connecting people. Though language often serves as a tool for exclusion, I use these letters as a sign of an intercultural conversation, an on-going dialogue.



Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

USMB discontinues funding Kindred Productions

The U.S. Conference will discontinue its financial support of Kindred Productions, the North America Mennonite Brethren publishing ministry, at the end of the 2016 calendar year. As of Dec. 31, 2016, the U.S. office, currently staffed by Amy Sterk, will close and USMB will no longer be the ministry's preferred customer. Until the end of 2016, orders placed by calling 1-800-545-7322 will receive the discounted shipping rate.

Kindred Productions is the first agency to feel the effects of the recent Leadership Board decision to narrow the number of Mennonite Brethren and inter-Mennonite agencies that receive USMB financial support. "At this point, only funding for the Kindred office has been completely ended," says Don Morris, USMB national director. "But agencies that are asking for increased funding will likely not see their requests met in the near future, and some could find that future funding is decreased or cut completely."—CL

Research grant awarded



Doug J. Heidebrecht has been awarded MB Historical Commission's 2016 Katie Funk Wiebe research grant. Heidebrecht's research project, "Sisters Leading Brothers? Mennonite Brethren and Women in Ministry Leadership," will explore Mennonite Brethren engagement with the question of women in church ministry leadership between 1954 and 2010. The \$2,000 research grant is made possible with support from the Katie Funk Wiebe fund. —MBHC

Advent devotional balances peace in spirit and in community

The 2016 Advent devotional from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, the denominational seminary in Fresno, Calif., seeks to combine inner spiritual life with real-world action. "In reality the gospel of Jesus involves both the hope of inner peace as well as a call to radical peacemaking," writes seminary president Terry Brensinger, in his introduction to *Calling All Peace-Builders*. Entries begin Monday, Nov. 28 and continue through Wednesday, Jan. 4. The devotional is available online at <https://www.fresno.edu/advent-devotions> and as a free smartphone app at Google Play. Printed copies are available by calling 559-453-7139. —FPBS

FPU enrollment remains strong

Enrollment of new students grew in all areas for 2016 at Fresno Pacific University, the MB university headquartered in Fresno, Calif.



In all, 3,520 students are studying at the main campus in Southeast Fresno and the regional campuses in Merced, North Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield. Traditional undergraduate programs welcomed 367 new students, bachelor's degree completion admitted 387 new cohort students and 327 new students were admitted to graduate study. Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary enrolled 148 students in master's programs, an increase of 11 from 2015.—FPU

Tabor College enrollment consistent

Tabor College enrollment for the fall 2016 semester is 727 students, including 670 undergraduate students at Hillsboro and Wichita, Kan., campuses. Graduate programs are up 35



percent for the second year in a row with an enrollment of 57 students. The largest increase in graduate students comes from the addition of the master of science in nursing program last year, which has 15 students enrolled, while the ministry entrepreneurship and innovation program is up four students from a year ago.—TC

What did Mary know?

By Del Gray

There was nothing safe about the path God had for Mary

“**M**ary, Did You Know?” is a beautiful Christmas song with a melody that stays in my head for days. But it is Mark Lowery’s words that impact me most. The lyrics consist almost entirely of a string of rhetorical questions directed at Jesus’ mother, Mary, after she has given birth on the first Christmas. The first verse is representative of the approach of the whole song.

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you delivered will soon deliver you.”

Asking these and other questions about Mary leads to some compelling insights about the familiar Christmas story. We evangelicals and Anabaptists are not accustomed to reflecting at length on Mary, outside of the issues that come up in the doctrines of Roman Catholicism. But if we lay aside these questions, the Gospels reward us with a portrait of a young woman that serves as a model of piety, deep theological reflection and sacrificial submission to God’s will.

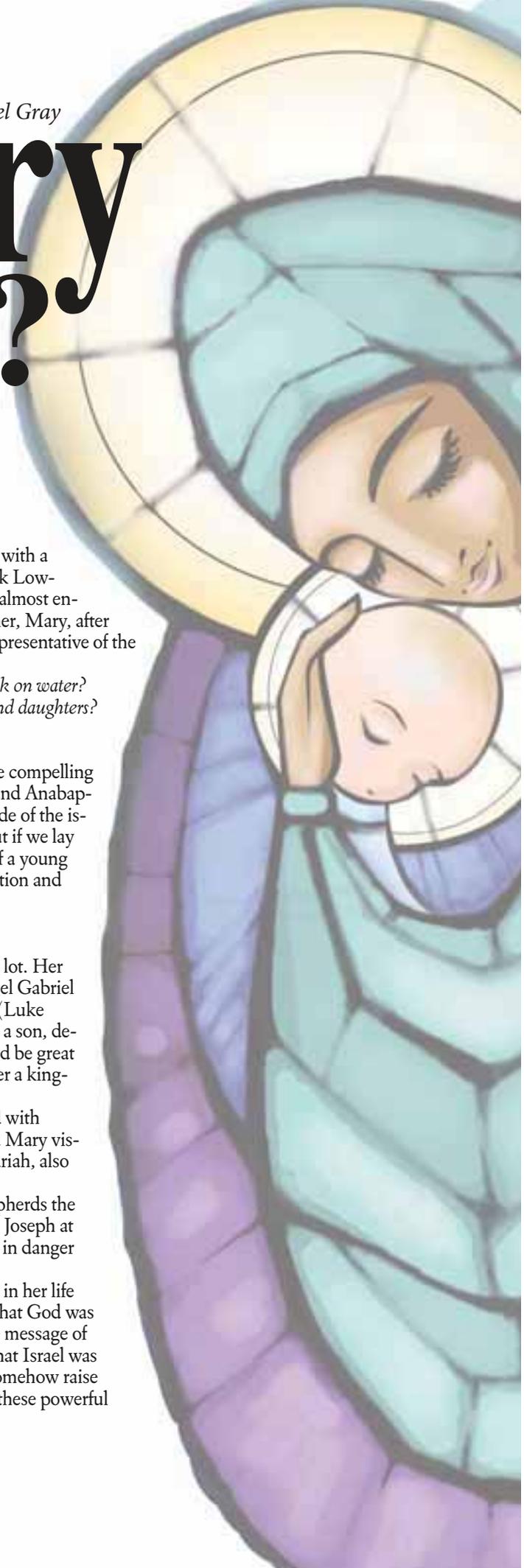
What did Mary really know?

Before Jesus even began to walk, Mary had been through a lot. Her typical rural peasant life had been radically changed. The angel Gabriel had visited Mary and announced what God was about to do (Luke 1:26-38). Mary learned that she would miraculously conceive a son, despite being a virgin. Gabriel also told Mary that this son would be great and that he would be put on the throne of Israel and reign over a kingdom that never ends (Luke 1:32-33).

In addition, Mary heard from Joseph that he too had talked with Gabriel about the miraculous birth of a son. Shortly afterward Mary visited her relative Elizabeth and found that her husband, Zechariah, also had an encounter with this same angel.

In the next couple of years a host of angels appeared to shepherds the night Jesus was born, and Gabriel himself spoke to Mary and Joseph at least two more times, first to warn them when their lives were in danger and then to announce when it was safe to go back home.

By this point it was obvious from the proliferation of angels in her life that something very special was going on. Mary understood that God was at work and her son, Jesus, was the focus of his plans. But the message of Gabriel was almost too dramatic to believe. Despite the fact that Israel was currently ruled by both an emperor and a king, God would somehow raise Mary’s peasant son to be the new king over Israel in place of these powerful world leaders.



In addition to the multiple appearances of angels, there was yet another event that confirmed Gabriel's prediction. Magi came to visit telling of a heavenly sign they had seen indicating the birth of a new king of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). These distinguished foreign guests then bowed and presented gifts to Jesus as a king.

Although at this point Mary did not yet have a clear picture of what all this meant, she would have understood its significance as a pious Israelite. Mary almost certainly shared the Jewish expectation that God would send a new anointed king, the Messiah, who would reestablish the kingdom of Israel by restoring the promised line of David. Everything that was happening and all that the angels said pointed clearly to the fact that Mary's baby, Jesus, was God's choice to be that king.

She did not yet know, however, that this new version of the kingdom of God would take a different shape than it did under David, and that the Messiah would therefore be a different kind of king from the previous ones. Her first glimpse of this came when she met Simeon at the temple and learned that suffering would be a part of their story (Luke 2:35). Mary also later struggled to understand what it meant that Jesus was the "Son of the Most High" when at the age of 12 he stayed behind at his "Father's house" (Luke 2:49-50).

Despite these limitations, what Mary did know was enough to warrant fear. Getting pregnant before her wedding was a major scandal in a culture that supremely valued an honorable reputation. Mary knew that her good name, her future wedding and even potentially her life were all at risk. God was at work doing something big, but it was coming at a great personal cost to Mary.

The scandal of pregnancy, however, was not the most disturbing part of God's plan. The announcement of the birth of a new king of Israel thrust Mary and her family into dangerous international politics. Caesar Augustus had taken the throne of the Roman Empire about 22 years earlier after a string of assassinations, betrayals and civil wars. The idea that Jesus would depose Augustus and take over as king of Israel was a serious threat to the stability of the Roman peace.

