

# CHRISTIAN LEADER

January / February 2017

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**Three Jeremys find shalom Page 18**



Hearing the call to repent

The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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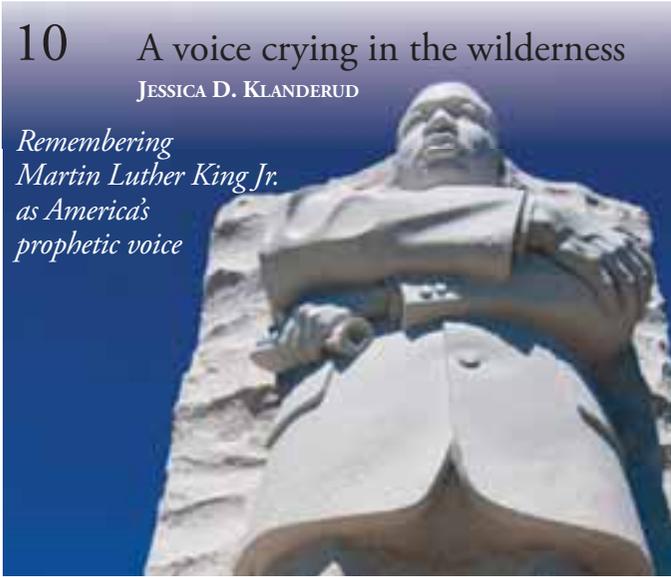
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# CL changes reflect new things

“Change your life, not just your clothes”

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past,” writes the prophet Isaiah. “See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isa. 43:18).

God’s words to his people are also appropriate words for the start of a new calendar year. The encouragement to look forward also speaks to U.S. Mennonite Brethren as we pursue a new vision and strategy that focuses on equipping the local church and forming networks around three core commitments: church multiplication and evangelism, intentional discipleship and leadership development.

As a symbol of this “new USMB thing,” we have made changes to the *Christian Leader*. We’ve tweaked the cover, adjusted the page format and reordered the contents. Changes to the content are intended to highlight the three USMB core commitments and to reflect the responses of the 312 readers who graciously completed the 2016 CL readership survey conducted last January.

One department we’ve significantly changed is the columns. When asked what they value most in the CL, readership survey responders said the personal testimony column. So each issue will continue to include a personal testimony from someone in the USMB family. Caitlin Friesen of Fresno, Calif., and David Vogel of Hillsboro, Kan., will serve as regular columnists for 2017. We hope you enjoy their personal reflections on daily life and God’s work in the world. In an effort to keep the USMB core commitments and ministry strategy in the forefront, each issue will also include an essay from one of the five district ministers and another from someone serving on the pastoral staff of a USMB congregation.

The second content area that readers highly value is the feature department. For the past six years, features articles in each issue addressed a variety of topics related to our faith and our lives. While this will continue to some degree, I anticipate that in some issues a common thread will run through our feature articles. For instance, in this issue that theme is repentance and the writers in this issue are calling us to repent of racism and our response to homosexuals.

Eugene Peterson’s translation of Joel 2:12-13 is helpful for thinking about repentance: “Come back to me and really mean it! Come fasting and weeping, sorry for your sins! Change your life, not just your clothes.” So as you read this issue, I invite you to consider changing more than just your wardrobe. Sometimes we change because God calls us to a new thing; at other times, we change because we are going in the wrong direction and God calls us to repent. In this issue, in different ways, the family of USMB churches is encouraged to do both. ▀



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## USMB leaders begin writing next chapter



Leadership Board members Gary Wall, Boris Borisov and David Hardt visit informally during the recent board meeting. *USMB photo*

Implementing the new USMB vision was the focus of discussions when the USMB Leadership Board (LB) met Oct. 12-14 in Kansas City, Mo.

LB members spent time evaluating the process that led to the new national ministry strategy, which was unveiled at the National Convention in a document titled “The Future Story” and which LB chair Marv Schellenberg says is in the rearview mirror. “That’s behind us now,” he says. “We’re no longer talking about the Future Story; we are the story.”

A key priority to writing the next chapter, Schellenberg says, is “immediate and effective communication.” Accordingly, board members provided input for a redesign of *Christian Leader* magazine, approved new staffing for USMB social media efforts and approved spending up to \$30,000 out of reserves for a new USMB website and accompanying rebranding.

The board engaged in a lengthy discussion regarding possible partnership with C2C, the church planting ministry of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC). According to the minutes, the board wants to encourage such partnerships “because this is exactly what we invited them to do in the Future Story.” The board agreed

to issue a letter to the leaders of C2C, MB Mission and CCMBC to clarify an operational agreement regarding church planting in the U.S. This

memorandum of understanding will be signed prior to any Mennonite Brethren church planting in the U.S.

The board approved a budget of \$826,840 for 2017, down almost \$36,000 from 2016.

The next meeting of the USMB Leadership Board is planned for March 30-31 in San Diego, Calif. —CL

## Board of Faith and Life meets

The USMB Board of Faith and Life (BFL) met Oct. 11-12 in Kansas City, Mo., to discuss ways to equip local leaders and congregations on matters of faith.

A BFL task force continues to evaluate hundreds of resolutions made by the General Conference before divestiture to the U.S. and Canadian Conferences to determine which should be elevated to policy level, which would then have formal and binding legal implications. The board acted on one such matter at this meeting, moving to add a sentence to the Ordination and Licensing Policies and Procedures Packet that women may be licensed for any ministry role other than lead pastor.

This move “clarifies and codifies what has been and continues to be the credentialing policy of the U.S.

Conference made through multiple decisions by delegates through the years,” says BFL chair Tim Sullivan via email following the meeting.

The board also heard updates on follow-up to the 2014 revision of Article 13 of the USMB Confession of Faith regarding peacemaking and explored the possibility of hosting a study conference in early 2018 on hermeneutics, which would allow for application to several relevant issues. A task force will provide a skeleton for such a conference by the end of 2016.

The board discussed several ways to provide resources for congregations on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues, including an article in *Christian Leader* magazine, a position paper available to pastors and possible regional events. A task force will work to plan one regional event that could be a model for further such events.

BFL will next meet March 29-30 in San Diego, Calif., following the National Pastors Orientation. —CL

## Giving Tuesday raises over \$22,000

Individuals and congregations gave a total of \$22,350 to support USMB church plants on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 29. All funds given to Mission USA during this one-day campaign will go toward the 11 new and existing MB church plants in the U.S. that will receive subsidy from Mission USA in 2017. Don Morris, USMB national director, says these funds are critical to church planting success: “If it were not for subsidies from Mission USA, the districts and other supporting churches, church plants would have a very, very difficult time even surviving. With these subsidies, church plants have the freedom to build their ministries, add space, hire part-time workers and do more things that allow them to reach more people and have an impact in their neighborhoods.” —USMB

## Central district holds annual convention

About 80 registrants made their way to remote Lustre, Mont., for the 106th convention of the Central District Conference (CDC) Nov. 4-5, hosted by Lustre MB Church.

The convention theme was “The Power of Our Story,” taken from 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Accordingly, stories of God’s work in and through the CDC churches were woven throughout the event, most notably on Friday evening, when attendees heard stories from both church plants and established congregations: Henderson (Neb.) MB Church; Sanctuary Fremont (Neb.); Iglesia Agua Viva, Omaha, Neb.; Lakota Gospel MB Church, Porcupine, SD; and Faith Bible Church, Omaha.

Guest speaker Randy Alonso, pastor of Central Life Church, Melbourne, Fla., helped flesh out the convention theme in three keynote addresses.

In business sessions, delegates heard reports from various district committees, elected a slate of district leaders and approved a “robust” budget, which assumes a 20 percent increase in church giving. District Minister Rick Eshbaugh led a roundtable discussion Friday afternoon that focused on applying the new USMB strategic vision to CDC congregations. Representatives from USMB, *Christian Leader* magazine, MB Mission, MB Foundation and Tabor College talked about how their ministries might help equip CDC congregations, then answered questions. —CL

## New pastors invited to orientation

Pastoral staff who are new to the U.S. Mennonite Brethren and their spouses are invited to the biennial National Pastors Orientation, to be held March 27-29 at the Island Palms Hotel and Marina, San

Diego, Calif. While most districts require pastors to attend the orientation, National Director Don Morris says attendees will be enriched. “The NPO is designed to provide attendees with information about the Mennonite Brethren world, with information about structure, theology, how we read the Bible, communication lines, Anabaptist and MB history, agencies, schools and mission,” he says. “It’s also a time to build relationships and to get to know leaders and other pastors.” Registration and cost information is available through district ministers and on the USMB website. —CL

## Miller hired as social media coordinator



USMB has contracted with Kolby Miller, Utah, to help promote USMB through social media and email marketing. Miller began work Oct. 24.

As the part-time social media coordinator, Miller is responsible for enhancing and managing USMB’s social media presence on various social media platforms and developing additional marketing strategies to facilitate online community among USMB members. Miller attends South Mountain Community Church (SMCC), a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Draper, Utah.

Miller replaces Myra Holmes, who served as the part-time social media coordinator since 2011. With this change, Holmes has increased the hours she spends in her role as the *Christian Leader* assistant editor. —USMB

## Youth gather for conferences

Nov. 17-20 was youth conference weekend for the Central and South-



ern District Conferences. A total of 503 high school students attended the Southern District Youth Conference (SDYC) hosted by First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., while 144 students and sponsors met at Cedar Canyon Camp in Rapid City, SD, for the Central District Youth Conference (CDYC).

Three speakers addressed the SDYC theme, “Game On!” taken from 1 Corinthians 9:25. Scott Parks, pastor of Restoration Church in Wichita, spoke Friday and Saturday evenings, addressing the importance of keeping your eye on the eternal prize. Saturday afternoon Terry Hunt, pastor of The Life Church, the USMB church in Lenoir, NC, talked about the Christian response to race relations and reconciliation. During the closing session Sunday morning, Matthew Penner, currently a missionary with Disciple Nations in Wichita, encouraged the students to live out Christ’s love in every circumstance. The weekend also included workshops, free time and evening activities. Organizers celebrate that seven students came to Christ over the weekend.

“Love Compelled,” based on 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, was the CDYC theme. In his five presentations, speaker Stephen Humber, with MB Mission, referenced a variety of Scripture passages to focus on the difference between knowing God and knowing about God. Each session built on the previous as Humber encouraged the students to build a personal relationship with Jesus. Friday afternoon the teens worked at

# 5 minutes with...

four service projects (photo): making scrapbook pages for foster kids with Lutheran Social Services, working with Feeding South Dakota at a mobile food distribution site, making over 15,000 bags of food for Kids Against Hunger and making hygiene kits for women with The Hope Center.—CL

## Inaugural National Strategy Team formed

USMB leaders have named the National Strategy Team (NST), an advisory team formed as part of the new national ministry strategy. The NST is comprised of Don Morris, USMB national director; Jon Wiebe, president of MB Foundation; Randy Friesen, general director of MB Mission; and the five district ministers: Tim Sullivan, Southern District Conference; Gary Wall, Pacific District Conference; Rick Eshbaugh, Central District Conference; Terry Hunt, North Carolina District Conference; and Aaron Hernandez, Latin American MB District Conference. Morris will chair the team. In addition, key leaders from local churches will be invited to NST meetings to provide input on specific questions. The NST will meet face to face three times per year with additional teleconferences as needed.—CL

## CCMBC announces leadership change

The Executive Board of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC) announced Nov. 25, 2016 that Willy Reimer has left the position of executive director, effective immediately.

