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The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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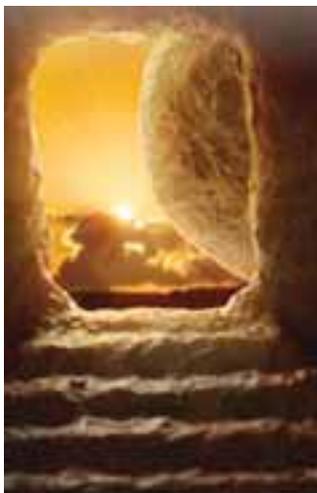
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Spiritual spring cleaning

Lent is the time to sweep away fear

I am currently hunting through our house, searching through closets, drawers, cupboards and storage areas for things that we don't need or use. A conveniently located spare bedroom has become the staging ground for a growing pile of stuff that will eventually be delivered to our local Et Cetera Shop, a community thrift store that benefits Mennonite Central Committee.

The process of cleaning and organizing brings me joy, which is likely why I resonated with a recent suggestion that Lent is a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking a spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things that hinder our relationship with Jesus and our lives as his disciples.

Lent can seem so "heavy," especially when you compare it to the anticipation and excitement of preparing for Christmas. Lent is typically a season of repentance, fasting, prayer and good deeds, and we focus on these things in preparation for the most important day of the entire year. In his article, "Of first importance," Jim Holm reminds us that Easter is more essential than even Christmas (page 10). Easter makes our Christian faith possible and gives ultimate meaning to our lives, he says.

What a glorious truth to celebrate. And what better way to express my commitment to following Jesus than to delve into the closets of my soul, ridding myself of the stuff cluttering the shelves, hiding in the corners and blocking me from seeing what matters most. One of the things that frequently creeps into our lives and needs to be repeatedly cleared away is fear. Fear of cancer or some other life-changing health issue. Fear of job loss or of not being able to pay the bills. Fear of being robbed or assaulted. Fear of another terrorist attack or school shooting. Fear of immigrants and refugees.

"There is no fear in love," says 1 John 4:18. "But perfect love drives out fear." Jesus' death and resurrection is the ultimate example of perfect love. Fear is swept away because of God's great love. Being a follower of Jesus is serious business, but it is also joyful business. God is at work in our world, and he is counting on you and me to give ourselves wholeheartedly to bringing his kingdom to our broken and fearful world (1 Cor. 15:58). During this season of preparation for Resurrection Sunday, let's look closely for those places where God is moving and stirring in our families, neighborhoods and workplaces. Let's join him there, overcoming any fears that could hinder the hope, peace, love and joy that God offers us and those around us. ■



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Church planting agreement reached

The USMB Leadership Board has announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USMB, MB Mission and C2C Network to serve USMB church planting in the United States. The MOU is intended to clarify how various entities will engage together for effective and cohesive Mennonite Brethren church planting in the U.S.

MB leaders met Jan. 5-6 in Phoenix, Ariz. Those present represented MB Mission, USMB and C2C and included several pastors who have a strong interest in providing leadership for USMB church planting moving forward.

The C2C Leadership Team, which includes Don Morris, USMB national director, will provide vision for C2C as the network begins working in the U.S. under the organizational structure of MB Mission. District church planting boards and committees will provide supervision of all MB church plant projects within their district. Scott Thomas, C2C U.S. national director, and Gord Fleming, C2C national director, will work closely with the USMB districts and church planters.

“This is a great opportunity to enhance our ability to further our main core commitments of church planting, developing leaders and disciple-making,” says Marv Schellenberg, USMB Leadership Board chair. —USMB

MBF implements historic rate change

For the first time in the 26-year history of MB Foundation (MBF), the decision has been made to lower variable loan rates and raise certificate rates. MBF is the stewardship ministry of U.S. Mennonite Brethren.

“This decision had nothing to do with the economy and everything to

do with empowering the local church to reach its full ministry potential,” says Jon Wiebe, president and CEO of MBF.

Forty-four Mennonite Brethren churches have a loan with MBF and 54 have certificates. This decision was made by the MBF Board of Directors Nov. 15 and took effect Dec. 1.

“We believe putting this money back into the hands of the local church is one way to empower the local church,” says Wiebe. “Of course, this rate change benefits more than just the churches. All told, approximately 1,500 accounts will benefit from this historic rate decision.”