King Herod had a similar history of violence in his role as king. Josephus paints a picture of a man so paranoid that he executed most of his sons for plotting to take his place. Both rulers would be threatened by this birth and neither would think twice about using violence to get rid of the competition. Becoming the mother of Israel's new king meant that turmoil, threats, violence and risk would most likely be part of Mary's future. She was joining God's movement to stand up to the current kings and declare that God had a different plan. There was nothing safe about this path for Mary.

Mary's response

In light of the personal cost involving potential scandal and tragic violence, Mary's response to God's plan was remarkable. By the end of her first conversation with Gabriel, Mary understood that she would be preg-

nant outside of marriage with a child that would threaten the ruling kings. When we look at similar passages where God invites the great Old Testament prophets like Moses, Jeremiah and Isaiah to difficult callings, we consistently see reactions involving fear and hesitance.

Mary's reaction to Gabriel's prediction, however, was full of grace and submission. In Luke 1:38 she responded by saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be that everything you have said about me comes true." Instead of making excuses or resisting God's plan, Mary willingly submitted to God and allowed him to work through her.

The very next account in Luke's Gospel describes Mary's visit to Elizabeth where both mother and unborn baby gave her an extraordinary greeting. Again Mary responded with remarkable wisdom and spiritual maturity. Luke 1:46-55 is the song of Mary that takes us deeply into her understanding of what God is doing. In the opening line of her song we get an immediate sense of Mary's tone when she cries out, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

She continued to praise God for the things he was accomplishing through the upcoming birth of the Messiah. Mary drew heavily from the Old Testament in this song to express her joy that God was finally shaking up the present order of the world and establishing his kingdom by bringing down the proud, the rich and the rulers on their thrones while lifting up the humble and the hungry. To Mary this was the exciting climactic fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs of Israel, and it was about to happen through her son.

I do not see Mary as the meek and mild figure portrayed in many Christmas plays and Western art. I believe that she was an intelligent, insightful and feisty young woman who did not shy away from the personal controversy or real danger involved in allowing God to use her in a surprising way. She eagerly embraced being placed in the center of a social and political upheaval, even though she did not understand exactly what that meant. Her faith in God was rooted in the Old Testament stories and promises that shaped how she looked at the world.

For many of us, the biblical character of Mary has been lost or minimized because of leftover baggage from past theological controversies. But when we get beyond these issues we find in Scripture a woman with a mature faith who was willing to face a life of difficulty and danger in order for God to use her however he wanted. It is no wonder that Gabriel greeted her as someone "highly favored" by God himself who entrusted Mary with the task of nurturing and raising his son. As we reflect on Christmas this year and ponder our own reactions to how God is working in our lives, let us not forget the model of this young woman whose response to God was an unqualified "May it be."

Del Gray is associate professor of biblical and religious studies at Tabor College. He is a member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.



CONNECTING WITH PURPOSE

By Brian Wiebe

Five commitments for meaningful holiday connections

For the first time in 11 years, my parents managed to gather all their offspring for a reunion this past August. Much happens in 11 years: marriages, divorce, death, new life, empty nests, refilling nests and many occupational transitions. In that time the clan grew by half, from three generations to four. A gathering like that is both fresh and familiar, and each new face, whether newborn or new boyfriend, refracts the sparkling light of family life through a new facet.

Our family rarely gathers simply because of the great distances between us all. Yet as we enjoyed our time at a lake retreat, singing, eating, playing, catching up, laughing and eating some more, I marveled that some families, perhaps yours, do this with great regularity, even frequency. Some manage to pull together every Christmas or Thanksgiving or even every Sunday afternoon. And I wondered if gathering often would be as meaningful as this rare family reunion.

I don't mean to glamorize family gatherings, because family is a source of great pain for some. But as you enter the holidays, there's a good chance you'll engage in some kind of family gatherings—whether your natural family or church family, perhaps your 12-Step Recovery “family” or work “family”—and any lingering value will be tied to this one word: connection. Sadly, it is not uncommon to gather and socialize, eat and be entertained and leave with no meaningful connection. Yet a worthwhile connection with friends, colleagues or relatives over the holidays could lead you to holy moments, worthwhile encounters or even life-altering conversations.

Connection or distance

Meaningful connection, however, does not happen by default. It is neither accidental nor automatic. In his book *Keep Your Love On*, author Danny Silk explains that every relationship has a goal, whether we realize it or not. The goal is a point somewhere on the continuum of connection or distance. In every relational encounter, my words and actions are moving me toward either greater connection or greater distance with the other.

For example, when I drive my relational goal with the police is distance, so I obey traffic rules to avoid a personal interaction with an officer. My relational goal with my wife, however, is absolute connection, so I pay attention to the actions and words that will move us closer together.

Even though the goal of relationship is connection, not each relationship will be the same. I want to have a meaningful connection with my neighbors, for example, but nothing like what I enjoy with my sons. Nevertheless, the neighbor connection can be meaningful, even if only visiting on the sidewalk and keeping an eye on each other's homes when the other is away. The goal is an appropriate level of connection.

So as you meet up in various settings these holidays, I offer some suggestions to move toward gathering in ways that matter, whether an office party, family gathering or church banquet.

1. Ask and listen more than talk and tell. As you catch up with friends and loved ones, remember that each one has a story. Ask questions about what they are reading or what they love to work on in spare time or how the new baby is doing or what they enjoy about college. If they want your story, they'll ask. You'll be enriched, and they'll be validated as you ask and listen. If you're genuine about it, they'll trust you to also share the real stuff in their heart and ask for yours. That's where connection truly begins.

2. Show up as a giver not a consumer. Everyone loves Santa Claus, in part for his presence but mostly for his presents! People love to receive, and as Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). When you adopt a position of giver at your gathering, you are immediately in a position to be a blessing and to be blessed. Give your attention to the isolated ones, give your service to the servers, give your compliments to the hosts, give your laughter to the joke tellers—look for ways to give more than you take.

3. Remember the past, but don't stay there. It's easy for annual gatherings to be little more than reminiscing parties. We retell the same old stories that get a laugh, often at the expense of someone's self-esteem or dignity, stories that glamorize a time long ago, ignoring that people and times have changed. It's great to enjoy the best of our memories, but we can't live there. Glorifying the past keeps us from moving toward better things, it excludes those who are with us now but weren't then and it paints an unrealistic picture of the “good old days” that, truthfully, weren't as good as we now pretend. I love our histories, but I'm more excited about our futures.

4. Be willing to open up. Small talk revolves around achievements and acquisitions, and there is certainly a place for that. If you asked, I'd tell you what my children are doing, or I'd boast a little about my wife's career accomplishments. We may talk about cars or motorcycles or the house you just bought. Those are easy and fun conversations, but the connection happens when we crack open our hearts and talk about something we've learned or how we're growing spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. Connection happens when we push through the fear of vulnerability. Let people see what's inside of you.

For example, if your aunt lost her husband this year, share with her something meaningful you learned from your late uncle, and ask if and how she has experienced comfort. If it's a work party, ask your colleague something new they learned about themselves this year, and add a sincere compliment to affirm them in their growth. Bonus: When grandpas and grandmas open up and share honestly, families are superblessed. Open up for meaningful connection.

5. Make the good news good! As you gather during the holidays, you will be with others who do not share your place in faith and spiritual practice. In these settings, a believer has an opportunity to elevate the good news of God's love and salvation. At times, I know I've been guilty of contempt or judgment, but the gospel is not a message of condemnation—it's the message that God's love compels God to extend saving grace to those who need it most. As you are able to direct conversations to matters of faith, make sure the good news is good news. Help others to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8).

The goal of meaningful connection is more than a good social skill. God's goal is connection with each person, and we are created in the image of God, with that same need and benefit of connection. Jesus said things like, “Come, follow me” and, “Come to me, all you who are weary” (Matt. 4:19; 11:28). Connection. It's in our DNA, and we are greatly enriched when we seek it and offer it to others. My hope for you is a well-connected holiday season, in each and every gathering.

Brian Wiebe has been the lead pastor at Bethany Church in Fresno, Calif., since November 2013. He is married to Becky, a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) registered nurse in Fresno. They are parents to two sons who have recently left the nest—one to study in British Columbia and one working with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in Germany.

The only question that matters

Article 13, peacemaking and the lordship of Jesus

By Trent Voth

God calls us to be peacemakers. No argument there. But how should Christians make peace? Is it appropriate for Christians to coerce with violence, especially as a means of protecting the innocent? Or is the use of (coercive) violence incompatible with following Jesus and nonviolence the litmus test of Christian faithfulness?

We don't just differ on the issue of violence. U.S. Mennonite Brethren also disagree on what the Bible actually teaches on the topic. We differ on how to interpret these teachings. Which authorities have our allegiance? Who is more and less deserving and what they are deserving of? The list goes on and on. It's a deep divide.

Many in leadership believed that revising Article 13 of our USMB Confession of Faith—which proclaims our position on peacemaking—could bridge the divide and move us forward together. So over several years, Article 13 was revised through multiple rounds of consultation with congregations as well as a study conference in Phoenix, Ariz.

The revised article was approved with a resounding support (90-plus percent) at the USMB 2014 National Convention. Now, the USMB Board of Faith and Life is charged with educating the conference in this new article. As part of that awareness campaign, I was asked to write about the themes and features of the new Article 13. But that poses two problems for me:

First, we don't have enough space to discuss all the ways the new Article 13 is an improved proclamation of what we're aiming to be, so we'll all have to settle for the best and biggest improvement the revised article makes.

And as much as I think the new and improved Article 13 is a superb proclamation of our faith, it won't make everyone happy, and we need to understand why.