After much discussion and prayer, and with the help of an external facilitator, the board came to consensus that a leadership change was required for the opportunities and challenges facing the conference at this time.

The board has begun an evaluative process to review governance challenges that the board must own, as well as leadership needs within the denomination. Ron Toews has accepted the Executive Board's invitation to serve as interim executive director.—CCMBC



## Jennifer Carter

Jennifer Carter's card-making hobby partly pays for itself these days. Besides the many involvements that come with being a pastor's wife at Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., and a part-time job as a school secretary, Carter has become an award-winning greeting card maker, featured in *Paper Crafts Magazine* and *Rubber-StampMadness*. Her card-making blog, [jensinkspot.blogspot.com](http://jensinkspot.blogspot.com), is a popular source for card-making ideas and instructions for the latest card-making stamps and cutting dies.

### 1. How did you get started making cards?

After our son was born, I found myself getting burned out making so many scrapbooks, trying to get every page perfect. The idea of doing the same kind of thing on a smaller scale appealed to me.

### 2. How does your hobby partly pay for itself?

One of the companies I bought supplies from asked me to start designing samples for their catalog. They sent me their products for free and I would make the samples. Now I'm designing for several companies. That's how it works in this industry—your payment is product that you get free.

### 3. What is your personal style?

I love to think outside the box, like using a winter stamp in summer. Recently I took a VW Bug stamp and cut off the back window to

make it look like an old-fashioned truck. It just takes looking at a stamp differently.

### 4. Where do you find inspiration?

Inspiration is all around me—in patterns in clothing, art, home décor, stationery and Pinterest. Sometimes I find it in the most unexpected places. I take those ideas and put them into card format.

### 5. How does card-making connect with your faith?

When my card-making friends are going through hard times they want me to know about it. Sometimes it's eye-opening. I get to share my heart and try to give them advice that is godly. On my blog I'm not pushy, but I encourage people to think of things in a different way. It is about relationship-building and planting seeds in people's lives.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

# Getting it wrong

My slow journey toward ministry with parents

I used to think being called into children's ministry meant I was to provide ministry to and for children with the help of some adult leaders. The job of parents was to bring them to church. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who got this wrong.

I got this impression from my childhood experiences in another denomination. There were always alternative worship options for children, especially young ones. The message I heard was children need to be separated from adults in order to be taught at age-appropriate levels. It's interesting, though, that this was not what I chose for myself. As a second grader, I distinctly remember choosing to stay in the service with adults, preferring it to children's church that went through third grade.

At Community Bible Church, our children's church is for kids age three thru kindergarten. After being hired by the church 11 years ago, I simply assumed we would move toward offering children's church for older children as well. This was largely based on what I perceived to be the "right way of doing things."

Laura, a children's ministry team member at the time, challenged my thinking. She suggested I read *Parenting in the Pew* and described the value of having her children sitting next to her in the worship service: Her children experienced corporate worship, learned to sit quietly and listen, were seen and known by the congregation and began to understand what it means to belong to a church family. Upon reflection, I realized my decision as a young child to worship with my parents was acceptable and, more importantly, valid.

Soon my closing remark on letters to parents became, "Thanks for allowing us to partner with you." I started

reading articles on what it means to walk alongside parents. And I joined a local children and family ministry network that reinforced the idea that parents should be primary spiritual disciplers of their children.

Our children's ministry team wrestled with how our mission statement could be changed to reflect our desire to equip parents. And after several years, we felt it was time to switch our Sunday school curriculum to one intentionally written with the role of parents in mind. One of the neat features was "pre-teach" pages that allowed parents to introduce the Bible stories before kids came to class.

My view of ministry to families continues to be refined. I now understand that it isn't my job to convince parents to take back their role as spiritual disciplers of kids but to help them see they have been doing it all along. The church's role is to be their cheerleader and to equip parents with practical tools to do the job well. This can be done in any number of ways.

For us, resourcing parents takes the form of family fun events, service opportunities in which families can participate together, a family resource display with articles and a newsletter applicable for families of various ages and stages and the switch to The Gospel Project, a Sunday school curriculum where all ages study the same biblical themes. Our most recent offering was a six-week parenting course called "Direction With Dignity," developed and taught by Calvin and Carolyn Richert, nationally recognized child development experts who attend CBC.

My journey to "parent ministry" may have been slow, but today I am an enthusiastic advocate of empowering parents to disciple their children. ▀



Ellen Funk has been on staff at Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., since 2005, working with children and families. She earned a master's degree in Christian Formation and Discipleship in 2015 from Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo, while simultaneously completing the Mennonite Brethren Studies certificate from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Funk is married to Donovan, has three grown children and four grandchildren. She is eager to connect with other USMB children/family staff workers, to learn from and support one another.

# Something had to change

Past struggles, fears create tender heart for youth

I have a heart for young people, and I believe it is because of my past struggles and fears. God used my difficult past to bring me to North Carolina to serve the youth at The Life Center.

My parents divorced when I was a small child. I lived with my mom in Maryland, while my dad moved to North Carolina. In my early teen years I began to hang out with the wrong crowd. I used and sold marijuana, joined a gang and dropped out of school. By the age of 16, I had a lengthy criminal record. Because of my choices, my dad and I stopped talking.

I knew my life was going nowhere and something had to change. Mom began going to church and told me I had to go too if I wanted to live with her. I agreed because I had no other place to live. One Sunday when I was 17, after the sermon I began to cry, ran to the altar and fell to my knees. That day I gave my life to Christ. I felt every burden and sin lift off my shoulders.

My life began to change dramatically. A judge expunged my criminal record. I earned my GED, went on to Bible college and earned an associate's degree in theology. I met and married my wife, Tonya, and we had three beautiful daughters. Because I don't want any young person go through what I went through, we began working with the youth in our church and became youth pastors there in 2007.

One of my heart's desires and prayers was to restore my relationship with my father, Mike Hodge. In September 2015, my stepmom, Beverly, contacted me on Facebook. That October, my wife and I decided to make the eight-hour trip to North Carolina to see my dad. I learned that my father and stepmom had been saved for five

years and that my dad had also been praying for reconciliation. We spent that whole weekend catching up and shedding many tears of forgiveness and joy.

That Sunday we went to The Life Center (TLC) in Lenoir, NC, where my dad is a member. We felt welcomed as soon as we walked in and visited a few more times in the next two months. After talking to Pastor Terry Hunt we found out that they needed a youth pastor.

We began to pray about moving to North Carolina. We have always enjoyed working with youth, and we felt that this decision would give us an opportunity to do that and be with my dad at the same time. In February 2016 we said goodbye to our church family in Maryland, packed a moving truck and headed south.

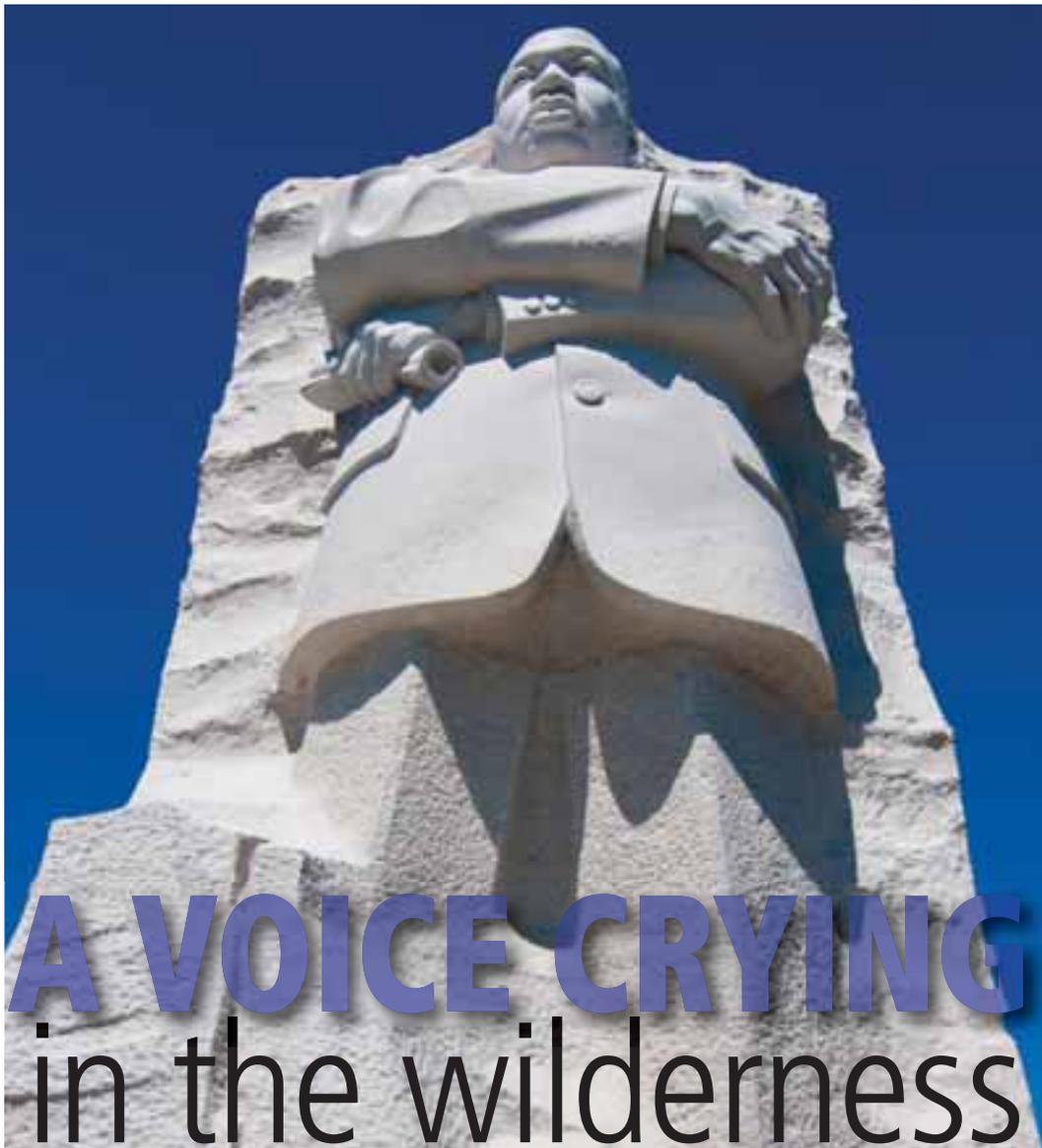
When we first moved, our daughters, who were 13, 10 and eight, had an extremely hard time. Tonya also had a difficult time; she had been in our Maryland church for 35 years, and it was all she had ever known. But Tonya and I knew it was what God had told us, and we were going to make it through.

Since then the girls have made friends. I work with my dad daily at his plumbing company and am building a great relationship with him. Tonya and I are building relationships as the youth pastors at TLC and have organized activities such as vacation Bible school, hiking trips and a day camp where 38 children under the age of 13 accepted Christ.

I am so excited for the things that God is doing. I cannot wait to see what God has in store for my family and The Life Center. ■



John Hodge enjoys bonfires and spending time with friends and family. His favorite thing about working with youth is watching them grow, develop and use their gifts and talents for the Lord.