Investments with MB Foundation provide resources for the Loan Program to finance ministry projects. At the same time, investors earn a rate of return. The rate change will benefit many churches, individuals and charities. —MBF

FPU names Joseph Jones as president



Joseph Jones has been chosen as the next president of Fresno Pacific University (FPU), the Mennonite Brethren school headquartered in Fresno, Calif.

Jones has served as chief administrative academic officer, dean and full-time faculty member in Christian colleges and universities in the United States and Pakistan. He will begin work in July 2017, succeeding Richard Kriegbaum, who started his

second term as president in September 2014 after serving from 1985-1997.

“Dr. Jones has a proven record as an educator, leader and administrator with a number of outstanding Christian colleges and universities,” says Donald Griffith, chair of the FPU Board of Trustees. “He brings with him a very clear vision of Christian higher education and a history of being an advocate for biblical justice, racial reconciliation, urban leadership training and intercultural learning.” —FPU

Historical Commission awards grants

Stephanie Chase, Abe J. Dueck, Zacharie Leclair and Conrad Stoesz are the 2016 recipients of the MB Historical Commission’s (MBHC) Mennonite Brethren studies project grants. Each award comes with a grant of \$2,500. The selection committee chose the four from a strong field of applicants, all working on projects of historical and theological interest to Mennonite Brethren around the world.

The Commission also awarded the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan a \$2,000 archival development grant in support of its application to help pay for needed archival supplies. This is the first year that archival development grants have been offered.

In addition, 25 books of historical interest to Mennonite Brethren—books published by MBHC and Kindred Productions—have been moved to a Creative Commons license and converted to online readable e-books. The number of books in the online library, accessible through the MBHC website, now totals 58.

The MB studies project grants, archival development grants and digital historical library are made possible with support from U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches. —MBHC

Mission Drift Forum encourages USMB ministries

Representatives from nine Mennonite Brethren ministries gathered Dec. 13, 2016, in Denver, Colo., for Mission Drift Forum. MB Foundation (MBF) called and hosted the forum and invited five national ministries—Fresno Pacific University, MB Foundation, MB Mission, Tabor College and the U.S. Conference (USMB)—along with the five USMB district conferences to send at least three leaders each for the daylong event. MBF covered the



expense of food and lodging for attendees. All but the LAMB District were represented, with a total of 26 people attending.

The idea for the forum grew out of the MBF Board of Directors' review of the book, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities and Churches*. The board encouraged the staff to bring the Mission Drift topic to denominational leaders and agencies. According to the authors, mission-true organizations know why they exist and protect their core at all costs. They remain faithful to what they believe God has entrusted them to do. The purpose of the forum was to encourage Mennonite Brethren agencies to remain "mission true" and to urge them to establish guardrails, to prevent drift.

Mission Drift authors note that without careful attention, faith-based organizations drift from their founding mission. This drift off course often happens in small and subtle ways. Left unchecked, it eventually becomes significant.

Chris Horst, who co-authored *Mission Drift* with Peter Greer, facilitated the morning discussion. Horst, who lives in Denver, is the director of HOPE International, a global nonprofit focused on addressing physical and spiritual poverty through microfinance.

Special guest Larry Nikkel, former chair of the USMB Board of Faith and Life, facilitated roundtable dis-

cussions in the afternoon to help agencies diagnose their present realities and identify guardrails to protect against drift.

Attendees shifted gears in the evening to discuss mission drift from the perspective of our collective MB family in the United States. Don Morris, USMB national director, helped participants to frame that discussion by asking questions like: Who is your agency accountable to? How does that work? Where do you think we are most vulnerable to mission drift as a national family?

"The Mission Drift Forum was well received by those in attendance, including myself, indicating that the topic was and is highly relevant for our MB family," says Morris. "I appreciate so much MB Foundation's investment in our MB leaders by

providing this forum on how to protect ourselves from mission drift."

"Perhaps the Mission Drift Forum will play a small part in revitalizing our commitment to each other and our commitment to remain mission true," says Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation president and CEO.—MBF

FPU holds December commencement

Some 434 students received diplomas at Fresno Pacific University's (FPU) winter commencement exercises, held Dec. 16. The graduates included 291 from the bachelor's degree completion program, 53 from the traditional undergraduate program and 90 from the graduate program, including one from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Graduates came from the main Fresno, Calif., campus, as well as regional campuses in Merced, North Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield.