Because Jesus is Lord

Both of these issues can be addressed by looking at the core feature and change made in the revised article.

The new Article 13 has many themes and features worth reflec-

tion. It expands the scope of the peacemaking discussion beyond “military participation” and “self-defense” to also focus on peacemaking in our homes and congregations. It employs positive language, describing what we strive to do rather than describing what we don’t do.

However, if we’re going to look into what Article 13 is really all about there’s one theme that is central. The most important message in the entire article—indeed the most important message in our entire confession—is: “Because Jesus is Lord, his example and teaching take priority....”

That is, without reservation, the best statement we could possibly make. That’s not just what the new Article 13 is all about. It’s what we are all about: the prioritization and centralization of Jesus and his way. It’s the summary of our entire Christian faith. We live out the proclamation that Jesus is “Lord” in every sense of the word—spiritually, socially, theologically and politically. We embody the declaration that Jesus’ actions and teachings are better than any other way or teaching, and we mold our identity corporately and individually with Jesus at the center.

Asking a different question

That’s the brilliance of the revised Article 13. It’s a subtle yet monumental shift from the previous version. It changes the focus, theme and discussion in a beautifully appropriate way and refocuses the attention where it should be, on Jesus. It’s a huge improvement. In effect, we exchanged a divisive answer to one question for a unifying answer to a different question—a more important question.

with this statement. Some disagreed theologically, others practically and still others for personal reasons. I imagine some saw it as an impediment to spiritual, numerical and financial growth. It became an optional confessional statement, even for those in leadership. An optional article led to an ignorable confession, which has subsequently led to a divided and dividing USMB identity. Something needed to change, and since this sentence lay at the heart of the ignorable, divisive Article 13, some concluded a new core proclamation was needed.

So, that’s what we did. We didn’t just change the divisive sentence; we changed the core question Article 13 is built around. The heart of the revised article is more a declaration about Jesus than a declaration about violence. That’s as it should be. The revised Article 13 doesn’t proclaim an answer about violence. It proclaims an answer about Jesus, namely, that Jesus is our example. Jesus’ answer to the “violence question” is our answer. It’s a massively important and subtly different question. It’s the better question. As Christians, identifying the right place to take a stand and standing there becomes simpler (although not easier) when you’re imitating Jesus.

We declare in this confession that Jesus’ position on peacemaking and violence takes precedence. We approach the question of peacemaking the way Jesus does: “We actively pursue peace and reconciliation in all relationships by following Christ’s example and his command to love God, neighbors and even enemies.... Because Jesus is Lord, his example and teaching take priority over nationalism and the demands of human authorities.”

“

It’s not about what you or I might think about violence anymore or how you or I might want to respond to various scenarios. We’re starting the discussion on what Jesus would do.

”

For decades the previous iteration of Article 13 proclaimed an answer to the use of violence, stating: “We view violence in its many different forms as contradictory to the new nature of the Christian. We believe that the evil and inhumane nature of violence is contrary to the gospel of love and peace.”

We U.S. Mennonite Brethren never fully agreed

Don’t we all agree on that? After all, what’s the argument against making Jesus our example? Since Christians are people “of the way,” Christians go the way Jesus goes.

However, as great as the new Article 13 is, and as much of an improvement as it is, it won’t resolve our theological disagreement about the use of violence. It

wasn't intended to. It merely reorients our focus and the question we're answering. It forms the direction and scope of the conversation we must have.

Differences in biblical interpretation

Under the previous version, our division seemed to revolve around whether one agreed with the statement on violence in Article 13. That won't be the division any longer. The division will now revolve around interpreting the Bible, which is where the division has actually been all along.

For some, the improvement of the revised Article 13 was the removal of the disagreeable sentence(s) in the previous version. I worry that some who voted to approve the revision were primarily interested in removing the previous wording and didn't notice the importance of reorienting the question to center on Jesus. The implications of reorienting the discussion to center on Jesus' example and teachings are immense. The discussion is no longer built around what we believe about violence. The discussion is now built around what we believe Jesus believes about violence. Yes, that provides some common ground, but it also jettisons some heavily relied upon arguments.

It's not about what you or I might think about violence anymore or how you or I might want to respond to various scenarios. We're starting the discussion on what Jesus would do. Hypothetical situations and one's response to these hypotheticals are secondary to Jesus. The expectations and laws of societies are, at most, secondary to Jesus.

Now, one might argue that Paul's statements in Romans 13 about submitting to the government should impact our perspective on the appropriate use of violence. Aside from the fact that Paul may be communicating something much deeper than simply, "do what the government says" (considering he and his readers are persecuted and executed for not doing what the government said), here again, where Jesus and Paul seem to disagree (and I can't emphasize the word "seem" enough), Jesus takes priority. That goes for Jesus and the Old Testament as well.

Hypothetical situations about home invasions, historical scenarios like Hitler and World War II, interpretations of the Old Testament or Paul's views that seem to conflict with Jesus are all secondary to Jesus. They always were, but now we've finally all agreed to it. Regardless of whether these

lines of discussion hypothetically could support a Christian's use of violence, where the example and teaching of Jesus advocates the opposite, Jesus takes priority. That's a significant shift in our discussion.

The center of the discussion

What do we believe Jesus teaches and does on this subject? That's the better question to be asking. Jesus should be at the center of every discussion, but especially this one. Our discernment of Jesus' example and teaching in passages such as these (and many others) will be central to the conversation: Matt. 5-7 (especially 5:9, 38-48); Matt. 10:34-39; Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 6:20-49 (especially 6:27-36); Luke 22:35-38, 47-53; and John 2:13-22.

We should discuss these passages (and others), discerning them in our congregations, with our leaders and with each other. Together, we should figure out what Jesus teaches and does in these passages and throughout the Gospels.

I'm confident for every interpretation of these texts arguing for nonviolence there's another interpretation that leaves the door open and vice versa. The point is: Jesus sets the direction and boundaries of the conversation. Ultimately, determining Jesus' position on the question is all that matters. If Jesus allows for the use of violence, no matter how many valid arguments there may be for nonviolence, we are not faithful disciples to close what Jesus leaves open. The opposite is equally true. If we, as a community, discern that Jesus opposes the use of types of violence, it doesn't matter what all the other arguments and reasons may be, it is wrong for faithful disciples to use or support those types of violence.

Because Jesus is Lord, his example and teaching take priority. It's time to identify where Jesus stands and stand there.

Trent Voth is a former associate pastor of Ebenfeld MB Church in Hillsboro, Kan., and College Community Church MB in Clovis, Calif. He is an alumnus of Tabor College ('07) and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary ('12) and is currently working toward a doctorate in biblical studies (New Testament) at the University of Toronto's School of Theology in Toronto, Ont. He currently facilitates a conversation forum on behalf of the USMB Board of Faith and Life discussing the revised Article 13, which can be accessed at USMB13.com.

One meal at a time

Small church shares Christ's love with homeless

In a part of the country with a nearly overwhelming homeless population, Shorelife Community Church (SCC), a USMB congregation in Capitola, Calif., is sharing the love of Christ one meal at a time.

Well over half a million people in the U.S. are considered homeless, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's most recent annual report on homelessness. That same report indicates that California accounts for 21 percent of the nation's homeless population and has the highest percentage of "unsheltered" homeless. California's Santa Cruz County is ranked 10th in the nation for number of homeless among small regions.

And smack in the middle of Santa Cruz County is Capitola, home of Shorelife Community Church, a small congregation of only about 25 families. Six years ago, Trevor Lee, pastor of Shorelife, had both a desire to help and previous experience serving the homeless. He knew there were many organizations meeting physical needs in the more densely populated areas of the county, but Lee wanted to find those whose needs were not being met. And he wanted to meet more than physical needs.

"How can the gospel be preached to all unless somebody goes?" he says. "We need to go where previously we've not been allowed in." So he began to look for an "untouched" group.

Lee only had to look a few miles down the road to the small, unincorporated community of Aptos where about 35 or 40 homeless men and women live. This group tends to be rather "insular," says Lee, generally refusing to mingle with other groups or accept help. Many have been burned by faith-based groups offering help, then abandoning the project. They are understandably wary.

Lee says, "If you're going to be doing this, you have to prove your consistency and your faithfulness. Otherwise you'll soon get written off as do-gooders trying to make yourselves feel better."

It started with coffee

On one cold day in late 2010, Lee rode his motorcycle to Aptos and met "Terry." Lee asked if he might bring some hot coffee. Soon there were a handful of homeless men and women meeting Lee, his wife, Jackie, and a few Shorelife volunteers on Friday evenings for coffee.

Judy Willis, Paul Kessler, Nancy Eaton, Trevor Lee, Dennis Alameda and Jackie Lee are regular volunteers with Manna Ministries.



Lee remembers bringing coffee one cold, fall evening in the kind of driving rain that soaks through in less than a minute. The fact that the volunteers came despite the poor weather "spoke to them about our seriousness," Lee says.

Based on that early trust, Lee asked if they might bring a meal, and the group agreed. That was early 2011, and the Shorelife volunteers have been serving a noon meal every Saturday since. They call the outreach Manna Ministries, to highlight God's provision of food.