## Remembering Martin Luther King Jr. as America's prophetic voice

**W**hen we think of Martin Luther King Jr., we often see him on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial calling to the nation to be true to our creed that all men are created equal. In the words of his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech, he declared his vision that looked to a day when little black boys and girls would join hands with little white boys and girls and be judged by their character rather than the color of their skin.

His words stir us because they call to our better natures as human beings and remind us of our common humanity and the brotherhood that we are called to as believers in Christ. This moment, which seemed to encapsulate King and his message, was not the end of his words to America nor was it a beginning. Instead, it was a common theme that he addressed throughout his ministry.

It is important to remember that King was not a great teacher. He was a pastor and a theologian. His faith formed every aspect of his vision for America. It was from his understanding of the

nature of God and his relationship with humankind that his dedication to the fundamental equality of all people and also to the principles of nonviolence developed and sustained his work.

For King, it seems, was not a person who wanted political power. In fact, it was important that King was outside of the frameworks of power. Instead, he functioned more like a prophet for America than even a pastor. The goal of a prophet is to call out sin, to cause a nation to seek repentance and to name the idolatry at the heart of people to allow them to draw closer to God.

### **A history of sin**

King served in this role, calling attention to the national sins of racism, segregation, police brutality, economic injustice and, above all, hatred. These sins were so pervasive in King's eyes that the very health of our nation was at risk.

If the United States did not turn from their path of segregation and oppression, the land would suffer.

Much like Old Testament prophets, the calls for repentance and a renewing of the faith of a nation often accompanied sustained troubles within the heart of a nation. The United States has suffered with the sin of slavery and its twin of segregation and discrimination for the entirety of our history. In fact, Jim Wallis goes so far as to call racism the original sin of the U.S.

From the earliest colonial days, labor provided by indentured servants and slaves formed the bulk of the work done in the colonies and, following independence, the United States. At some points, unfree laborers made up as much as 75 percent of the population. These numbers brought many new Americans into our growing nation, but the scourge of racism grew alongside the population.

As indentured servitude declined, African slavery increased. Slavery and the concept of race itself developed out of the process of separating indentured servants, who were unfree for a time, from slaves, who were defined as property for life. During the height of America's slavery, slaveholders used Christianity as a weapon to further subjugate slaves by claiming a biblical basis for their servitude as a punishment for supposed generational sin.

This use of the Bible to justify slavery did not keep slaves from developing their own relationship with God. Through the Scriptures, many slaves saw parallels between their own unjust servitude and the plight of the Israelites in Egypt and their exodus into the Promised Land.

After emancipation of the slaves following the Civil War, segregation, sharecropping and the prison system, which allowed for slavery to continue under the 13th amendment, recreated much of the system of inequality that disproportionately affected African Americans. By the development of the modern Civil Rights Movement, African Americans had endured centuries of unequal treatment based on the color of their skin.

### **The church as moral compass**

King stood outside of the halls of power, reminding the leaders of this nation of their responsibilities to all of the citizens of the nation regardless of their color or creed. King's understanding of God led him to call for the church to be the moral compass of the nation. In King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," he compares his work to the prophets "who carried their 'thus saith the Lord' far beyond the boundaries of their home towns."

For King, his work in the cities and towns of the U.S. reflected his commitment to end segregation and the evils of racism in this country. In his letter from the Birmingham jail he wrote, "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; ... who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.'"

This cry has continued through the decades following the large push of civil rights legislation in the 1960s through to today, as many people continue to question the patriotism of Colin Kaepernick and of people protesting for reforms in policing and meaningful efforts to combat police brutality and the disproportionate killing of unarmed African American citizens.

These issues are not divorced from King's calls for justice for the oppressed and his emphasis that Christians as a whole must engage with the cause of justice since their freedom was bought with a price as well. King's calls for America to repent of the sins of slavery and segregation have often fallen on deaf ears for many. It is easy to say that my ancestors may have done some horrible things but I am more enlightened than that.

While it is true that we have seen some progress on race relations in this country, it is also evident that we must press on. The promised land of racial reconciliation is still in the distance. This effort to reach a place where all the children of God can be treated equally in this country requires a true repentance that acknowledges the sins of the past, the omissions of the present and the ways that the culture of America and yes, the culture of the Church does not allow people of color to fully engage with the work of the Church as brothers and sisters—co-heirs with Christ.

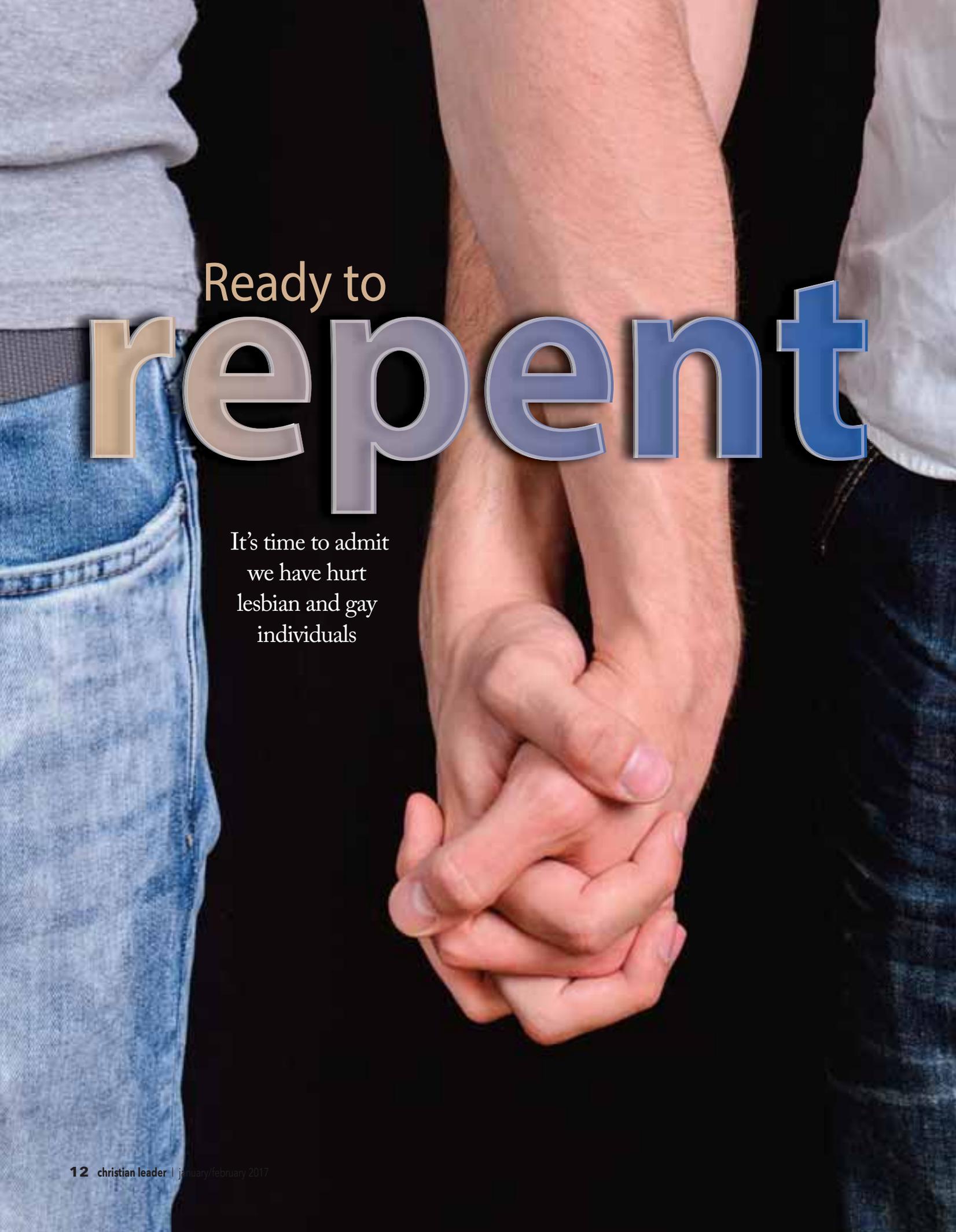
It is only when we are able to repent of our sins of racism and segregation that we will be able to, in the words of America's prophet Dr. King, "speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, We are free at last.'"

*Jessica D. Klanderud is assistant professor of history at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kan. ■*



*King stood outside of the halls of power, reminding the leaders of this nation of their responsibilities to all of the citizens of the nation regardless of their color or creed.*





Ready to  
**repent**

It's time to admit  
we have hurt  
lesbian and gay  
individuals



**By Brad Burkholder**

**I** am amazed at God's faithfulness to his people as seen in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Three remnants travel from Babylon to the Promised Land. The people go back with the goal of rebuilding their land and their cities. I do not think they realized they were also going back to rebuild their relationship with God.

For hundreds of years previous, judges and prophets had called the people to repentance. By the end of the book of Nehemiah, the people come to their leaders and say, "We have sinned." There are still 400 years between Nehemiah and Matthew, but God is working in the hearts of his people to call them to himself.

#### **The question that haunts**

At the end of July 2016, my wife and I attended both the USMB Pastors Conference and the National Convention in Denver, Colo. During the Pastors Conference, the presidents of Fresno Pacific University and Tabor College hosted a forum intended to increase understanding between the churches and schools about the issues each face regarding same-sex relationships. The presentation was clear and concise. The discussion was sensitive and appropriate.

At the time, I did not ask the question that continues to haunt me: Do we bear responsibility for the hostility felt this summer due to proposed legislation in California where we have a number of Mennonite Brethren churches and more generally for the lack of a relationship between the lesbian and gay community and the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Church?

I believe the answer is yes. I have been judgmental toward gay and lesbian individuals when I should have offered grace. I have been hateful when I should have offered love. I have caused pain when I should have offered healing. I have excluded when I should have included.

For Mennonite Brethren churches, I also believe the answer is yes. I know that not all MB churches exclude gay and lesbian individuals. Not everyone within an MB church that has excluded has done the same. It's messy. We can rationalize that we are doing a much better job now to not be exclusive. But, at the very least, we have acted like we are better than the lesbian and gay community, and for that we are wrong.

#### **The call to repent**

There are USMB congregations in 18 states, and gays and lesbians living in these states—and for that matter in all of the United States—have every right to be angry and disappointed with the Mennonite Brethren Church because of its treatment of lesbian and gay individuals. Just think about the things we write on Twitter, the articles we post on Facebook, the jokes we tell in secret and the



*We can rationalize that we are doing a much better job now to not be exclusive. But, at the very least, we have acted like we are better than the lesbian and gay community, and for that we are wrong.*



“us/them” language we use in conversations. By not acting in grace, we have put state governments in a position to defend lesbian and gay individuals.

God is calling me to repent. God is calling us to repent.

I am pretty sure I am about to lose two groups of readers right now. One group reading this is saying, “You go, Brad. Tell them how gay/lesbian intimacy is not a sin.” I may lose you because I do not agree with you.

I believe that the act of homosexuality is a sin. The Bible does not define every sexual sin. I believe it does define marriage. Scripture repeats three times (Moses in Genesis 2:24; Jesus in Matthew 19:5; Paul in Ephesians 5:31) that marriage is between a man and woman.

I believe every human being in their sinful nature is born with desires that lead to sin against the institution of marriage (lust, fantasy, porn, affairs, homosexuality, divorce, etc.) And to be clear, desires—temptation—is not sin; acting on the desires is sin.