R. Scott Rodin, a pastor with 32 years of experience in leadership, fundraising, strategic planning, board development, change management and organizational effectiveness, was the guest speaker. "Pay close attention to how you define success, because it will determine who you are and drive everything you do," Rodin said.—FPU

Canadian MBs appoint interim leader

The Executive Board of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC) announced Jan. 15 that Steve Berg has been appointed interim executive director, effective Feb. 1.

Berg is currently senior associate pastor at South Abbotsford (BC) Church, where he will continue to spend 25 percent of his work time. Berg has committed to the new role for up to 18 months, during which time a search process will proceed for the permanent position. Ron Toews, the current interim executive

director, will return to his role as director of L2L, CCMBC's leadership development ministry. —CCMBC

MB Foundation hires regional director



MB Foundation (MBF) has hired Jason Hofer to the newly-created position of regional director in the Fresno, Calif., office. Hofer joined the team Jan. 3.

Hofer is recognized throughout the Pacific District Conference (PDC), having served in both Shafter (Calif.) MB Church and Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, along with holding a variety of district leadership roles since 1998. He currently serves as secretary of the PDC.

Hofer not only brings experience from the local church but also a passion for developing and leading teams. "I am excited to be part of an organization where I can be involved and develop a team to serve individuals in stewardship and generosity with the resources God has provided them," says Hofer.

As regional director, Hofer will work closely with Dennis Fast, church relations director, in the Fresno office to serve the churches and constituency of the PDC. Additionally, working closely with other MBF staff, he will be seeking ways to enhance the Fresno office to best serve and support the clients and ministries within the district.

"We are increasing our commitment to the ministries and people within the PDC. We are blessed to have quality staff members who understand the needs of the local church, are heavily invested in our community and are eager to serve," says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO of MBF.

MBF is the stewardship ministry of U.S. Mennonite Brethren. —MBF

5 minutes with...



Bob Glanzer

Between his early morning Agriculture Committee meeting and the daily briefing with the Republican Caucus, Bob Glanzer found a few minutes to talk with the *Christian Leader* about his new role in the South Dakota legislature. Glanzer is a member and active leader at Bethesda MB Church in Huron. A retired banker, his 2016 campaign to represent Beadle and Kingsbury counties was Glanzer's first foray into public office.

What prompted you to run for office?

The summary of my life is a huge involvement in my local community. When I retired five years ago, it wasn't in my long-term plan, but it was a natural jump, and I had a lot of great support.

You've identified drug abuse as a costly issue your state needs to address.

Meth is seemingly the drug of choice, and it's almost impossible for addicts to be rehabbed out of it. As the saying goes, I'd rather put a fence at the top of the cliff than an ambulance at the bottom. We need education, but the main issue is a heart problem, and you can't legislate that away.

What experience do you bring to this issue?

My wife, Penny, and I have been doing a Bible study in a drug and alcohol rehab program for 13 years. So many of the kids have the same story—no dad in the home, mother

with several relationships. Parents don't have the skills to raise their children. We have a big job to restore our culture back to solid families.

Where do you go for help in making decisions about issues?

The convictions I came here with were not decided five minutes ago. They're the result of a lifetime of Bible study and contemplation. People are looking for that kind of substance. My roots in faith and family are fundamental to making decisions in today's confusing environment.

What do you want to accomplish as a legislator?

I didn't come in with an agenda. I feel like Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:9 who saw a "wide door of opportunity," but also adversaries. There are many who are not thinking along the same lines as I am. I want to be a strong conservative voice and a light in this part of the world.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

The power of expository preaching

Two reasons to preach the “whole council of God”

I first came under the weekly effect of expository preaching in my early 20s. It was an entirely unique experience. As the preacher worked systematically through sections of Scripture, I was brought to see a kind of beauty and depth in the Bible that I had never before experienced. It started to change me.

I began to see my sin in a vivid light, and I began to feel the hope offered in Jesus Christ in a much deeper way. I wondered at first why the expository ministry had such an effect on me, but as time went on it became clear: Expository preaching has disciple-making power. There are many reasons for this. I will just mention two.