Five-star dining

Each Saturday morning, a team of faithful volunteers prepares a meal at the church and takes it to the homeless in Aptos, a group which has grown to about 30. The core of volunteers includes head chefs Paul Kessler and Dennis Alameda, who prepare the main portions of the meal in the use-what-you-have style of The Food Network's "Chopped." Judy Willis is the "salad queen," creating hearty greens that are meals in themselves. Jackie Lee makes coffee and helps with logistics. And Nancy Eaton calls herself the "scullery maid," helping to clean up and then serve.

These meals aren't meager soup kitchen fare. A typical menu might include: roast chicken, potatoes, salad, coleslaw, two or three vegetable sides, dessert and cookies, breads and pastries, coffee and water.

The team loads the food, serving equipment, tables and chairs into a van, sets up in the parking lot of Resurrection Catholic Church in Aptos, and serves those gathered. Because Resurrection Church needs the lot for other activities, Manna Ministries is allowed only half an hour in the parking lot, so the team sets up, serves and tears down with military precision.

Many of the Aptos homeless live in the woods at "the bottom end of the lifestyle," as Lee says, and physical needs go beyond food. Bloody and filthy feet are often evidence of the wear and tear of their life. Lee wonders: When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, were they as "damaged" as this? Sometimes, the guests show up barefooted. "The first thing we do is get their feet washed, get them some socks, then we go straight out to Big 5 and get them a pair of boots or something," Lee says.

Often, such extras are paid for out of the pockets of the volunteers. Volunteer Nancy Eaton says, "We love them. If anyone in my family had such a need and I could fill it, I would."

Other area churches come alongside with donations of finances and items to help meet physical needs: hygiene kits, sleeping bags, tents, bottled water—and socks, which seem to be a perpetual need. Those partnerships in the community continue to expand as others hear about the success of Manna Ministries and ask how they can help.

Last year, these community partners helped to raise about half the funds needed for a shower trailer, a portable way to provide for better hygiene. Lee is currently pursuing other possible funding to make this dream a reality.

Nourishing souls

The team's ultimate desire for their homeless friends is to meet spiritual needs as well as physical. "The important thing is that they come to know Jesus," Lee says. "The goal is for them to know they are loved, not

because they're a project, but because Jesus in us and through us is loving them."

So the Manna team also brings Daily Bread devotionals to their Saturday meals. They pray before each meal, and the regular guests now compete for the privilege of praying. Volunteers often pray with the homeless guests for specific needs, and God has answered those prayers. When one guest tells how God answered prayer, "that's the best advertisement you can get," Lee says.

The team dreams of one day bringing the meals to the Shorelife facility, where they would have better facilities to meet physical needs as well as more time to explore some kind of Bible study. In order for that to happen, the homeless guests would have to be willing to leave their comfort zone, and the Manna team would have to arrange transportation.

In it for the long haul

It's not a ministry with overnight results. It takes patience, time and consistency to build trust. "It's consistently portraying Jesus and his love to them which will win them over," Lee says.

But these volunteers are in it for the long haul. Nearly six years into Manna Ministries, Lee says he can scarcely convince core volunteers to take a Saturday off. They speak by name of their homeless friends, celebrate when one finds housing or gets accepted into college and grieve when a regular disappears or dies.

The most difficult part of the ministry, several say, is bumping up against needs they can't meet, like dental work, addiction treatment or medical care. So they keep sharing the love of Christ one meal at a time, believing that God will use it to make a lasting difference.

As volunteer Judy Willis says, "We just love them."—Myra Holmes.

Congregations and individuals interested in serving the homeless in their community are invited to visit www.usmb.org/homeless-ministry-tips for pointers from the Manna Ministries team.



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STARS shine at North Fresno Church

Friendship program connects senior adults, kids

This holiday season, third and fourth graders from North Fresno (Calif.) Church (NFC) will take time over two days to visit about 20 senior adults. They'll meet the people behind the photos in the prayer book in their Sunday school classroom. Perhaps they'll bring hand-made cards or holiday gifts. They might even throw a Christmas party, complete with formal invitations, refreshments and a kid-directed talent show for entertainment.

The visits are just one piece of a program at NFC that aims to connect children and seniors and benefits both.

Seniors That Are Really Special (STARS) began some 10 years ago when Sunday school teacher Pat Unruh adopted the idea from another church and adapted it to fit NFC. Now all NFC children from preschool through sixth grade regularly connect with seniors in age-appropriate ways. The selected seniors have some connection to NFC, often church members who can no longer attend because of health issues.

Preschool and early elementary-aged children reach out by sending letters and hand-drawn pictures to the seniors.

Unruh's class of third and fourth graders takes that pen pal relationship to a more intentional level with a classroom book with photos of each of their special seniors, basic information such as name and interests and prayer requests the kids have gathered. Each Sunday, she leads the children in praying for two of the seniors by name.

About twice each year, the class visits each of their STARS, usually in spring near Easter and again near Thanksgiving or Christmas. Since many of the seniors are residents of Palm Village Retirement Community in nearby Reedley, Calif., the children organize a party there. A second day of visits takes the children to those who are living in other senior centers or with family.

After interacting with seniors in Unruh's class, the children are well prepared to continue to serve in the fifth and sixth grade class, which takes one Sunday each



Third and fourth graders from North Fresno Church visit seniors like Peter Enns twice each year as part of the STARS program. While some children are shy or hesitant at first, they often enjoy the visits so much that they ask to continue after they've graduated from the class.

month to play Bingo with women in the senior center across the street from the church.

Caitlin Friesen, associate pastor of children and families, says that both children and seniors can feel overlooked and disconnected in the church community. "We found that by bringing them together, there's this natural chemistry that comes from our children enjoying our STARS," she says.

As the children learn to interact with the seniors, they are learning how to better follow Jesus, too. In Unruh's class, teachers take class time to prepare for visits, coach the children on basic conversation skills and answer any questions that may come up. Some of the questions are difficult, such as when one of their STARS dies. But those conversations are as much part of discipleship as the planned Sunday school curriculum, Unruh says.

"We have time with them to teach them other aspects of discipleship and worship, such as serving and loving others," she says.

For their part, the seniors typically respond very positively to the visits, often sending thank you notes to the children. One recent note said in part, "I enjoyed myself so much the day you came to visit....I thank our dear Jesus that we can be prayer partners."

Friesen says, "[STARS] has been an incredible blessing for our church family. Our kids have been able to inspire the teens and the adults to reach out."
—Myra Holmes

Volunteers tailor curriculum

Cordell's All-Stars created with community children in mind

Like an ill-fitting suit, the midweek children's program at Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla., was a little too loose here, a bit too confining there. While perfectly good for another church, it simply wasn't the right fit for Bible MB.

So six years ago, the volunteer children's ministry team took out their needles and thread and tailored a weekday program to fit their congregation and their community. The result isn't flashy. It doesn't claim a designer label or cutting-edge accessories. But for this small congregation, it fits beautifully.

A poor fit

For as long as anyone could remember, Bible MB had used the Awana children's curriculum. Awana is a popular program among USMB congregations, often commended for its emphasis on Bible memorization. And for many, many years, it fit Bible MB perfectly.

Over time, however, the situation changed. At first, Bible MB was the only church in town to offer Awana. When another community church started offering an Awana program as well, some children would attend both programs, memorizing the same verses for double credit. Volunteers felt the focus turn increasingly toward the rewards, not an understanding of the Scriptures.

At the same time, they noticed holes where needs weren't being met. Cordell is a small community of about 3,000 with a significant population of people drawn by job opportunities in the oil industry. More and more of the children coming to the Wednesday night program were unchurched.

"We realized we had children who were coming from families where they didn't hear about God, they didn't know the Bible stories, they don't go to Sunday school," says children's ministry leader Joyce Creed. "We needed a program where we could actually teach them the Bible and not just require that they memorize verses."

Added to the growing list of concerns was a volunteer staff that was stretched thin. Bible MB is a small congregation of about 50 on a typical Sunday morning; many attendees are advancing in years. While the volunteers were dedicated, there simply weren't enough of them to provide meaningful interactions with the roughly 50 kids attending.

Then Awana changed up the curriculum to require new T-shirts, workbooks and awards. Since many of the children who attended Wednesday nights at Bible MB couldn't afford to pay for their materials, the church shouldered that cost, and the transition felt like a significant expense for a small church.

Doing their own thing

Given this list of concerns and one "particularly trying year," the Wednesday night volunteers met together to explore new options. As they brainstormed what they wanted in a midweek program and what would fit the needs of the kids they longed to reach, they made a bold move: "We decided we could do our own," says Mary Beth Keil, co-director of the midweek program.

They call their program All-Stars, an acronym for: Seek God's face, Turn from evil, Accept salvation through Christ, Remember God's words and Shine like stars.

At the top of their wish list was more emphasis on Bible stories so that kids would have context for the verses they memorize and more opportunity to discuss what they are learning. So group time in the Bible is a top priority. Each year, Creed prayerfully develops a theme, eight units based on character traits and weekly Bible stories to illustrate the given character trait.

After hearing the Bible lesson as a large group, children break into small groups according to age and gender. In these smaller groups, adult volunteers can go beyond listening to children quote verses to discussing the Bible story and engaging with the children's questions.

Bible memorization in All-Stars incorporates verses that tie in with the theme and are chosen to give the children a more cohesive understanding of Scripture. Participants still get rewards for memorizing verses, but the rewards are smaller to take the emphasis off of the prize. Bible MB volunteers created a star-shaped badge based on their All-Stars theme, and children earn small pins to attach to the badge when they memorize a verse. The Internet provides resources to custom-make the badge and to order each year's pins.