#### **Forced to move**

The other group I may lose are those of you who agree that we have not done everything right, but you do not think we need to repent. I might lose you because I think we do need to repent. This group of readers is caught in *zugzwang*, German for “compulsion to move.”

*Zugzwang* is a situation found in chess and other games wherein one player is put at a disadvantage be-

cause they must make a move when they would prefer to pass or not move.

I have been in this situation; you may have too. My child disobeys. I get angry. I say or do something I should not. I am in *zugzwang*. I know I should repent of my anger, but I also do not want my child to think what he or she did is acceptable.

One of the hardest lessons I have had to learn as a parent is that until I humble myself and repent for my sin, I really do not have any ground to work on in dealing with my child’s disobedience. God’s Word never called us to consider how repentance might be interpreted as a condition for repentance. God simply calls us to repent.

It would appear that the Mennonite Brethren community is in *zugzwang* and that we think it is to our disadvantage to make the next move toward lesbians and gays and to repent.

So we’ve passed. And we’ve passed. And we’ve passed.

#### **Stop passing**

Our Confession of Faith, specifically Article 13: Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation, calls us to humble ourselves and repent. But we do not repent. It is hard to humble oneself. And the biggie: What if the lesbian and gay communities interpret repentance as approval?

From Genesis to Nehemiah to Matthew to Revelation, God has been at work to redeem his people.

#### **Are we willing to repent?**

Warren Wiersbe writes about the crisis facing the evangelical church: “For centuries, the church has been telling the world to admit its sins, repent and believe the gospel. Today the world is telling the church to face up to her sins, repent and start being the true church of that gospel. We Christians boast that we are not ashamed of us. For some reason, our ministry doesn’t match our message.”

What is God calling you to do?

What is he calling us to do?

Stop passing.

If we need someone to go first, let it be me. I have had thoughts, said words, felt hate, made jokes that are insensitive and acted like the sins of the lesbian and gay communities are greater than mine. In general, I have acted like I am better. That is not the person God has called me to be.

I am sorry. Please forgive me. It is my desire to accept, know and love all those created in God’s image. I realize I have hurt and offended lesbian and gay individuals by my actions and attitudes.

*After serving as the Hesston (Kan.) MB Church youth pastor for nine years, Brad Burkholder has been the HMBC lead pastor for five years. He also served for eight years as a missionary at Echo Ranch Bible Camp in Juneau, Alaska. He and his wife, Sally, have two children, Cassidy and Carson, who are both in college. ▮*

By Mark Baker

# Costly love

The story of a sinner, an insult and Jesus

Imagine receiving an invitation to a dinner party from a highly respected person. What an honor! Inclusion in this elite circle surprises you. The day comes; you approach the house with anticipation and ring the doorbell. The host opens the door, but that is all. He does not greet you nor shake your hand; he just holds the door open. So you enter.

The host does not offer to take your coat or offer a drink like the others milling around. They are invited individually to their seats at the table; you are left standing. You see there is a seat left and assume it is yours. What would you feel if this happened to you?

Jesus experiences just this sort of thing at the house of Simon the Pharisee. We read in Luke 7:36-50 that Jesus is invited to a meal at an important person's home; he is not shown the proper regard expected from a host and a woman of ill repute seeks to perform the missing acts of hospitality and honor. Let us reflect on the story's three main figures: the woman, Simon the Pharisee and Jesus.

## The woman who was forgiven

We know a few things about the woman from the biblical text. She is publicly known as a sinner (7:37, 39, 47). She apparently comes to Simon's house with the intention of anointing Jesus with ointment. She does not come prepared to wash his feet.

We can deduce other things. She probably is a prostitute who has been marginalized and shamed in her village—especially by the highly religious like the Pharisees. Jesus speaks of her sins being forgiven before this event (7:41-43, 47), implying she has already had a significant encounter with

Jesus. We can imagine that Jesus showered her with love and acceptance and that she soaked it up like a thirsty plant.

Apparently in the midst of that encounter they spoke of her sins and Jesus pronounced forgiveness. Jesus' forgiveness and acceptance so moves the woman that she desires to express her gratitude to Jesus. Hearing that Simon the Pharisee is hosting a dinner and Jesus is an invited guest, she goes to the house, prepared to honor Jesus with ointment. She arrives either before or simultaneously with Jesus (7:45).

What does she see? Simon insulting and disrespecting the person she has come to honor by not offering Jesus customary gestures of hospitality. Shocked and probably with a mix of anger and sadness, the woman takes steps to show Jesus the honor and hospitality that Simon has not offered.

Jesus explains to Simon: “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” (7:44-46).

The woman met Jesus and felt loved. In response she recognized her sin, and Jesus pronounced forgiveness. Having experienced this love and forgiveness, she responds with actions of love and gratitude to honor Jesus after Simon has dishonored him.

### Simon, the host

We do not know why Simon invited Jesus to this meal. Was it in order to insult Jesus for Simon’s own social gain in the community? Or was the invitation sincere but Simon had a change of perspective when Jesus actually arrived?

As a Pharisee, Simon not only carefully complies with the Law and the traditions of the Jews but also works to motivate others to do the same. As we observe in his actions toward both Jesus and the woman, Simon seeks to honor those who comply and shame those who do not. He threatens exclusion to pressure people to live according to the Pharisees’ definition of piety.

In that time and culture it was acceptable for people who were not invited guests to gather around the edges of the room and observe the event. Hosts desired this. More people meant more honor. So it was not unusual that an uninvited guest would enter the house.

But for a woman known as a sinner to enter Simon’s house is certainly unusual. Her presence itself will likely be cause for gossiping the next day, but it is her actions that especially catch people’s attention. She makes a scene not only by weeping and washing Jesus’ feet with her tears but in particular by loosening her hair to dry Jesus feet—an intimate act only done in the presence of a woman’s husband. Everyone present, not just Simon, is surprised that Jesus lets this sinful woman continue these scandalous actions.

Simon demonstrates an attitude of superiority and uses threats of shame and exclusion as tools for motivating behavioral conformity and religious compliance. Jesus practices the opposite—a strategy of inclusion, love and forgiveness. This is obvious in the case of the woman but also apparent in relation to Simon too.

Rather than dishonoring Simon by refusing the invitation, Jesus goes to his house. And when Simon dishonors him, Jesus does not immediately move into a competitive stance, such as exiting the house or exposing Simon’s mistreatment of him.

Jesus challenges Simon out of love for the woman but also love for Simon. Until Simon steps away from his life of exclusionary line-drawing, he will not truly be living in authentic communion with God or others in his community. The entire incident challenges the distorted honor system of the day.

### Jesus’ response

When the woman begins her surprising and then scandalous actions, Jesus has various options. If he is most concerned about his own reputation and honor, he could reject her actions—kicking her away and insulting her.

Or, as Kenneth Bailey suggests in his book, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, to save face Jesus could say something like this: “Gentlemen, I am embarrassed by all of this. Yes, on occasion I do eat with sinners, but we always keep the numbers down and we try to clean them up a bit before our meals, which are always in private. This is not at all the kind of scene with which I am comfortable, and so do not be upset. I grant that no easy acceptance of such types is possible. Standards must be maintained!”

These actions would protect Jesus’ honor but at the expense of the woman. Such insincerity from Jesus will confirm her shame and disgrace. But Jesus does not act to save his own honor. At cost to his own reputation he accepts and defends her. He counters the shame she had experienced by honoring her and giving her a new identity. With his final words he honors her publically: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” This peace, or shalom, is not just the internal serenity of a guiltless conscience, but public restoration to community and wholeness. She is free to live in harmony with others.

Before Jesus speaks up in her defense, all the eyes in the room would have been glued on the woman—shaming eyes of accusation. When Jesus begins to speak he becomes the scandal, and the eyes of accusation shift to him. He takes on the shame in her place. Because of Jesus’ surprising defense, the woman leaves feeling even more loved, more accepted and more graced than before. Jesus loves her so much he is willing to suffer shame to save her from being shamed. Like the cross to come, this is a startling display of costly love.

Do you, like the woman, feel guilt and shame for things you have done? Express that to Jesus as she did, with the confidence that Jesus will respond with forgiveness.

Have you felt dishonored and inappropriately shamed by others? Do you carry a burden of shame from an experience of exclusion and rejection in the past? I invite you to imagine Jesus embracing you with love and acceptance, honoring you, like he honors this woman, in front of those who have shamed you.

Who are people you know who are excluded and shamed by our society’s distorted concept of status and honor? How can you, like this woman, shower respect, love and honor on someone insulted and shamed by others?

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## New Year, new vision

Morris leans into new USMB vision in 2017

**D**on Morris isn't one to make New Year's resolutions.

"I very seldom keep them," he admits with a laugh.

Rather, the newly-appointed USMB national director views the start of a new year as a time to recommit himself to those things he thinks are most important, like Bible reading and prayer. Similarly, he views the start of 2017 as a time for U.S. Mennonite Brethren to commit to working together toward a new vision for the future.

For Morris, whether personally or as a national church family, it's all about reaching people with the gospel. "My heart always will be about reaching the lost," he says. "As we're moving into 2017, that's where my thoughts will go: Are we reaching people who don't know Jesus yet, and are we helping them to become deep followers of Jesus?"

The USMB Leadership Board announced Morris as the national director at the National Convention in July 2016—the same convention at which they unveiled a new national ministry strategy, outlined in a document called "The Future Story." The strategy emphasizes resourcing local churches and networking around three core commitments: church multiplication and evangelism, disciple-making and leadership development.

Morris served as interim executive director during the two-year review process that led to that unveiling. He also served as director of Mission USA, the USMB church planting ministry, since 2004. Since Mission USA began, 29 churches have started and survived, and Morris says that seeing the impact

of church planting firsthand for the past 12 years has been especially rewarding.

While he will still be involved in church planting as national director, it will be less directly. "There's a bit of grieving," Morris admits. "Yet God is reminding me: You're still involved; it's just in a different way."

It helps that both in his work with Mission USA and as interim executive director, he has made connections with people all over the country who are likewise passionate about seeing people come to salvation. The USMB vision for the future, he notes, is ultimately not about denominational survival but about kingdom work: "to see people come to salvation and become deep followers of Jesus."

He says, "We just have a lot of people who are passionate about that, and it's very exciting."

If pressed to name some resolutions or commitments as he heads into 2017 as national director, Morris puts listening at the top of the list. He notes that while the former title of executive director implies a top-down hierarchy, the new title of national director fits with a vision that emphasizes organic networking. Accordingly, he wants to sit down over coffee with as many people as possible to ask how he can serve. "I don't see this as some lofty position," Morris says. "It's a position that hopefully allows me to be a servant."

Transparency would also be on his list of commitments for 2017. Morris acknowledges that the strategic review that resulted in the Future Story document and vision—a two-year process that took place mostly behind closed doors—left many frustrated. The secrecy in particular "hasn't felt very good to a lot of people." But he wants openness to be the hallmark of his ministry as national director. "People will get honest answers from Don Morris," he says.

Morris also wants to be known for approachability, so that too goes on his list of commitments for 2017. He wants those in the USMB family to know they can approach him at any time, with any



For Don Morris, accepting the position of USMB national director wasn't simply a matter of taking a job. "I wanted it to be something God was calling me to." He says both he and his wife clearly discerned God's direction and calling.