It is through expository preaching that people are helped to hear, understand and apply the Word of God and be saved. The Apostle Paul writes to his pastoral understudy, Timothy, and after charging him with the task of preaching the Word, he goes on to remind the young pastor that it is those “sacred writings which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Through the Scriptures—and very often through the Scriptures preached—people are brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus. It is no coincidence that after Peter’s exposition from the prophets and the Psalms in Acts 2, the crowd responded by repenting and being baptized. It is through the Word preached that disciples are made, for it is through that same Word that people are brought to understand the good news that cen-

ters upon the Savior.

It is through expository preaching that people are helped to hear, understand and apply the Word of God and be matured. After Paul charges Timothy with the task of preaching the Word, the Apostle goes on to remind him that the Scriptures are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul is making clear to Timothy that in the task of pastorally caring for the church in Ephesus, the Word of God is the means through which the people of God are built up.

For this reason, Paul ministered with conviction during his own time in Ephesus, reminding the elders there that he “did not shrink from declaring to you the whole council of God” (Acts 20:27). As the saying goes, “It takes a whole Bible to make a whole Christian.” When the preacher moves faithfully and systematically through the “whole council of God,” the people (and the preacher) are taught, reprovved, corrected and trained, being brought to maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ, to whom the sacred writings testify on every page (John 5:39).

We live in a world filled with many voices. On Sunday morning, we as pastors get up in front of our congregations with our Bibles in hand, prepared to expound the saving, maturing truth found in its pages. We do so because those who sit before us do not need to hear another voice among the many; they need to hear the Voice above all others calling to them, “Come and follow me.”



Jared Pulliam is the founding pastor of Christ Church in Portland, Ore., a church plant that began in 2013 in partnership with Mission USA. He is a native Oregonian and loves the culture and climate of the Pacific Northwest. Pulliam and his wife, Julia, have four children. Currently, he is pursuing doctoral studies through Western Seminary.

Beginning in March, Pulliam is leading a three-month cohort on the topic of expository preaching. The course will focus on the practice of expository preaching and how it fits with preachers’ callings to lead their congregations and disciple them week in and week out from the Word of God. This cohort is designed specifically for participants to refine Bible teaching skills in community with others and in so doing, further develop their abilities in the service of Christ and his kingdom.

Painting with a wide brush

I have read Pastor Burkholder's article carefully ("Ready to Repent," Jan/Feb 2017). I am yet unsure if he is affirming the principle that as Christians we show love to the sinner while "hating" (an inadequate word) the sin, or is he asking us to re-examine our conduct toward the LGBT community with a "lessened" view of Scriptural condemnation of the homosexual lifestyle. If the later, it would help to review the literature on the subject posted by Mennonite Brethren writers and present the readers with adequate rationale to take a "lessened" view. This will be harder for older members than younger ones but perhaps prepares the MB church for a less anguished and divisive future.

Now I have a pretty good idea how Pastor Burkholder will answer this, but the real conflict I have with his article is his call to repent. If he is calling all Mennonite Brethren to repent, he is painting us with far too wide a brush. If he is calling me to repent, he has judged me incorrectly. I have had in the past at least two homosexual friends and enjoyed their company while being bewildered by their choice. Feel free to debate me on "choice." If he is directing his call to repent to those who abuse, berate, isolate and more those who are LGBT, then I encourage him to have at it.

His article was informative and challenging. The LGBT issue is not going to go away, and I support Pastor Burkholder's desire to deal with it. I just felt the repent brush was too wide.

Robert F. Lewis, Reedley, Calif.

Questions

I was deeply troubled when I read the article "Ready to Repent" by Brad Burkholder (Jan/Feb 2017 issue).

What is the position of our colleges and the U.S. Mennonite Brethren church on homosexual conduct?

What is the proposed legislation in California that you mention?

When you say "gay community," do you mean the well-financed and vocal organizations that homosexuals are using to push their lifestyle or individuals who are struggling with homosexual desires?

How do you keep from causing pain when you speak out against sin? Pain usually comes before repentance.

When you talk about gays and lesbians being excluded, do you mean from coming to church or being a member in good standing or holding places of leadership in the church?

We are all sinners saved by grace but to say our lifestyle is not better? I am okay; you are okay? No way.

Brad wants us to go on a guilt trip for how we have treated gays and lesbians. This is a favorite trick of the devil to keep us from witnessing.