Adding missions, customizing lessons

A big change is the addition of a mission project. Many of the children come from less-privileged families who are targeted with charity programs and therefore are used to getting, not giving. Creed says, "We thought it's so much more important to teach them to give than to teach them to save up everything so they can get the best gift."

The first year they introduced a mission project—providing shoes for impoverished school children in the Philippines—Creed doubted these poorer children would give. But the children eagerly embraced the opportunity, bringing their pennies and birthday money and providing over 50 pairs of shoes that year.

One of the biggest advantages of creating their own



curriculum is the ability to customize it to meet specific needs. This year's theme—family—is a perfect example of that. Volunteers noticed that many of the children coming on Wednesday nights come from difficult family situations. So this year, All-Stars will focus on family, with units such as, "I have a Father who loves me," "I have a heritage," and "I have a church family." The hope is that children will understand that, no matter their home situation, the Bible MB congregation will support them and their Heavenly Father will love them unconditionally.

"We just want them to know that love," Keil says.

Quality over quantity

The first year Bible MB implemented these changes, attendance dropped dramatically, from about 50 at the peak of the Awana years to about 15. That was worrisome to volunteers, but they held fast to their decision to emphasize more comprehensive Bible teaching.

"It's better to reach fewer in number but be able to disciple better," Creed says.

By the end of that first year, about 20 kids were coming regularly. Volunteers evaluated, discussed and decided to continue with their tailor-made curriculum. And the effort has paid off. This year's mid-week pro-



gram started in September with 38 children. "To us, that's pretty good growth," co-director Keil says.

Creed and Keil emphasize that any congregation could similarly create their own curriculum. The key is a group of committed volunteers who are willing to bring ideas. "We just brainstormed," Keil says. "Any church could do this."—Myra Holmes

For more details about All-Stars or tips on how to customize a curriculum, please contact Joyce Creed or Mary Beth Keil through the Bible MB Church office, 580-832-3287 or cordellmb@juno.com

Writing your own curriculum lets you be flexible, says Joyce Creed. So this year kids like David Syfert and Damien Richards (top photo) will play cooperative rather than competitive games. Small group time (bottom photo) will allow for in-depth discussion and opportunities to develop relationships.

Operation multigenerational outreach

Hesston MB Church makes packing shoeboxes an all-church event

Like many USMB congregations, Hesston (Kan.) MB Church (HMBC) participates every year in Operation Christmas Child (OCC), a global outreach of Samaritan's Purse, a non-denominational evangelical Christian international relief organization based in Boone, NC. For the last several years, they've turned packing shoeboxes into a discipleship opportunity by making it an all-church event.

OCC encourages individuals and families to pack shoeboxes with small gifts. The boxes are distributed to children in need around the world, where local churches can follow up with a gospel message. Typically, churches collect the packed boxes and deliver them to a community drop-off point.

That's all good, says J.L. Martin, pastor of children and families at Hesston MB. But he wondered if the church might amplify the impact by working together. So about eight years ago HMBC cancelled regular Wednesday night children's activities and invited children and their families to pack boxes together. That effort has expanded to an all-church event that not only packs a significant number of boxes, but also encourages multigenerational interaction.

The date of the event is always determined by OCC's collection week, which this year is Nov. 14-21. Instead of asking families to bring prepacked boxes, the church distributes a list of suggested items and collects donated items before the event. On the chosen Wednesday, the entire church family gathers for a meal, activities, worship, a brief Bible lesson and packing.

Activities are fun and family-friendly. Last year, during the popularity of the "Minions" movie, the activity was a game-show-like challenge called "Minions or Messiah." Other years, it might be a word puzzle or Pictionary-type game with Christmas themes.

Youth pastor Jared Redding leads a brief time of worship, often calling upon the talents of church youth. Lead pastor Brad Burkholder gives a short, gospel-oriented message to remind those gathered of the meaning behind the holiday.

Then, of course, children, parents and grandparents pack boxes. An assembly line of tables with donated items and signs with instructions makes packing a simple process. Children help load finished boxes into Martin's vehicle for delivery to the local drop-off location the next day.

Martin says turning OCC into a multigenerational event has several advantages, like giving regular Wednesday night workers a break and helping church attendees get to know each other.

But the biggest benefit is the discipleship that happens as those from different generations interact. Like when grandparents and grandchildren fill a box, then pray together for those who will receive it. Or when excited children want to keep a toy they see, and adults have an opportunity to talk about blessings, poverty and generosity.

"So often we think we have to separate to reach the different generations," Martin says, "but there's something valuable about all of us coming together and being united around a specific purpose."

The success of the shoebox packing night has encouraged HMBC to try other multigenerational events, like packing school kits for Mennonite Central Committee, seasonal "gospel parties" or a craft night. "This kind of idea can be more than at Christmastime," Martin says.

More details about Hesston's shoebox packing night can be found by searching for November entries on Martin's blog, daddy4ms.blogspot.com/ or the Hesston MB Facebook page, www.facebook.com/hesstonmb —Myra Holmes



Last year, children and adults at Hesston MB Church packed 165 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

#Together we plant churches



Together, we continue to plant new churches all across America. In 2017, at least 11 Mennonite Brethren church plants will be making disciples in communities across the United States. They are counting on our support and prayer. Please support these churches on Giving Tuesday, so that people in communities all across the country will have a chance to hear the Gospel and respond.

November 29, 2016

GIVING TUESDAY™

Giving Tuesday is a global day to celebrate giving.

Your participation with Mission USA on November 29 will support our church plants in 2017.



Mission USA

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#Together





Don Morris
USMB national director

Are you thirsty?

God is always ready to refresh our weary hearts

Recently I read a daily verse from Bible Gateway that hit home for me. David writes in Psalm 63, “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”

For those living in areas where there has been severe drought lately, like California, perhaps this verse feels even more relevant. I must admit that I don’t always thirst after God with the kind of passion and longing that David describes. But the times when I do get to that level of thirst come when I realize I’ve been so busy doing things that I haven’t taken the time just to seek God, and I then recognize that I really need him.

Lately I’ve been in one of my “thirsting” slumps. Perhaps it’s due to focusing so much on providing energy toward getting the Future Story moving forward. Perhaps it’s because I tend to rationalize that I can please God by doing more rather than by simply being with him. Maybe I’ve lost focus as a result of so many other things in life that seemingly need my attention. Some are even good, positive things. But as these good things drain my energy and demand my time, I unintentionally leave God out. And great thirst results.

There are times when I like to work in our yard. My wife, Janna, thinks I need to want to like it more often than I do! But when I really get into it and am working away and sweating a little, I sometimes suddenly realize that a big Coke Zero from Sonic has become very tempting. I’m thirsty!

I need to drink! Are you like me in this way? Do you get to a point where you suddenly notice that you are really thirsty for God?

As I write this I’m wondering why I let my thirst for God get to a point where my dryness is so intense. Why not simply remain consistently hydrated in God? I wish I was like David all the time — “my whole being longs for you [God].” But one thing I’m thankful for is that when I do get dry and then earnestly seek God, he is always waiting to quench my thirst for him. God is waiting to pour out his words to me. He’s ready to refresh me once again.

David goes on to say in this Psalm, “Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.” These are beautiful words describing how God wants to meet with me and to be my help.

In the midst of thinking about all of this and contemplating my own desire to seek God and be refreshed by him, I’ve been reminded by God once again that enormous numbers of people that I see every day have never had God quench their thirst. Massive numbers of people are walking around with great thirst but with no idea as to how to remedy it. They don’t know the source that will change their state of need. So, they try all kinds of things to satisfy their parched life, all for naught. Only Jesus can satisfy their longing. I must go to those who are thirsting and offer them *living water*. And, Lord, as I do, let me also, with my whole being, come thirsting to spend time with you.

The MAJORITY of
AMERICAN ADULTS

(66%)

believe God can
supernaturally heal
people physically.

Did YOU know?

Source: ©Barna Group, 2016

Evangelicals are the most likely of any
group to believe people can be physically
healed supernaturally by God—almost nine
in 10 (87%) strongly agree.

Giving Tuesday funds church planting

USMB joins global social media giving campaign for third year

For the third year in a row, Mission USA is inviting individuals from across America to join together on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 29, to raise funds for the support of planting Mennonite Brethren churches. Giving Tuesday is an unprecedented global movement of generosity that was started in 2012, harnessing the power of social media to create a movement dedicated to giving around the world.

Coming just after the spending days of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, this one-day event is designed to encourage individuals and families in giving during the Christmas season. Last year Mission USA raised over \$40,000 that helped plant and support new USMB churches. This year the goal is to raise at least \$50,000 on this one day. These funds will be used strictly to help start new churches in 2017 and support the 11 Mission USA-supported MB church plant projects that are already underway.

“Since planting churches is something we do together as a family of churches, we’ve named and hash-tagged our Giving Tuesday campaign #Together,” says Don Morris, USMB national director. “We’re also asking you to please help us get the word out to people you know through social media or word of mouth! In addition, we’re asking our MB churches to help promote the Giving Tuesday campaign in church newsletters or during a worship service. #Together, we can make a kingdom difference!”