*Christian Leader photo*

issue. If someone has a concern or complaint, he wants to hear that personally. If they have a struggle, he'd like to pray with them. In particular, he wants to hear how he can help local churches as they pursue the three core commitments: "Ah, that's what I really want to hear!" He can be reached at [don@usmb.org](mailto:don@usmb.org).

As for the USMB family, Morris lists these hopes for 2017:

**Initiate.** While delegates and attendees of the USMB National Convention in July unanimously affirmed the vision outlined in the Future Story, Morris says that nod of approval isn't enough; now it's time to put energy into turning the Future Story into the "now" story. "We can't put it off; we've got to do it and do it now," he says. "Let's do it! Let's connect; let's talk!"

**Work together.** The vision depends upon individuals and churches working together. He says the new strategy is not a new program or a series of directives coming from USMB leaders to the local churches, but "a whole new way of being a family of churches." It depends upon churches working together, encouraging each other and sharing ideas. Morris points out that local congregations are already beginning to work together in new ways: "We're hearing stories of life change because one church got an idea from another church. That's what this is all about."

**Continue to support USMB.** Morris notes that the shift to this more organic model does not negate the need for a national conference. He expects the USMB staff to not only provide vital administrative resources but also to act as a key connecting point for congregations and districts. Communications through a revamped website, *Christian Leader* magazine and social media will have "tremendous value" in sharing information and resources. "It continues to be crucial that we have a collective conference that is alive and well," he says, adding that the support of each local congregation is needed now more than ever.

**Pray.** Just as Morris often uses the start of a new year to refocus his personal prayer life, he hopes that 2017 can mark a new season of prayer for U.S. Mennonite Brethren. Prayer will be an important part of the future, as churches and individuals learn how God is working across state and district lines, in rural and urban areas. Prayer warriors

will be praying for things happening miles away. "That's the beauty of who we are as a family of churches networking together," Morris says.

By the end of 2017, Morris hopes momentum for the new USMB vision will be building in tangible and obvious ways. Churches will be enjoying the new connections they are building with other churches. New churches will be starting because several congregations banded together to initiate the project and USMB came alongside to help. Agencies and partners will be less "siloeed" and brainstorming new ways to partner.

"I hope we would be at a point where we can say, 'Yes, this is working,'" Morris says. "We're doing this together." —  
*Myra Holmes* ▀

## Three Jeremys find shalom in Fresno

Center for Community Transformation helps churches fulfill their calling

**E**xecutive Director Randy White takes his commission for the Center for Community Transformation from Jeremiah 29:7: "...seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its shalom you will find your shalom."

As a nonprofit organization connected with Fresno Pacific University and Seminary, the Center's focus is to bring shalom to Fresno and the communities that surround the city in California's Central Valley.



Jeremy, his father and his grandfather — also Jeremy—have found a home at North Fresno Church and have experienced shalom in the process.

*Photo from North Fresno Church*

But what is shalom? And what does shalom look like in a city? Three Jeremys from the Robinson Neighborhood around North Fresno Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation, know the answer from experience.

Red-headed second grader Jeremy Jr. found shalom in the form of an after-school tutoring program at North Fresno Church. Pastor of Community Ministries Loren Dubberke remembers him coming on Wednesday afternoons to soak up the love of the church's volunteer tutors. With his father in prison, Jeremy's chance to do his homework in a safe and loving environment was shalom.

When Jeremy Sr. was released from prison, in need of shalom in his own life, his son knew where he could find it. Bringing his big, tattooed father into Dubberke's office, the young Jeremy introduced him: "Pastor, this is my dad. I want him to meet everyone."

Within a week the elder Jeremy was working for Rock Pile Yard Service, a business founded in connection with North Fresno Church to employ people with barriers to employment. When he needed a checking account for the direct deposit paycheck, someone from church helped set him up with a bank. Employment and financial literacy meant shalom for a Jeremy transitioning from prison.

Within a few weeks the shalom spilled over to reach little Jeremy's grandfather, also named Jeremy. He and his son had been estranged for several years while the son was in and out of prison. But the three of them showed up together at a North Fresno "Church in the Park" event. Having seen the evidence of shalom in his son's life, the oldest Jeremy was intrigued. "My son has been changed a lot," the grandfather told Dubberke that day. "I want to find out what you're all about."

North Fresno Church's efforts to bring shalom to the lives of the three Jeremys find support in the programs offered by Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary's Center for Community Transformation (CCT). "The biblical principle of shalom is broader than just peace." White points out. "It's making things the way they ought to be."

Things in the Fresno area are far from the way they ought to be, says White. He cites a

Brookings Institution report naming Fresno as the United States city with the second highest rate of concentrated poverty.

But, White says, more important than the statistics about the poverty and needs of the community are the resources that could be activated to meet those needs: "Fresno's 500 churches are an embedded asset that can be mobilized to be a blessing to our city."

The Center is founded on the principle that it is the church's calling to bring shalom to their communities. According to Dubberke the church needs help figuring out how to fulfill that calling.

"We know how to do prayer and Bible study and worship services," he says, "but a lot of times churches don't

know how to tackle issues impacting our city—issues like homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy."

White agrees: "Most churches don't know how much of an economic force they are in their neighborhood and pastors don't see their congregation as an economic engine."

CCT's efforts to "make things the way they ought to be" began with a study that collected stories of churches becoming involved in their community by starting small businesses. Those stories became the book, *The Work of Our Hands*. Inspired by these models, CCT inaugurated a diverse array of programs.

An annual City Summit each spring trains hundreds of young adults interested in transforming neighborhoods through Christian Community Devel-



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opment, a movement dedicated to the holistic restoration of people and communities (See *ccda.org*). In workshops and plenary sessions, attendees from dozens of churches throughout California's Central Valley explore a Christian response to issues such as housing, gang ministry, racial reconciliation and law enforcement.

In another CCT initiative, a playful and creative event they've dubbed "Spark Tank," church-related nonprofit organizations and faith-based entrepreneurs compete for grant money to fund social enterprise businesses. With a background soundtrack from reality TV's "Shark Tank," participants are allowed four minutes each to pitch their ideas to a panel of judges.

In four years Spark Tank has awarded over \$50,000 in support of 31 enterprises, including the grant that funded the start of North Fresno's Rock Pile Yard Services. Other winners have included a "farm to fork" organic food café that employs people coming out of the Fresno Rescue Mission rehab program and an inner city fitness gym located in the city's highest crime zip code.

A third CCT program came at the initiative of Spanish-speaking churches located in and around Fresno. Leaders from these churches approached CCT about the need for pastoral and leadership training. CCT learned that only 5 percent of the pastors in the Spanish-speaking churches had any kind of training.

"Typically these pastors are 10 years into their pastorate," says White. "They started a church, but just went on adrenaline and passion."

A team of five pastors from Hispanic Mennonite Brethren and other local congregations worked with CCT to formulate a Spanish-language certificate program that was affordable and accessible for church leaders, many of whom are bivocational.

Since the *Certificado en Liderazgo Pastoral y Ministerio* (Certificate in Pastoral and Ministry Leadership) began in 2013, nearly a hundred area pastors and other church leaders have participated in one or more of the modules. Each module meets weekly for five weeks and covers one of the following topics: Bible training, leadership, pastoral care, Christian education, theology of the family and community transformation.

Pastor Edgar Larios of Fuente de Vida, an MB church in the rural community of Parlier, is one of three MB pastors who teach in the *Certificado* program. "Most of our people don't have any theological training," says Larios, who himself holds a Doctor of Theology degree from the Latin University of Theology. "We need training for the times we live in now."

Seven of Fuente de Vida's leaders, including a trustee, a youth leader, a member of their pastoral team and a worship team member, have taken the *Certificado* course. Larios says that this training is expanding the church's capacity for ministry.

"The light bulbs go on when leaders see how they can transform their communities," adds White.

Hispanic church leaders are finding shalom in becoming better equipped for their ministry and spreading shalom among the many Hispanic residents in low income communities in and around Fresno.

Three generations of Jeremys living in North Fresno knew what it was like to live without shalom, but a welcoming community brought them to a place of shalom. For them it meant homework help in a loving environment and a fresh start back in society.

Harnessing the resources of the church, CCT is equipping a new generation of ministry workers and faith-based entrepreneurs to multiply shalom wherever things are not "the way they ought to be." —*Kathy Heinrichs Wiest* ▀

## Summit equips leaders for local, national, global service

Second Vision Summit emphasizes what it means to follow Jesus

Jesus uses the analogy of a seed in John 12:23-26 to illustrate what it means to follow him. Unless a kernel of wheat dies, it cannot produce and multiply. Similarly, Jesus' followers must lay down their earthly ambitions to invest in eternal life.

This call to surrender was strong for many of the 73 participants at the second annual Vision Summit, hosted by the MB Mission Midwest Mobilization Team Oct. 13-16, 2016, at the Oasis Ranch and Retreat Center in Plevna, Kan. It is another example of how God continues to equip leaders for local, national and global mission—the purpose of the event.

The weekend involved speakers, workshops led by missionaries, worship music, listening prayer and small group discussions. The speakers, who came from Hillsboro and Wichita, Kan., Washington, D.C., and Abbotsford, BC, spoke about the importance of dying to self, yielding to God and counting the cost of following Jesus. Missionaries from Thailand, Germany, Panama and Central Asia shared what God has done through surrender in their lives.

"Dying to yourself is an essential part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus," says Stephen Humber, mobilization team leader. "When you're not dead [to self], you're giving a lot of time



As part of his presentation on surrender, pastor Andy Addis from Crosspoint Church, Hutchinson, Kan., gave each Summit participant a white flag. Attendees, including Tina and Mike Yutzy from Buhler (Kan.) MB Church, were asked to write on the cloth things that they needed to surrender and then Addis asked everyone to wave their flags in surrender to God. *MB Mission photo*

and energy to useless things. But when you die to that, you will experience resurrection life and have more time to do what matters. Death is this opportunity to be free from things that own us.”

Phil Thiessen, of Hillsboro, almost did not attend the summit due to a busy schedule. But he realized the summit was a quieter environment through which God could remind him to use his sales job as a mission field.

“I need to get in a place where God can just have his way,” he says. “He could every day, but it seems like so often I need something like this to ask God, ‘What do you have for me?’ I don’t want to get so busy that I lose sight of the bigger picture and how God wants to use me.”

Participants were asked to write a short summary of their takeaway from the weekend.

“God helped me to surrender my control, fears and the timeline I had given him, and now I am unhindered

from hearing clearly and obeying fully the directions God is giving me for my future.”

“God has asked me to let go of security, fears and pride and called me into a new Spirit-filled life of surrender.”

“I think God is trying to tell me not to be afraid of full surrender; do not be afraid of opening my heart to seek him and seek him fully.”

“I surrender my will, my time, my ambitions, my desires and my interpretations of what others think of me and exchange it for an identity solely in Christ.”

“I am ready for wherever God leads me next. I need to keep walking down the path God has me on and be willing to be used by him along the way.”

“We are a part of something that the Spirit is doing in the broader church,” says Larry Neufeld, MB Mission lead team mobilization, citing examples of peace and renewal around the world.

“The Lord has invited us to the ends of

the earth, and there are willing servants who are surrendered to going.”