A liberal Supreme Court has ruled that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states. We need to take our guidance from the Bible rather than the state of U.S. governments.

We may let them into our churches as members in good standing, but will God let them into heaven?

Jake Fast, Guymon, Okla.

Responsibilities, relationships and repenting

Do we bear responsibility for the hostility behind California's SB1146 ("Ready to repent," Jan/Feb 2017)? As Christians, we have the responsibility and the right to teach our children and students according to the Word of God, our traditions and our values. We understand that a campus' culture and context will reinforce those truths. If living out the truths of God's Word is offensive and results in hostility from the culture, so be it. We need not repent but resolve to live out God's Word without yielding to cultural compromise.

What about the "lack of relationship" between Mennonite Brethren and the gay community? We should differentiate between individuals who are genuinely seeking God and a community (backed by a political lobby which seeks to change cultures, customs and laws) that celebrates sexual sin and would have us change our understanding of the image of God, creation and marriage. We must remain true to God's Word.

Do we need to repent because we have "excluded" homosexuals? How have we done that? By not celebrating same sex marriages? By not allowing homosexuals to become members? Should we allow those who are openly practicing and celebrating homosexuality (or other sexual sin) to become leaders?

There is need for repentance within the MB denomination. We should turn from the idolatry of our heritage and history towards the truth of the gospel. We should turn from the idolatry of our greed and materialism toward the God who provides. We should turn from the idolatry of sexual sin and personal pleasure toward a life of service and self-sacrifice. We should turn from the idolatry of cultural compromise and religious syncretism toward an uncompromising faithfulness to God's Word. And we should call a lost and dying world to turn from their sins and turn to Christ in faith and receive life everlasting.

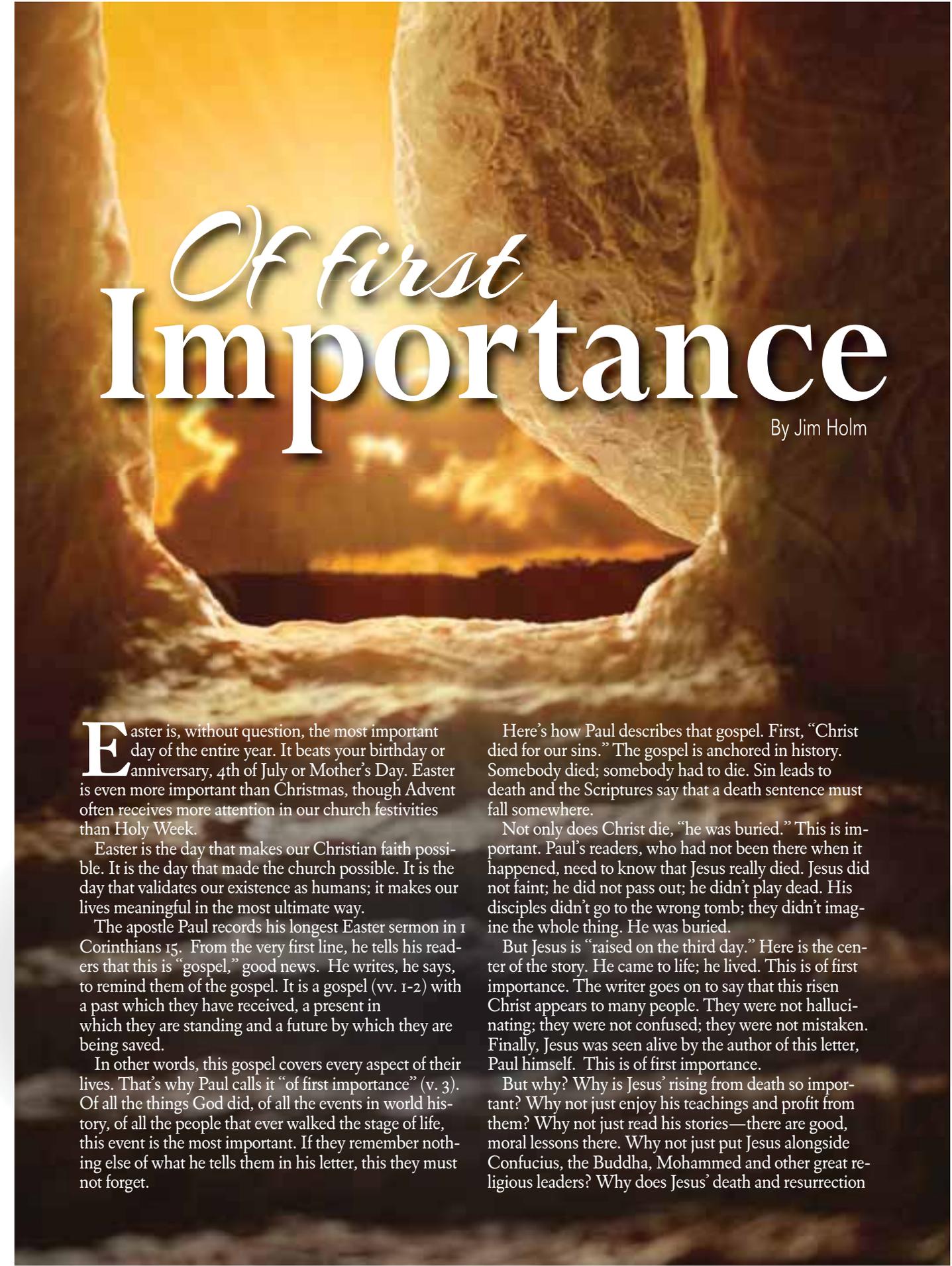
James Epp, Balko, Okla.