Plan now to go to our website, www.usmb.org, on Tuesday, Nov. 29, to give easily and securely online. Then make sure and come back to the website during the day to see the running total of the amount raised—funds given to bring the gospel to more people through the planting of more mission-minded MB churches all across America.
—Mission USA

Spokane church has a new home

New church plant reaching young adults with Slavic backgrounds

Pacific Keep, a Mennonite Brethren church plant in Spokane, Wash., dedicated to reaching disenfranchised and irreligious young adults in the greater Spokane Valley, has a new meeting place.

“The place we were previously renting planned to double our rental fee, so we’ve been looking around for a new location,” says church planter Boris Borisov. What the church found was The Bartlett, a café with a nice-sized meeting room (pictured right) in the back. “This space has some of the best acoustics of any venue in Spokane,” says Borisov.

The young church continues to reach millennials and young couples, many of which have Slavic backgrounds. The church has grown in the past months and with the new venue, located in the center of the city, it appears God has big plans for this MB church plant.

Borisov is a city planner for the City of Spokane and fills his off hours meeting the needs of the church and spending time with his wife, Julia, and new baby daughter, Grace. He also is taking classes at nearby Whitworth



University. “There’s not much time for anything else besides those things,” says Borisov. Yet, he is also a new member of the USMB Leadership Board.

Pacific Keep is supported by the Pacific District Conference, Mission USA and mother church, Pilgrim Slavic MB Church, also located in Spokane.
—Mission USA



Carlin Buhrman

How can we manage anxiety?

Five ways to help a family member who is anxious

There is a live shooter here in Hesston!” That’s how my therapy session started on the evening of Feb. 25, 2016. It was a day of tragedy for Hesston, Kan., and the surrounding areas. Excel Industries experienced a mass shooting with four people killed, 14 injured and many others negatively affected. The days that followed were filled with remembering, recovery and moving forward. They were, and some continue to be, days filled with anxiety.

None of us will escape this life without being directly or indirectly affected by situations that cause anxiety. The avoidance, fear, flashbacks, dreams and other symptoms can be difficult to manage.

For some these symptoms seem to fade, while for others they tend to persist or appear intermittently. When anxiety shows up, it can be difficult to know how to manage it. Seeing our family members struggle with high anxiety levels can leave us paralyzed and bring us to push them further than they feel they can manage or to damage relationships.

What can I do to help my family member who is struggling with anxiety?

1. Prepare for anxiety before it shows up by helping your family feel safe to one another. Create intentional time together for fun and pay attention to both negative and positive emotions. Let family members know it is OK to feel their emotions and share times when you’ve felt similar. Incorporate God as Comforter,

Healer and Counselor into your family conversations and activities. Once we establish a safe place, family members have a place they can trust to be supportive.

2. Chase the why. Sometimes it is easy to find the origin of anxiety, but it can be challenging. Knowing why your family member is anxious helps them begin to manage their anxiety and helps family members cultivate compassion.

3. Visit your primary care physician. There can be biological reasons for anxiety, and we don’t want to ignore them.

4. Equip the person who is anxious. Here are a few ideas:

- Rehearse an event, a bus ride for example, several times before it happens. Even just imagining getting on the bus with all the details of the ride will help the brain to be prepared for it when the time comes. You can also have children draw, paint or create a picture of the event going well.

- Think about the supportive people (you can include God, parents, friends and even pets) that person has and have them imagine that those people are all helping them do whatever they get anxious about.

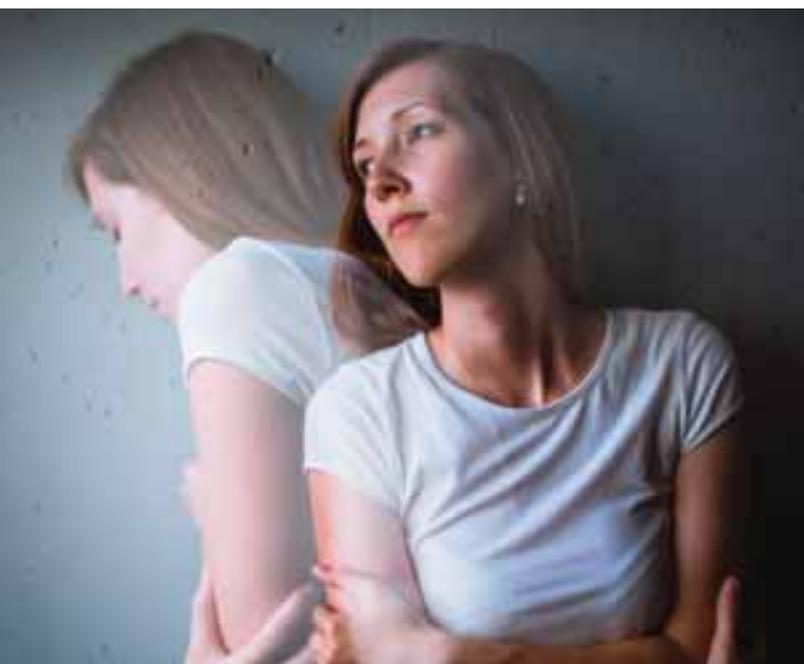
- Learn and practice “diaphragmatic breathing.” It can help to calm your body in stressful moments and gets your body and brain the oxygen it needs to help with healthy living.

- As a family, memorize verses or prayers that are helpful for you in anxious situations. Make them part of your daily prayers together.

- Keep a family journal (you can use pictures, stories and photographs) of all of the times family members succeeded in conquering anxiety and review it when someone in the family is preparing to face something they are anxious about.

5. If you try the above and feel that you need more direction or help, visit with a therapist. There are several effective methods of treatment for anxiety. Maybe an outside perspective and some expertise in the area will be helpful in leading your family toward a healthier life.

Carlin Buhrman is a licensed clinical marriage and family therapist from Hesston, Kan. She owns Central Kansas Counseling, a private practice in Hesston, and also works part time as a therapist at EMPAC, an employee assistance program in Wichita, Kan. She and her family attend First MB Church in Wichita.





Kathryn Glanzer

My spontaneous book club

Whose recommendations do you take for a good book?

Like many writers, I am an avid and selective reader. I can only read so many books in a year, and I want to make sure to choose wisely. However, this creates questions: What makes a good choice and whose advice do I take?

In the past few years, I have begun to filter book suggestions by my relationship with the person who is recommending. In truth, a kind person may recommend a book that was good for them, but may be totally ill fitted for me; close friends know the difference. Unfortunately, individuals may also recommend books in a passive attempt to change me. I have learned that it is all right to judge a book by the person who is recommending it.

My favorite recommendations come from a group that meets only once a year in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. For the past eight summers, my husband and I have traveled there to help with the Southern District Conference senior high camp. There are many people who help with worship, leading youth, programming, etc. Some individuals are there nearly every year, like Roxi and Ty Klein from Hillsboro, Kan. Others come just once yet leave a memorable impression, like Jason and Nicole Quiring of Saratoga Springs, Utah. Every year is a new combination of people, experiences and stories.

Over the past years a typical pattern has evolved. When we are not helping with youth activities, we spend much of our free time catching up, seeking and giving advice and talking about the books we have read over the past year. By the second day, we have started our separate lists of recommended books typed in our phones. By the final day of camp, I have already chosen the order in which I am going to buy and read each one.

This past summer was no exception. I recently contacted Lisa Schmidt of Fairview, Okla., to see what books she had on her list and was surprised to find we had written down completely different lists—not one book was the same. I already have added one of her books, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, to my list.

In between worship sets this year, Rod Jost, Sheridan, Wyo., recommended several books including *The Power of the Other* by Dr. Henry Cloud. I am currently finishing this book so that I can get to Jost's next recommendation, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* by John H. Walton.

In his book, Cloud discusses the power of connection and relationship in building or tearing one another down. After all, our various relationships impact us emotionally, mentally, socially, professionally and spiritually. He argues that with the right people around us, we can hope to grow past projected limits and expectations. Through reading this book, I understand the importance of who I take book advice from.

When someone recommends a book, I certainly question whether this person is trying to change me or to encourage what they see the Holy Spirit already working within me. Do they desire for me to grow past my current limits and expectations? Oftentimes, it is through this spontaneous Colorado book club's people and books that the Holy Spirit reaches new parts of my intellect and sense of empathy, opening new doors for ministering to the people around me. With so many wonderful people encouraging me, I have a long list to read through.

Kathryn Glanzer lives in Hillsboro, Kan. with her husband, Chris, and two children, Anna and Paul, and is a member of Ebenfeld MB Church.

Looking for a way to raise funds for a mission trip, nonprofit ministry or any "God adventure" you are embarking on? Check out GiveSendGo.com (GSG), the only free Christian crowdfunding website available. GSG is designed for short- or long-term campaigns, and each month GSG gives 10 percent of the donations back to active campaigns on the site.

"As Christians, we realize that no amount of money will give the world what it really needs, which is hope. You can raise all the money in the world and still not make an eternal difference in someone's life," co-founder Jacob Wells says. "We want to develop a site that Christians can use to come together, support other believers in their endeavors and bring hope to the world. We believe that when we are living the life God wants us to, we will be able to share his hope with others."

re: Crowdfunding

milestones

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Daniel Nannenga was baptized July 31 at **Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, ND.**

Sadie Decker, Mikinzi Horn, Andy Reimer, David Reimer, Ryan Warkentin, Janelle Wood and Bianca Vega were baptized Sept. 11 and received as members of **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church.** Courtney Baer, Nate Baer, Shelly Barsoom, Chris Braun, Myra Braun, Donna Kliewer, Larry Kliewer and Jonathan Moritz were received as members Sept. 18.