The Midwest Mobilization Team is delighted to see momentum growing since the 2015 summit. The number of participants doubled from 2015 and expanded in age and proximity. It is another step toward MB Mission’s vision for the 2020 Movement: to help the church multiply and send out disciples to the least reached locally, nationally and globally.

“It’s all for the sake of the nations,” says Danae Schmidt of the mobilization team. “We don’t die and live just for ourselves. It’s so that we can call others to it also.”

Anyone interested in receiving ongoing updates on the 2020 Movement can “like” the MB Mission Midwest U.S. Facebook page or visit <http://www.mb-mission.org/offices/midwest-us/>. —

*Jenae Suderman* ▀

## Visits to missionaries boost connections

It’s a win-win when church sends visitors to MB Mission workers in Berlin

The Henderson (Neb.) MB Church (HMBC) congregation prays regularly during Sunday morning worship services for the missionaries and Mission USA church plant couple they support. But prayers for two of these four households are enriched thanks to visits from HMBC representatives—visits encouraged by Pastor Luke Haidle.

“Pastor Luke is a big advocate of church members visiting missionaries and seeing firsthand what God is up to,” says Karla Block who has visited two of the families HMBC supports.

Most recently, Block visited Kenton and Kedron Miller and their children, MB Mission workers in Germany for almost 10 years who are currently living in North America. HMBC “adopted” the Millers in 2013, and in 2015 the congregation sponsored their first visitor: Heidi Schmidt, who has served with MB Mission in Peru.

The next summer, the congregation covered the plane fare for Block and Becca Page to visit the Millers. In November HMBC hosted the Millers as their Harvest Mission Festival speakers.

These visits have been a win-win for the missionaries and the congregation.

“It has been super encouraging to be partnering with Henderson MB

Church in the work going on in Berlin,” says Kenton Miller in an email. “It was a blessing to have Heidi, Becca and Karla come out for visits during our last term.”

Over the past two years, the congregation has been able to pray more specifically for the Millers thanks to these visits.

“The three of us came back with stories and experiences that help the congregation to have better insights into how we can best support missionaries,” says Page in an email interview. “Missionary visits have served as encouragement and motivation for our church to be more mission-minded.”

Schmidt agrees: “Our trips to visit the Millers and reporting back to the church members have helped [members] get a better understanding of what kinds of things the Millers are doing as well as how to better be in prayer for them.”

For Page, doing life with the Millers for 10 days created a sense of accountability. “I would say that the three of us have a responsibility to keep our congregation informed about the Millers and to grow the friendship,” she says.

Trips between Henderson and Berlin have also impacted HMBC’s children. Two years ago the kids filled a suitcase with kid-friendly supplies that Schmidt delivered to the Miller’s two young children.

“We talk about our missionaries and pray for them each Wednesday,” says Block, who has been the Wednesday night children’s program director. “Kids relate well with kids of similar ages. It’s fun to learn about different cultures this way.”

Block often encouraged the children to someday visit HBMC’s missionaries. “Never thought I was preaching to myself,” Block says.

Schmidt anticipates that her congregation’s interest in visiting missionaries will continue. “I believe that these visits are creating a ripple effect in our church family and more people will want to go and see for themselves what is happening in Berlin,” she says.

“I have had the opportunity to visit and participate in ministry with the Quirings in Utah (USMB church planters Jason and Nicole Quiring) and now the Millers in Berlin,” says Block. “Being on location, meeting friends and acquaintances of our missionaries and sharing daily life all make my commitment stronger. It feels more like a partnership.”

—Connie Faber

*Editor’s note: The Millers have chosen to take a restricted status online to their work so this article will not be posted at CL Online. We ask that CL readers also refrain from posting anything about the Miller’s ministry. ■*



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C2C network

mbmission

# C2C helps churches plant churches

Canadian network involved in USMB church plants

**W**hose job is it to plant churches? The seminary? No. The denomination? No. The two minimalist millennial dudes meeting in their tiny house watching old Rob Bell videos? Uh, nope, I think. Church planting networks? Nope.

The job of planting churches belongs to other churches. The Book of Acts records the church sending missionaries to other places to proclaim the gospel and gather believers. But with so much attention required in the local church, multiplication doesn't seem feasible. That's where a church-planting network becomes valuable to the mission of the local church.

Home Depot has an ad campaign: "You can do it. We can help." That's the strategy of C2C Network: The local church can plant churches. C2C can help. Church leaders have access to an able friend who devotes 100 percent of its time, attention, money and energy to church planting. Like a brother with a pickup and a garage full of tools, C2C is eager to come alongside the local church to assess, coach, train and support leaders.

C2C Network exists to make disciples through equipping the local church to multiply and plant gospel-centered, Spirit-led and mission-focused churches. C2C gets its name from Psalm 72:8: "May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth!" (ESV). C2C desires that God will have dominion in our hearts, in our homes, in our churches and in our cities and nation. We believe the multiplication of gospel-centered churches is the key to that calling.

C2C Network, originating from the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC), recently launched in the United States. As we have been doing in Canada, C2C Network will come alongside U.S. denomi-

nations and local churches to train leaders. C2C will serve as an additional resource for USMB and MB district church planting.

C2C US is working closely with USMB church planters Mario and Stephanie Trujillo in Pueblo, Colo. C2C is coaching Mario to lead a church plant downtown in a city with less than 8 percent who attend an evangelical church.

"Without C2C coaching and mentoring me and consulting with our leaders, we would not be able to establish this ministry hub as the only church in the City Center," says Mario.

"It is so reassuring to know we aren't alone in this calling," adds Stephanie.

The Southern District Conference of MB Churches and Mission USA are also sponsors of this project.

C2C Network offers Incubator, an intense two-year, cohort-based learning community for church planters. The planters engage with one another in an adult learning format to develop the 10 dimensions necessary for an effective church planter. Through 16 modules, this nonsectarian curriculum includes gospel-centrality, self-leadership, mission engagement, preaching and others. The first Incubator for the U.S. is scheduled for Nashville beginning this month.

C2C Network is praying for multiplying leaders to emerge from within churches. Prayer is our main recruiting method. We pray at 10:02 every day that the Lord will send workers into his harvest (Luke 10:2). C2C is also praying that existing churches will multiply their mission locally, nationally and globally.

C2C and MB Mission are sponsoring a Multiply Conference in Fresno Calif., Feb. 22-23, 2017 to equip the local church to multiply and plant gospel-centered churches from sea to sea. ■



Scott Thomas is the director of C2C U.S. He and his wife, Jeannie, live in Nashville, Tenn. Thomas has served over 35 years as a lead church planter and as a board member on three international church planting networks. Thomas is the co-author of *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God*, published by Zondervan in 2012 as well as three other books to help pastors develop leaders within the local church.

precious in his sight

## Looking for a hand

Are we blessing the children in our congregation?

I have the honor and privilege of working with children and their families on a daily basis. Anyone who works with this age group of children knows how wonderful (and difficult) it can be to experience and understand the world through a young person's mind. In the church we often talk about how to take care of our entire congregation yet come up lacking in ways to care for our youngest community members.

Which is what I hope we can unpack together in 2017: How do we care for our children in holistic and practical ways? Why do kids matter?

As I read through Scripture and pray and discern what Jesus' life means for my own, I am completely taken with this one truth: Jesus places his hands on kids' heads.

"One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. But Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.' And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left" (Matt. 19:13-15 NLT).

Most scholars agree it was a Jewish custom for a parent to take their young ones to the Temple to be blessed by a person of spiritual significance. This person blesses the child by placing their hand on the little head and reciting Scripture or a prayer or whatever

words they think sound best. Jesus also places his hands on kids' heads.

As described in Matthew 19, the parents who bring their children to Jesus to be blessed get a talking to from his followers. The disciples tell the adults to leave. This might be because kids are not always clean and can be loud and don't understand theology and are sometimes super annoying. Or because they think Jesus doesn't have time for crying babies in all the highly spiritual work that has to be done. But Jesus takes those kids and puts his hand on their heads.

Jesus blesses those children more than the religious leaders when he touches their heads.

His blessing is more than recited words. It is an act of undiluted love. Because Jesus loves kids.

This year I hope to instill the same desire to bless in adults, all of us whom are trying to be more like Jesus but sometimes end up looking like his disciples. I hope we cannot be afraid of letting our youngest lead and will instead walk alongside them. I hope we can really look for the talents in the sons and daughters growing up around us and remind them of what they have. I hope we can encourage the parents who are holding their children out for a blessing.

I hope we can do good things for the kids who are looking for a hand—both literally and figuratively. Jesus loves kids. So should we. ■



Caitlin Friesen is a native of Fresno, Calif., and graduate of Fresno Pacific University. She has a passion for Jesus and a heart for kids, both of which have been put to use as a backpacking guide, outdoor educator and camp counselor. She recently married her favorite person in the world, Ben Friesen from Guthrie, Okla. She serves as the associate pastor of children and family ministries at North Fresno Church.

# Because he lives

Worrying during the uncertain days of parenthood

**M**y wife, Hanna, and I are expecting our first baby—a girl—this month. It’s thrilling and terrifying all at the same time, and I find myself frequently emotional, swinging between goofy grins and a sudden welling of tears without notice.

I also worry a lot.

I worry that I’m not equipped to be a good dad. I worry that we won’t have the necessary resources. I worry about her health and future. And I worry about bringing her into this world. There is so much violence and hate and suffering on this planet that I get caught up in dwelling over how this world will hurt her, or worse, push her heart away from Jesus.

I worry mostly over things that I feel inadequate to control.

A few weeks ago I was asked to sing at a memorial service. The family requested Bill Gaither’s hymn, “Because He Lives.” I’ve always liked this song, but the second verse resonated for me in a way it hadn’t before: “How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride and joy he brings. But greater still the calm assurance: This child can face uncertain days because he lives!”

The first phrase—“How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride and joy he brings”—perfectly matches my thrilled anticipation. (Cue sudden tear welling.) But the second half of the verse—“This child can face uncertain days because he lives”—turned my worry on its head, bringing to mind a pivotal childhood memory.

I was four or five, and my family was attending a church picnic. It was summer, the thick trees around the small

lake were bright green and a little trail outlined the shores.

Mom and I were walking along that path alone, talking about how fun it would be if we found a turtle. She suggested we pray and ask Jesus to show us one. It was a simple prayer; something like, “Dear Jesus, please help us find a turtle. Amen.”

We started to walk again, but stopped short. Just a few feet in front of us, in the middle of the trail, was a red-eared slider. Mom said, “Thank you, Jesus.”

That moment will live in my memory for the rest of my life because, simple as it was, it revealed to me something very profound in a very tangible way: God is always present and always caring.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is from Matthew 6, where Jesus describes how fields of flowers are dressed better than Solomon in all his splendor, and how birds that do not sow or reap are always fed. “Are you not more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matt. 6:26b-27)

If he can choose to reveal himself in such a seemingly mundane way, like a turtle on a trail, how much more can we rely on him in times of trouble?

So I’m trying to not worry so much. Just like our parents did for us, it’s up to Hanna and me to show our child how to seek the Father in everyday life, to ask for his help, and to celebrate when he intercedes.

My baby girl can face uncertain days because he lives. ▀



David Vogel and his wife, Hanna, live in Hillsboro, Kan., where he operates a graphic design business and is the media and interim worship director at Hillsboro MB Church.