Dialogue is healthy

My hardy congratulations [on the article] about ML King and race relations ("A Voice Crying in the Wilderness," Jan/Feb 2017). I'm afraid that many sometimes glaring "social issues" are not discussed openly among us, either because of ignorance, fear (of the unknown) or, unfortunately, denial and prejudice. Dialogue of any issue should be possible, of all places, within the body of our Savior, who, through the apostle Paul, asked us to share one another's burdens, not necessarily for consensus, but because the body needs to care for itself. Bruises and abrasions of the soul should find welcome salve among us.

Mike Groft, Kingsburg, Calif.

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Of first Importance

By Jim Holm

Easter is, without question, the most important day of the entire year. It beats your birthday or anniversary, 4th of July or Mother's Day. Easter is even more important than Christmas, though Advent often receives more attention in our church festivities than Holy Week.

Easter is the day that makes our Christian faith possible. It is the day that made the church possible. It is the day that validates our existence as humans; it makes our lives meaningful in the most ultimate way.

The apostle Paul records his longest Easter sermon in 1 Corinthians 15. From the very first line, he tells his readers that this is "gospel," good news. He writes, he says, to remind them of the gospel. It is a gospel (vv. 1-2) with a past which they have received, a present in which they are standing and a future by which they are being saved.

In other words, this gospel covers every aspect of their lives. That's why Paul calls it "of first importance" (v. 3). Of all the things God did, of all the events in world history, of all the people that ever walked the stage of life, this event is the most important. If they remember nothing else of what he tells them in his letter, this they must not forget.

Here's how Paul describes that gospel. First, "Christ died for our sins." The gospel is anchored in history. Somebody died; somebody had to die. Sin leads to death and the Scriptures say that a death sentence must fall somewhere.

Not only does Christ die, "he was buried." This is important. Paul's readers, who had not been there when it happened, need to know that Jesus really died. Jesus did not faint; he did not pass out; he didn't play dead. His disciples didn't go to the wrong tomb; they didn't imagine the whole thing. He was buried.

But Jesus is "raised on the third day." Here is the center of the story. He came to life; he lived. This is of first importance. The writer goes on to say that this risen Christ appears to many people. They were not hallucinating; they were not confused; they were not mistaken. Finally, Jesus was seen alive by the author of this letter, Paul himself. This is of first importance.

But why? Why is Jesus' rising from death so important? Why not just enjoy his teachings and profit from them? Why not just read his stories—there are good, moral lessons there. Why not just put Jesus alongside Confucius, the Buddha, Mohammed and other great religious leaders? Why does Jesus' death and resurrection

top them all? Paul answers in the rest of the chapter, beginning in verse 12, by making a series of incontrovertible factual statements.

Fact 1: If Christ was not raised, you are wasting your time (v. 14). Give up on Jesus; he is not a great teacher or a moral example. You've been lied to, and all the sermons you've heard were a waste of time. Instead of celebrating at Easter, we should be holding a funeral. If Christ has not been raised, let's stop pretending.