Kaydence Bayles, Hayley Haskins and Dale Cable were baptized Sept. 18 at **South Mountain Community Church's South Jordan (Utah) Campus.** Jeff Smith, Michelle Smith, Savannah Smith, Ariana Dunn, Allyson Naud, Elizabeth Ruelle and Matthew Casady were baptized Aug. 14. Matt Pullman was baptized March 13. Kierra Cable and Taylor Winsness were baptized Jan. 10. Warner Matthews and Laura Matthews were baptized Sept. 30, 2015. Gentry Opie was baptized Sept. 13, 2015.

Justin Gross, Caleb Hofer, Lauren Rink, Rebekah Rink, Daniel Stahl, Sadie Stahl and Michael Waldner were baptized Sept. 11 and received as members of **Bethel MB Church, Yale, SD.**

Kurtis Brown, Temperance Talley, Joel Young and Joel Pinzon were baptized Aug. 7 at **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.** Abigail Smith, Christi Fischer, Dexter Fischer and Kevin Meikle were received as members July 12.

Cale Braun, Robin Herbel, Kaley Brin, Karen Kisner, Savannah Clingan, Anita Koster, Bailey Englert, Ella Neher, Caleb Englert and Jett Smith were baptized Aug. 28 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**

CELEBRATIONS

Memorial Road MB Church, Edmond, Okla., marked a name change to Cross Timbers Church with an internal celebration Sept. 4 and a city-wide launch service Sept. 25.

Trailhead Church, Littleton, Colo., celebrated 10 years Aug. 28. Trailhead was planted in 2006 in partnership with Mission USA.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., celebrated the completion of their church building fund debt with a mortgage burning Aug. 28.

WORKERS

John Hodge is the new youth pastor at **The Life Center, Lenoir, NC.** He and his wife, Tonya, have three daughters and came to North Carolina from Maryland, where he also served as a youth pastor.

Vanna In is the new youth pastor at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.**

Jonathan Ahlum was installed Aug. 28 as associate pastor at **Shorelife Community Church, Capitola, Calif.**

Neil Peterson is serving as interim pastor at **Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD.** He had been serving as associate pastor.

Scott Gassoway was installed Aug. 21 as lead pastor at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church.**

Joel Kersey is the new student ministries pastor at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church.** Matt Harder is the new pastor of care and counseling.

DEATHS

Devoe, Jim, Edmond, Okla., member of Memorial Road MB Church, Edmond, April 23, 1941—July 24, 2016. Parents: Cleve and Nellie Devoe. Spouse: Cheryl Thomas. Children: Erin Devoe, Heather Devoe, Seth Devoe; two grandchildren.

Faul, Hilda Heizelmann, Bismarck, ND, former member of Harvey (ND) MB Church now Cornerstone Community Church, April 29, 1918—Aug. 1, 2016. Parents: Ferdinand and Kathrina (Faul) Heizelmann. Spouse: Leander Faul, deceased. Children: Kathleen Herbel, Shirley Unrau, Naomi Faul; three grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

Faul, Mirad, Cooperstown, ND, member of Harvey (ND) MB Church now Cornerstone Community Church, July 22, 1923—May 1, 2016. Parents: Charlie H. and Bertha (Reimche) Faul. Spouse: Deloris (Graumann) Faul, deceased. Children: Wade, Dwight, Emma and Denise Kesanen; four grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Foth, Dorothy Jane, Halstead, Kan., of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, April 19, 1927—June 18, 2016. Parents: Peter B. and Margaret (Franz) Nickel. Spouse: Harvey Foth, deceased. Children: Steven; five grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

Fruechting, Betty, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Sept. 20, 1935—Aug. 6, 2016. Parents: Menno and Heddie (Wall) Harder. Spouses: Paul Lange, deceased; Don Fruechting. Children: Byron Lange, Wendy McCarty, Terry Fruechting, Kevin Fruechting, Mike Fruechting; 17 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren.

Groening, Elsie, Hillsboro, Kan., of Hillsboro MB Church, July 5, 1925—Aug. 24, 2016. Parents: Jacob H. and Anna Ewert. Spouse: Marvin Groening, deceased. Children: Marilyn Hiebert, Karleen Warkentin, Loren, Joel; 14 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren.

Heer, Calvin Coolidge, Fairview, Okla., of Fairview MB Church, Jan. 27, 1926—Aug. 2, 2016. Parents: John and Mary (Smith) Heer.

Volunteer serves Lenoir youth

A summer partnership between The Life Center, a USMB congregation in Lenoir, NC, and Mennonite Central Committee's Summer Service Worker's Program benefitted the youth of the church and community. MCC volunteer Austin Crawford, a student at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute who is from Lenoir, was responsible for the youth day camp for children ages five through 12 held June 27-30, assisted with the North Carolina MB District Conference Sunday School Convention held July 4, helped plan and lead the church's vacation Bible school program July 17-20 and organized the Back to School Party held Aug. 13. Crawford was also responsible for Random Acts of Kindness (RAoK), a weekly Thursday night service project that involved taking teens to different communities where they did painting, lawn work, home repairs, etc. He also assisted youth pastor John Hodge with weekly Bible studies. "This program was designed to develop and enhance Austin's leadership skills and to improve his work with youth," says TLC Pastor Terry Hunt. "I saw a spirited young man who began to exercise his faith in Christ Jesus and to demonstrate leadership skills that he never thought he had."

Elmer Martens dies

Elmer Martens, Mennonite Brethren scholar, teacher, administrator and pastor, died suddenly Sept. 21, 2016, of a massive heart attack. He was 86. He devoted much of his professional life to MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, Fresno, Calif. He was a full-time member of the Old Testament faculty from 1969-95 and continued to teach part time after his retirement. He was president of the seminary from 1977-86. Martens was born Aug. 12, 1930, in Main Centre, Sask., to Jacob H. Martens and Susanna Nickel Martens. He married Phyllis Jean Hiebert Aug. 24, 1956; she died Oct. 1, 2016. He is survived by four children, Lauren Martens (Helen), Frances Martens Friesen (Kenneth), Vernon Martens (Sally) and Karen Bartlett (Rick), and nine grandchildren. He and Phyllis lived in Fresno, Calif., and attended North Fresno MB Church.

Reedley MB Church set on fire

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, the first Mennonite Brethren congregation organized in California (1905), was burglarized Aug. 27 and then set on fire. The custodial office, adjoining chapel, west education wing, main office building and a breezeway sustained damage. The congregation was able to hold worship services the next day, Sunday, Aug. 28 and begin the new ministry year Sept. 7 as scheduled. Damaged areas will be gutted and rebuilt; initial estimates for the completion of the project are between nine and 12 months.

Spouses: Bonnie Young, deceased; Nelda Barnes. Children: Janet Wood, Judith Wright, Jean Bostwick, Paul, David, Timothy; five grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Stepchildren: David Hutton; three step-grandchildren.

Harder, Henry J., Abbotsford, BC, former MB Biblical Seminary professor, July 30, 1926—July 24, 2016. Parents: John and Agatha Harder. Spouse: Doris Karber. Children: John; two grandchildren.

Hoff, Martha, Reedley, Calif., member of Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., Feb. 10, 1920—July 2, 2016. Parents: Theodore and Helena Klassen. Spouses: Ebner Friesen, deceased; David Hoff, deceased. Children: Alicia Patriquin, David Hoff, Jr., Dorothy Stitts; many grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

Hohm, Clarence "Jimmy," Huron, SD, member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, SD, Sept. 4, 1923—Aug. 11, 2016. Parents: Ludwig and Susanna Hohm. Spouse: Ida Hofer. Children: Phillip, Charles, Bethel Serck, Ludwig; nine grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren.

Jost, Rosella, Hillsboro, Kan., of Hillsboro MB Church, June 13, 1917—June 20, 2016. Parents: Peter J. and Maria (Siemens) Franz. Spouse: Marvin Jost. Children: Loretta Neufeld, Dale, James, Cheryl McJunkin; 10 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren.

Koop, Malinda K., Fresno, Calif., member of Bethany Church, Fresno, Oct. 19, 1924—Aug. 10, 2016. Parents: John and Nettie Goertzen. Spouse: John H. Koop, deceased. Children: Grace Peters, Sharon Stone, Ken, Nadine Gretsck; six grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren.

Martens, Phyllis, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, July 15, 1928—Oct. 1, 2016. Parents: John (J.N.C.) and Anna (Jungas) Hiebert. Spouse: Elmer Martens, deceased. Children: Lauren, Frances Martens Friesen, Vernon, Karen Bartlett; nine grandchildren.

Soden, Christopher Adam, Wichita, Kan., of First MB Church, Wichita, died Sept. 4, 2016. Parents: Jack and Mary Ellen Soden.

reaching in

DISCIPLESHIP

A group from **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, meets weekly to write notes of encouragement to those going through struggles.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church hosted a "Savvy Caregiver" workshop series Sept. 15-16, offering families of those with dementia face-to-face training with experts in the field. The event was a program of the Alzheimer's Association.

Lighthouse Community Church, Wichita, Kan., hosted "Making Disciples in Broken Places," a

conference held Sept. 9-10 and sponsored by World Impact's Urban Ministry Institute.

In October, **Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church** began hosting an adoption support group that is led by a local adoption agency. The group aims to give adoption families in the church and community a place to learn from each other.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held their annual Ministry Fair Aug. 21, with opportunities to volunteer and to sign up for small groups or join a Bible study.