## Doing mission together

Planting, leadership training, youth part of SDC vision

**T**he recent adoption of what has been called The Future Story by the U.S. Conference delegates at our national convention in Denver, Colo., this summer has sparked interest and enthusiasm for the vision of our national conference to “help empower each local MB church to reach its full, God-given ministry potential within the framework of their evangelical and Anabaptist distinctives.”

We also affirmed three core commitments: church multiplication and evangelism, discipleship and leadership development. Some of the ways that the Southern District Conference (SDC) has been working to achieve these three strategic commitments are as follows.

### **Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.**

This recent church plant on the west side of Denver is a partnership between the U.S. Conference, SDC and Mountain View Community Church in Fresno, Calif. Lighthouse Church relaunched in September 2016 and is living to be a blessing to their community.

### **Avenue Church, Aurora, Colo.**

Avenue Church is another SDC church plant. Led by Pastor David Yirdaw, Avenue Church will launch public services in February 2017. There is already a group of 60 to 70 young adults who are excited about creating a multicultural community of faith, birthed out of Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Denver.

### **City Church, Pueblo Colo.**

This most recent church plant has a vision for changing the community of Pueblo from the businesses to the streets. Through a loan guarantee from the SDC Stewardship Commission, City Church was able to purchase a building to use as a ministry center in the heart of Pueblo’s renovated down-

town district. Recently, Valleyview Bible Church in Cimarron, Kan., partnered with City Church to help provide a limited part-time salary for their new pastoral intern, Mario Trujillo, who has been serving without compensation while working full time at Cracker Barrel in Pueblo.

### **2020 Movement Vision Summit**

The MB Mission mobilization team that serves the SDC is partnering with churches and leaders to do leadership development through the 2020 Movement’s Vision Summits, a series of gatherings which focus on helping college age and older men and women discern what God is calling them to next. The Vision Summit is a weekend conference designed to build upon the dreams, spiritual gifts and passions God has already placed in his people and equip them for the mission he has for them, whether locally, nationally and/or globally.

### **Southern District Youth Conference and Camps**

Four hundred-plus youth from SDC churches gather annually in various locations throughout the district for inspiration, encouragement and challenge. This is the largest annual gathering of Mennonite Brethren in the U.S. and is a primary place of helping youth groups create space for life change. Each summer, Southern District Youth and Kids Camps are considered top-notch events and are well attended.

These are only a few examples of how we have been networking to help churches reach their full potential. What is it that your church dreams to do? Check with your district minister to see how you can network with other churches to make that dream come true! ■



Tim Sullivan has served as the Southern District Conference district minister since 2004. He is married to Donna, who is the U.S. Conference administrative secretary and bookkeeper. They live in Wichita, Kan., and have three married children and seven grandchildren. Sullivan enjoys hunting, fishing, riding bicycle and showing his grandchildren the wonders of God’s creation.

## milestones

### Baptism/Membership

Gord and Teri Nonhoff, Dave and Carolyn Fakkema, Mark and Rachel Kreutzkamp and Jary Gaskill were baptized Nov. 20 and received as members of **Birch Bay Bible Community Church, Blaine, Wash.** Jon and Becky Landis, Adrian and Ali Soto and Gerri Gaskill were also received as members.

Martin and Mandy DeWitt were received Oct. 30 as members of **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**

Joshua and Brook Caswell, Joshua and Emily Knop, Colin and Elizabeth Lindamood and Colby and Jennifer Lindamood were received Nov. 6 as members of **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**

Wade Ratzlaff, Joshua Reimer, Daniel Voth, Allen Weber and Cory Weber were baptized Oct. 9 at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** and received as members. Isaac and Christina Engholm were also received as members.

Brent and Cindy Wichert were received as members of **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** Oct. 30.

Mike and Laura Graves, Donnie and Linda Mast and Mason Barger were received Oct. 9 as members of **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

### Workers

Brian Isaak is serving as a youth ministry intern at **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church.**

Tim Johnson is now the lead pastor at **Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash.**

### Deaths

**Bell, Dawnette Martens**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Aug. 14, 1956—Sept. 22, 2016. Parents: Harry and Viola Martens. Spouse: Steve Bell. Children: Aaron, Grant.

**Hiebert, Allen Gene**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Oct. 17, 1941—Nov. 14, 2016. Parents: Albert H. and Helen Ensz Hiebert. Spouse: Lois Frantz. Children: Mark, Julie; five grandchildren.

**Karber, Edna**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, March 7, 1926—Aug. 13, 2016. Parents: Frank and Anna Hiebert. Spouse: Edwin "Eddie" Karber, deceased. Children: Royce, Susan Janzen, Barbara Ewbank; 12 grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren.

**Klassen, Beverly I.**, Arlington, Va., former member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Dec. 28, 1934—Aug. 4, 2015. Parents: C.K. and Lizzie Isaak. Spouse: Robert L. Klassen. Children: Gregory, DeeAnn; four grandchildren.

**Peters, Linda Ann**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, April 26, 1954—Sept. 29, 2016. Parents: Harvey and Annie Schellenberg.

Spouse: Ron Peters. Children: Scott, Laura Pauls, Julie Just; eight grandchildren.

**Ratzlaff, Larry**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 27, 1945—Aug. 3, 2016. Parents: Edwin and Esther (Jost) Ratzlaff. Spouse, Judy. Children: Ryan, Courtney.

**Rhodes, Ellis Martin**, Hillsboro, Kan., of Hillsboro MB Church, July 18, 1935—Sept. 27, 2016. Parents: George W. and Ruth (Boydston) Rhodes. Spouse: Frances "Fran" McKinzie. Children: Sherrie Lovato, Donna Fadenrecht, Janet Jones; eight grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren.

**Siemens, Marie A.**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, May 29, 1930—Nov. 1, 2016. Parents: John L. and Marie D. (Schroeder) Strauss. Spouse: Floyd Siemens. Children: Cynthia Koehn, Mark, Tom, Christine McFerren; eight grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

**Stagell, Harold Joseph**, Weatherford, Okla., of Corn (Okla.) MB Church, March 30, 1925—Aug. 21, 2016. Parents: John and Alice (Schantz) Stagell. Spouse: Ella E. Miller, deceased. Children: Darla Zook, Ranae Almos, Reonna Gossen; four grandchildren.

**Suderman, John E.**, Fairview, Okla., former member of Fairview MB Church, Aug. 22, 1934—Oct. 11, 2016. Parents: John and Annie Suderman. Spouse: Carolyn Jo Butler. Children: Chad, Heidi; two granddaughters.

## Katie Funk Wiebe dies

Writer Katie Funk Wiebe died Oct. 23, 2016, in Wichita, Kan., at the age of 92. In addition to being an author, biographer, editor, columnist and essayist, Wiebe was a speaker, preacher, pioneer, prophet, provocateur, feminist, teacher, mentor and historian. In 2000 *The Mennonite*, the publication of Mennonite Church USA, named her among the top 20 Mennonites with "the most powerful influence on life and belief of the...Mennonite Church in the 20th century."

Wiebe wrote more than 2,000 articles, columns and book reviews, wrote or edited more than two dozen books and was a columnist for *Christian Leader* for 30 years. She taught English at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan., from 1966-1990.

Wiebe was born Sept. 15, 1924, in Laird, Saskatchewan. She married Walter Wiebe Aug. 21, 1947; he predeceased her in 1962. She is survived by daughters Joanna Wiebe and husband Tim Baer,

and Susan Wiebe; son James Wiebe and wife Kathy; seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. At the time of her passing, Wiebe was a member of First MB Church, Wichita, Kan. In her later years Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, Wichita, was her church home.

A new edition of Wiebe's popular *How to Write Your Personal or Family History* will be released Feb. 7 by Skyhorse Publishing. This is a major revision designed to appeal to a broader audience, from Millennials to Boomers and beyond. The book is available on Amazon.com and through local retailers.



## reaching in

### Discipleship

Families at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, gathered to celebrate the beginning of Advent Nov. 27. "Church Family Advent Night" included snacks and games.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, opened the church for communion and prayer on Election Day, Nov. 8.

**College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.**, hosted an election forum Oct. 23, with discussion centering on ballot issues, not political candidates. CCCMB has been hosting elections forums since 1982.

### Fellowship

**Vinewood Community Church, Lodi, Calif.**, showed the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* and served popcorn Dec. 12.

Elders at **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, served a Christmas dinner to senior adults Dec. 12.

Attendees of **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, many of whom live in the same neighborhood, decorated their houses for Christmas together Nov. 26.

Senior adults from **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gather every Thursday evening to play board games.

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** opens their gym every Friday evening for family-friendly games and sports. The evenings include both free time and structured activities.

An Oct. 15 event for men from **First MB church, Wichita, Kan.**, included a morning of paintball followed by a BBQ lunch. An Oct. 20 event for senior

adults featured a police K-9 unit presentation and demonstration.

Women from **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** had a "pumpkin party" Oct. 9, with pumpkin foods and fall activities. Meanwhile, men had an "open range day," with two rifle ranges, a small caliber range and clay shooting.

Women exchanged silly socks at an event Dec. 3 at **Copper Hills Church, Phoenix, Ariz.**

Women from **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** made Pinterest-inspired crafts for "Pinterest Interest Night" Oct. 10.

"Sundae Sunday" Nov. 27 at **North Park Community Church, Eugene, Ore.**, celebrated children's fall birthdays.

Families from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, packed shoeboxes Nov. 9 for Operation Christmas Child. A supper of chili and cinnamon rolls started the evening.

As a service project that families could be involved with, attendees of **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, went caroling in the community Dec. 16. The Christian Education Committee provided a soup supper before the caroling and after singing the groups reconvened for snacks and fellowship.

Attendees of **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, were invited to share their talents for a variety-show style Christmas celebration Dec. 11.

Women from **Birch Bay Bible Community Church, Blaine, Wash.**, celebrated the holiday with a progressive dinner Dec. 3.

"Jingle Jam" Dec. 7 at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, included train rides, a giant human-sized hamster ball, photos with Santa, an Olaf meet and greet and more.

Children age two through sixth grade were invited to a "Happy Birthday Jesus" party Dec. 3 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

In lieu of worship Jan. 1, **Lighthouse Church, Golden, Colo.**, hosted a chili cook-off designed to include friends and neighbors.

"Merry Christmas Bakersfield" was a family-oriented event Dec. 16 hosted by **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, that included hay rides, fire pits, s'mores, a cocoa bar, photo booths and more.

### Worship

The Nov. 20 service at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, included music from a special thanksgiving orchestra.

Missionaries from Rwanda were guest speakers for Harvest Mission Sunday Oct. 30 at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.** A noon fellowship meal followed the service.

Gavin Linderman, church plant pastor at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, was the guest speaker for the harvest mission Sunday Oct. 30 at Bethel MB Church, Yale, SD.

Children from **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, presented the program "The Christmas Store Window" Dec. 11 followed by a birthday party for Jesus.

Children presented the musical "The Mystery of the Manger" Dec. 18 at **Birch Bay Bible Community Church, Blaine, Wash.**

The Fresno Pacific University bell choir played Christmas carols during worship Dec. 4 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.**

Each week during Advent, attendees of **Trailhead Church, Littleton, Colo.**, picked up candy canes with an attached challenge to reach out to friends and neighbors during the week.

Dec. 18 was the children's Christmas program at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, followed by cookies and hot chocolate.