Fact 2: If Christ has not been raised, you have believed in something useless and "your faith is vain" (v. 14). Noah spent 100 years building a boat because he believed in something. Moses led a grumbling people for 40 years in the desert because he believed in something. Paul gave his life to persecution because he believed in something, and countless people since have done the same thing. And it was all a waste of time, all empty, hollow, useless—if Christ has not been raised.

Fact 3: If Christ has not been raised, we have made a liar out of God (v. 15). We have said God raised Jesus, which God did not do if Jesus has not been raised. This is a terrible lie, and it is placed at the spot where people are most vulnerable—at the center of their lives where they are looking for meaning. We tell them how to find God through Jesus, and it is all smoke and mirrors.

Fact 4: If Christ has not been raised, all our Christian visions, values and virtues have accomplished nothing. We are going to die as sinful people. We are going to hell; there is no hope. As Sartre wrote, "There is no exit."

Fact 5: Everyone is gone forever (v. 18). This is hard to believe, but the news gets worse. All our deceased relatives, all of them, are gone forever. Mother, father, sister, daughter, son—they are gone. There is no resurrection. I have stood by caskets many times in my ministry, offering words of hope. But there is no hope if Christ has not been raised.

Fact 6: We have wasted our lives. This is the worst news of all (v. 19). We have wasted our lives. We are pitiful. We gave ourselves to something that is empty; we built our life on a hope which does not exist. And we are to be pitied more than other people because we should know better. We should have recognized that this whole thing is a fraud, because we knew that people could not rise from the dead.

What an incredibly dark, dismal and depressing picture. What if the chapter had ended there? Thank God it didn't. Note the first word of v. 20 is "but." This conjunction reveals a breath-taking answer to the depression of the previous section. Thank God we don't have to remain there. Thank God we don't have to live lives of hopeless desperation. "But, *in fact*, Christ has been raised from the dead" (my highlight).

Paul has been listing facts in the previous verses. I've summarized six of these facts. But there is one more fact. This fact negates, cancels out, reverses all the other facts Paul has enumerated. This is the fact: Christ has been raised from the dead. He is alive; he is alive!

Not only that, he is the "firstfruits." Christ is only the first one to rise from the dead, never to die again. There will be a whole lot of people following Christ into this resurrection life. In fact, from the moment of his resurrection, our vocabulary changes. You can see that in verse 20. The word "dead" is changed to "sleep." At the instance of Jesus' resurrection, death turns into sleep. Jesus has risen, and even the way we talk about dying needs a renewal.

One more thing—well, actually two. Jesus' resurrection, which we celebrate this Easter, makes two things inevitable. These two things must and will happen. They cannot not happen, and they cannot be stopped from happening.

1. The resurrection of Jesus changes the course of the world, the destiny of the universe. Jesus' resurrection puts in motion something which cannot be stopped. First, the resurrection means that the inevitable process of death, which began with Adam, is reversed by the inevitable process of life which comes in Jesus Christ (vv. 21-22). Since God raised Christ from the dead, all who follow Christ will be raised from the dead. This will happen; you can bank on it. There is no doubt about it.

There is more. When believers are raised from the dead, the end of evil will come (v. 24). Evil will be annihilated, and Jesus will hand the universe, purged forever of darkness, over to his Father. Friends, there is power in this resurrection. We need never surrender to the forces of darkness. There is power, wonder-working power.