Kids at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, learned about poverty in August with a series of four lessons called "Step into my Shoes." Participants experienced the life of a Christian Ugandan family, saw a working safe water system and mosquito net and explored what the Bible says about poverty.

FELLOWSHIP

Crafters from **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** met Oct. 22 to make fall charger plates.

Men from **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** served supper to football players from Tabor College Aug. 26.

Motorcycle enthusiasts from several Oklahoma Mennonite churches, called Mennonites On Bikes (MOB), gathered at **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, Sept. 18 for a ride and lunch. Donations benefitted Mennonite Disaster Service.

The seniors group at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, called the 8-Tracks, and the church's young adults group, called the Blue Rays, gathered Sept. 15 for a meal and activities based on the TV show "Survivor." The church organized a "PAG" (Pine Acres golf) Tour this summer. Tournaments were held June 12, July 17 and Aug. 14.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., partnered with the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes to show the film "Woodlawn" Sept. 24. Free popcorn and drinks were served. This event was part of the community's annual Santa Fe Days festival.

Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND, held worship in a local park Aug. 21, followed by a potluck meal.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., held its annual fall kick-off picnic at a local park Sept. 25. The community was invited to the event, which included a taco truck, bounce houses and carnival games.

An Aug. 21 back-to-school fair for those in preschool through college at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, included info booths, prayer partners, immediate one-on-one prayer and sign-ups for church programs.

A fall kick off weekend Aug. 20-21 at **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, included a back-to-

school carnival on Saturday and a BBQ after the Sunday morning service.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., hosted a pancake breakfast and car show Aug. 20.

Women from **Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif.**, went hiking together July 9 and had a "coffee and canvases" evening July 16.

Copper Hills Church, Phoenix, Ariz., hosted a comedy night Sept. 17, with Christian comedian Kenn Kington and gourmet pizza.

Families from **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, went to a baseball game together Aug. 12.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., organized a pool party Aug. 14.

A new "Handcrafters" group at **Vinewood Community Church, Lodi, Calif.**, encourages individuals to make handcrafted products that will be sold to support various ministries in the church and community. The group meets monthly to share their crafts and build friendships.

Youth from **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gathered July 24 to make Christmas cookies

and watch a Christmas movie in the pool for "Christmas in July."

A family night June 9 at **College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.**, featured a small showing of vintage motorcycles and automobiles, ice cream sundaes and crafts.

Fairview (Okla.) MB Church offered a "blessing of the bikes" for motorcycles at the end of the service June 26. The day also included a free biker breakfast, reserved seating for bikers during worship and a ride after church.

Henderson (Neb.) MB Church offered a class June 25 on how to create a quilt using old t-shirts.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church hosted a free movie night on the church green July 15, featuring "Finding Nemo."

reaching out

LOCALLY

Henderson (Neb.) MB Church partnered with other area churches to host "garage parties" on Hal-

loween. Teams of two to three families worked together to pick a theme, provide snacks and beverages and organize activities for trick-or-treaters.

Fourth, fifth and sixth graders from **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** and **Iglesia Companerismo Cristiano, Shafter**, gathered Aug. 21 to make prayer blankets for members of both churches. Their goal was to make 20 blankets and distribute them.

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif., held a free medical and dental clinic Aug. 13.

Copper Hills Church, Phoenix, Ariz., hosted a community car show, known as "The Westwing Classic," Oct. 15.

GLOBALLY

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., plans to send a team to serve at the Operation Christmas Child processing center in Dallas, Texas, Nov. 25-27.

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church sent a short-term team to Portugal Oct. 4-12 specifically to pray with and for missionaries there.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Job Openings

Lead Pastor: Dinuba MB Church is looking for the right man to join our congregation and Elder Team as a lead pastor while we prayerfully implement a new vision for transitioning to a refreshed church. With 180 attending two services, we desire to more effectively reach our mostly Hispanic community with the gospel. The successful candidate should have a missional orientation and excitement about embracing this opportunity. For more details email pastorsearchtaskforce@gmail.com.

Lead Pastor: We are looking for a lead pastor to follow our retiring pastor. We are an MB church with a community focus in West Salem, Ore. Along with mission interest, we focus our outreach on our own neighborhood. We have a combination youth/worship pastor on staff as well, but all other positions are volunteer. Worship is mixed in style and multi-generational. We see church as family and have a mix of new believers and established. Church's web site is www.kingwoodbible.net. Contact via email kingwoodpastor@qwestoffice.net or by letter to Pastor Search, Kingwood Bible Church, 1125 Elm St. NW, Salem, OR 97304

Lead Pastor: Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. Responsibilities include helping to provide leadership for the congregation, preaching, teaching, discipling and mentoring. Please email resume and statement of faith to ccscspastorsearch@gmail.com

Agency Job Openings

College Faculty: Fresno Pacific University is recruiting online business adjunct faculty who will work with the program director for the undergraduate and graduate online business programs advancing teaching outcomes and values of Fresno Pacific University. Complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/careers.

Planned Giving Advisor: MB Foundation is accepting applications for Planned Giving Advisor to represent MB Foundation programs and services to individuals and ministries throughout the West Coast. If interested, send a letter and resume to: Jon C. Wiebe, President & CEO, MB Foundation, PO Box 220, Hillsboro KS 67063 (jwiebe@mbfoundation.com)

Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way! Multiple hotel tours focusing on Mennonite-Anabaptist history in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. Organized by Mennonite Heritage Tours, www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu

Notice

Tabor College is seeking comments from the public about the college in preparation for its periodic evaluation by its regional accrediting agency. The college will host a visit Feb. 6-8, 2017, with a team representing the Higher Learning Commission. Tabor College has been accredited by HLC since 1965. The team will review the institution's ongoing ability to meet HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. The public is invited to submit comments regarding the college to the following address: Public Comment on Tabor College, Higher Learning Commission, 230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500, Chicago, IL 60604-1411. The public may also submit comments on HLC's website at www.hlcommission.org/comment. Comments must address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs. Comments must be in writing. All comments must be received by Jan. 9, 2017.

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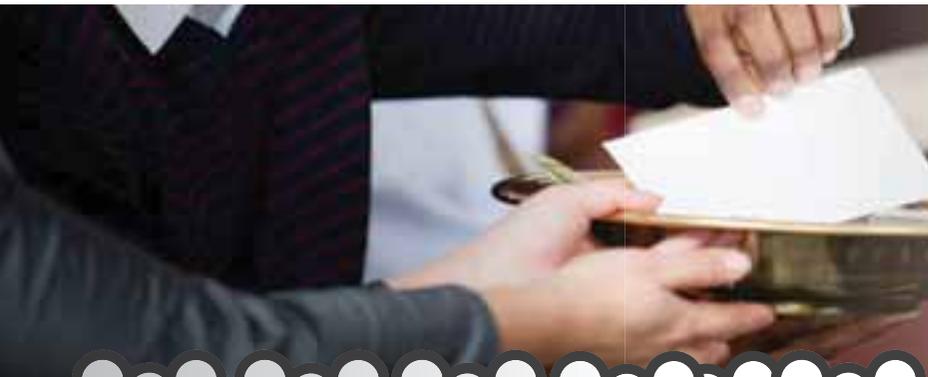


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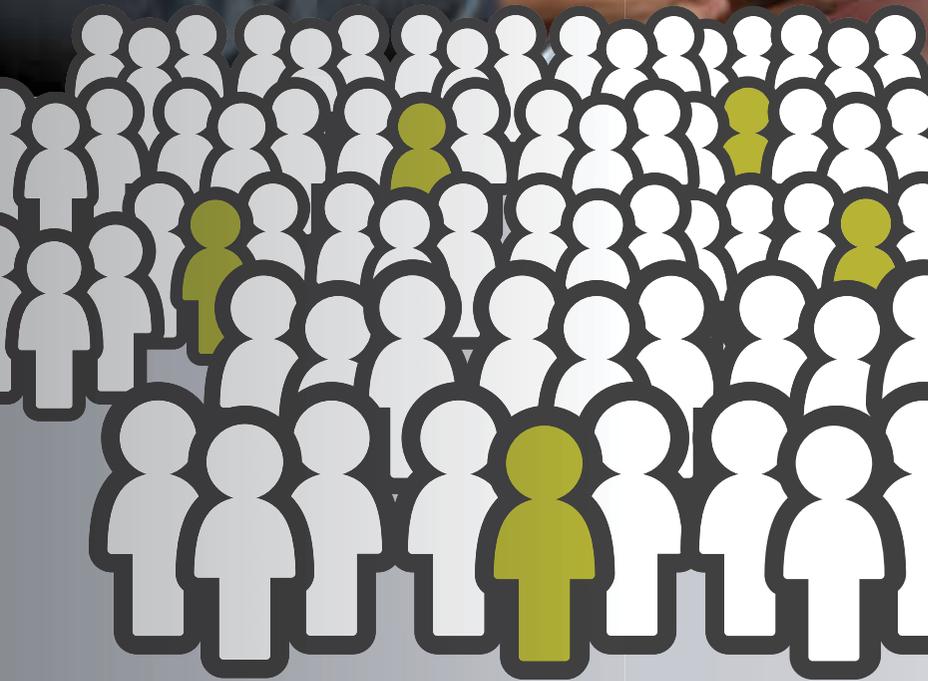
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