## Memorial Road MB Church becomes Cross Timbers Church

**M**emorial Road MB Church, Edmond, Okla., has changed their name to Cross Timbers Church in an effort to create a more welcoming identity in their community. The congregation marked the new name with an internal celebration Sept. 4 and a city-wide launch under the new identity Sept. 25.

As the congregation focused increasingly on reaching their community, they kept bumping into the name as an obstacle. Mennonite Brethren aren't well known in the Edmond area, and Pastor Jeremy Jordan says that people often had negative connotations with the church's name, associating it with the Mormon faith or Amish communities.

After a conversation-filled process, a congregational vote in spring 2016 affirmed the new name. The church remains solidly Mennonite Brethren in theology and practice, Jordan says. "Being MB isn't about a name; it's about a way of life." That way of life, he says, includes things like reaching those in the community who don't know Jesus.

The church announced the change to their community with flyers to about 6,000 homes within two to three miles of the church announcing the new name, directing people to the new website and inviting them to the launch service.

**College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.**, held a service of mourning Dec. 18 for those grieving or facing difficulty during the holiday season.

A Dec. 18 "Christmas Bash" at **Mountain View Community Church Sunnyside, Fresno, Calif.**, offered a pancake breakfast and photos with Santa before and after services. Children performed in both services.

## reaching out

### Locally

Volunteers from **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, "adopted" lower-income families from a local elementary school by fulfilling Christmas wish lists.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a Christmas store Dec. 17. Church attendees donated gift items and staffed the store, and lower-income families from the area purchased gifts for their children at greatly reduced prices.

At The **Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, "out bags" are a regular way for attendees to donate needed items for local ministries, such as nonperishable foods, hygiene items or cleaning supplies. Lists of current needs are distributed through the church's app, attendees fill bags as they go about their regular shopping routine and bags are collected on Sunday mornings.

The youth ministry of **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, meets weekly over the lunch hour at the local high school. This fall, over 200 students attended a special event at the school intended to introduce Neighborhood and share the gospel on campus; 20 students stood to indicate a desire to learn more.

As part of Advent this year, **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, asked attendees to bless someone locally who does not attend the church. Participants wrote first names or initials on ornaments and hung them on a "Giving Tree," then prayed for that person and gave that person gifts and encouragement throughout the season.

**Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD**, hosted "Christmas Across America" in cooperation with Child Evangelism Fellowship. Children who attended the Dec. 9 event heard the story of the birth of Christ and received a DVD of Jesus, *A Story for Children*, produced by the Jesus Film Project.

A new ministry at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, called "Food for the Badge," takes food to the local police department to let officers know they are appreciated.

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** has adopted a local school and spent the day Oct. 22 helping with service projects on campus.

**Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** sponsored a grocery shower of canned and nonperishable foods for students of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary in November.

**Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, partnered with other area churches to provide Thanksgiving meals to those in need Nov. 22. Because the church's contribution to the meal was mashed potatoes, they called their effort "Monster Mash."

**Lighthouse Community Church, Wichita, Kan.**, and First MB Church, Wichita, delivered Thanksgiving meals to Lighthouse community members Nov. 20. Their goal was 350 meals.

**Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, presented a drive-through nativity, called "Journey to Bethlehem," Dec. 14-17. The tour included complimentary hot chocolate and s'mores.

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, will host a blood drive Jan. 15.

Attendees of **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, went caroling at local residential care homes following the morning service Dec. 11.

Volunteers from **North Park Community Church, Eugene, Ore.**, organized volunteers from the community to pack breakfast and lunch bags for lower-income children from a local elementary

school. The Dec. 13 effort, called "Winter Feed Hope," aims to feed at-risk children over the winter school break.

Volunteers from **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, helped staff a Christmas tree lot that supported a local organization that works to reduce homelessness.

### Globally

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** sent a team of three people to Lisbon, Portugal Oct. 4-12 to pray with and for MB missionaries there.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, sent a team of 26 people to serve at the Operation Christmas Child processing center in Dallas, Texas. The team helped process approximately 7,000 shoeboxes.

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## CLEARINGHOUSE

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### Local Church Job Openings

**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](http://www.kingwoodbible.net). Contact via email [kingwoodpastor@qwestoffice.net](mailto:kingwoodpastor@qwestoffice.net) or by letter to Pastor Search, Kingwood Bible Church, 1125 Elm St. NW, Salem, OR 97304

**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 [pastoralsearchtaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:pastoralsearchtaskforce@gmail.com).

### Agency Job Openings

**Faculty:** Fresno Pacific University invites applications for the Director of the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies & Faculty in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. This position is a full-time, 11-month faculty appointment in the School of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences.

**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](mailto:jwiebe@mbfoundation.com))

## Traveling a new path forward

The future is now, the story is unfolding

I am in my sixth month as the USMB national director and many ideas came to mind as I thought about what to cover in the first edition of this column. As a result, this essay will cover an assortment of topics and tidbits.

One of the central things I want to express as your national director is that I will strive to be as forthcoming and honest as possible when speaking with you about what's happening in the U.S. Conference. One motivation for saying this now is that much of the process of the two-year development of the new USMB Future Story was kept secret and hidden from our Mennonite Brethren family.

Although there were reasons for this concealment, being ultra-secretive with the process did not sit well with many. Over the past several months, significant frustration has been expressed to me about this selected course of action: that most people didn't get an opportunity to weigh in as things developed or to even read the proposal of the Future Story prior to the convention in July. So I want you to know that as much as I possibly can, without breaking confidences, I will be open and straightforward with you.

I hope we are all beginning to understand the new focus of USMB. This new mission forward is one that encompasses three core commitments: intentional disciple-making, leadership development and church multiplication/evangelism. Some people have indicated that they feel like these are things we were already doing and are really nothing new. That may well be the case, yet I'm grateful that we have agreed that these ministry ideals are what we want to zone in on for the foreseeable future. I think these are the right things. And they are things that USMB can definitely help us accom-

plish together. By the way, the idea of doing things together is so important for who we are as an MB family. We have even developed a new hashtag to use for this ideal—#TogetherMB—for those of you who know what hashtags are.

The Future Story will not be called the Future Story much longer. It needs a new title, one that recognizes the reality that the story is "now." Be watching for a new name for the vision and mission of USMB. This new path forward is beginning to unfold, albeit slowly:

- Networks among churches and leaders are beginning to form.
- Topics/ideas for resourcing our churches are being provided.
- A new, powerful USMB website is under construction.
- Church planting initiatives are being honed and refined.
- A new National Strategy Team (NST) has been formed.

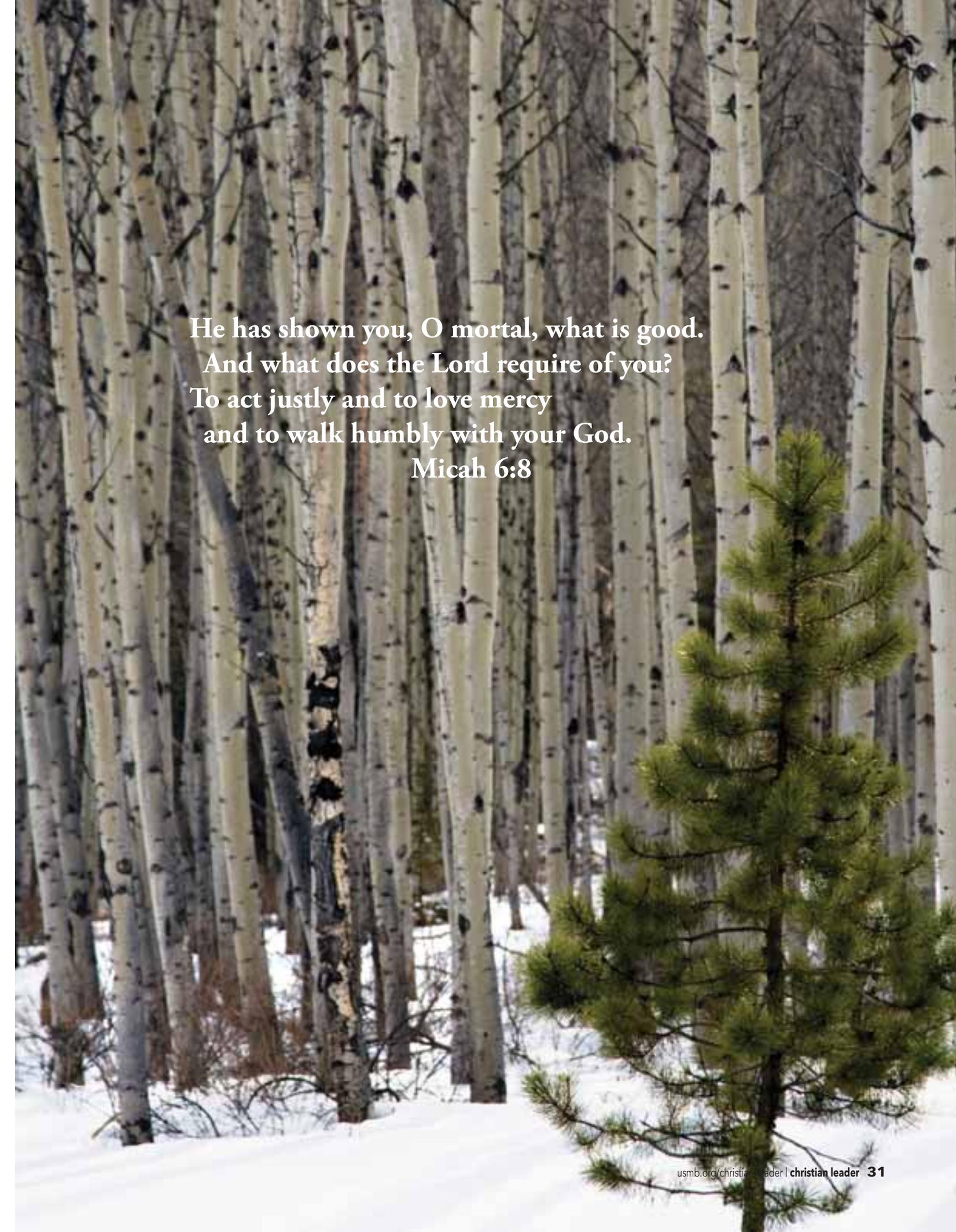
I've spent a lot of time just sitting and listening over coffee with our Mennonite Brethren pastors and leaders as they share what's important to them and how USMB can serve them. I want USMB staff to listen and respond.

Listening and responding will be a key element of USMB moving forward: Listening to the Holy Spirit and responding. Listening to our pastors and churches and responding. Listening to one another and responding. Listening to the need and responding.

I have an ongoing prayer: that God will provide his wisdom, that we will collectively pursue the things of God and that together we will make a significant impact for the kingdom, maximizing our God-given ministry potential in each and every context God places us in. ▀



Don Morris began serving as the USMB national director Aug. 1, 2016. Prior to accepting this new position, Morris served as the USMB interim executive director for two years and as the director of Mission USA since 2004. He and his wife, Jana, live in Edmond, Okla., where they attend Cross Timbers Church.

A photograph of a winter forest. The background is filled with numerous thin, vertical tree trunks with white bark and dark, irregular spots. The ground is covered in a layer of snow. In the lower right foreground, there is a single, larger green pine tree with dense, dark green needles.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.  
Micah 6:8

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