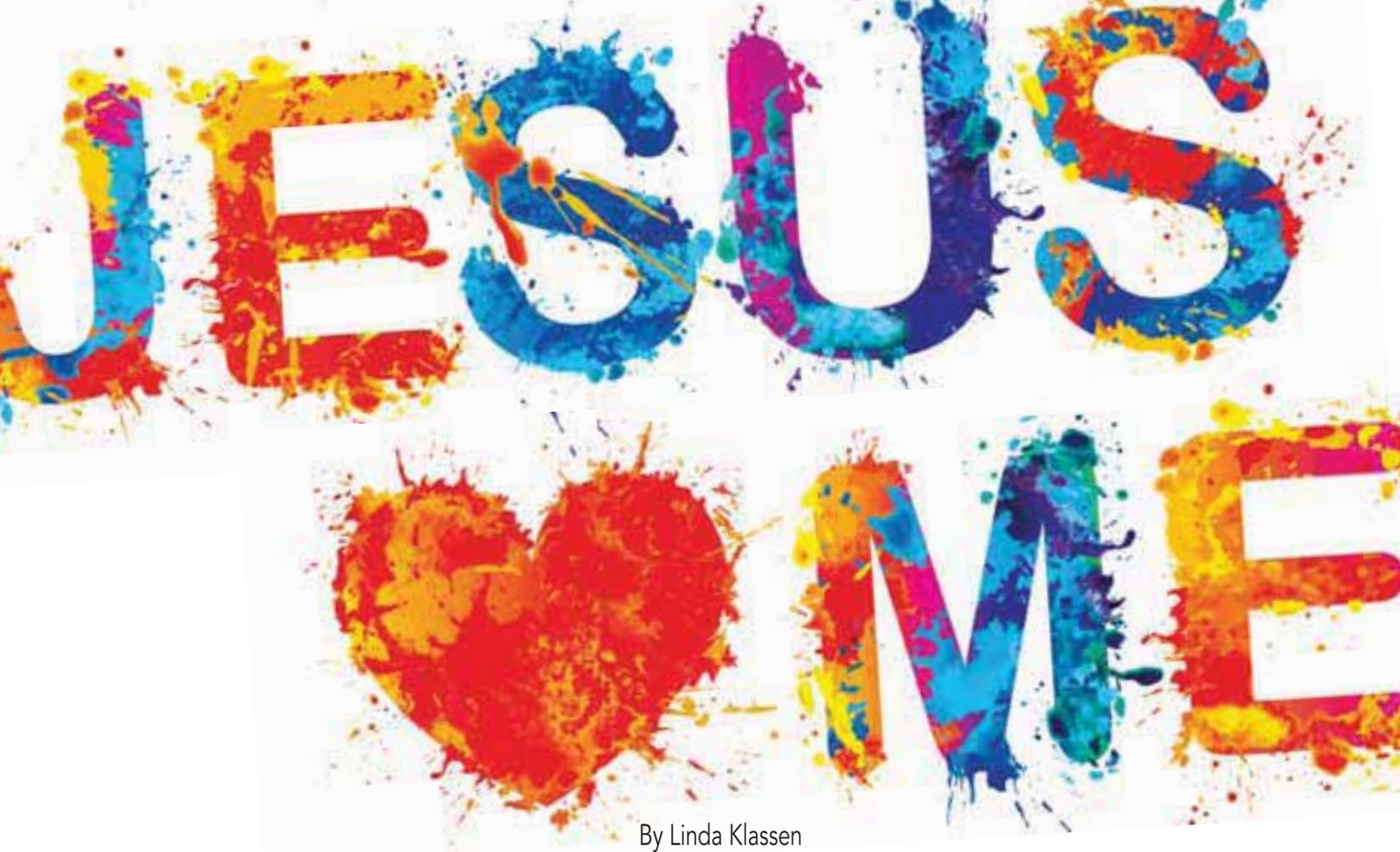
We have not yet seen all that is evil destroyed, and we may not live to see it. But the inevitable has begun. And it cannot be stopped any more than you can stand on a railroad track and stop a speeding locomotive by putting up your hand and crying, "Halt!"

2. The resurrection of Jesus means death itself will be destroyed (v. 26). It is not just that things and people won't die anymore; it is that death itself will cease to exist. There won't even be any possibility of death.

Jesus was sent to earth on a mission, to reclaim the rule and reassert the sovereignty of God, to bring in the kingdom of God. All of creation will submit to our heavenly Father. And when that task is completed, Jesus will hand the universe over to the Father and say, "Mission accomplished." This is inevitable. It will happen because of the resurrection.

This day, this Easter Day, makes all the difference in the world. It is of first importance.

Jim Holm is the pastor of the Faith Community Congregation, one of four congregations of Butler Church in Fresno, Calif. ▀



By Linda Klassen

A woman's journey to Christ

The power of the resurrection is at work today among the women and men in our U.S. Mennonite Brethren congregations. Linda Klassen, who recently became a member at Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church, is one of many who testify to the power of our resurrected Savior and his overwhelming love for them.

Although God has always been a part of her life, Klassen's faith journey has been full of challenges. Born in the 1950s in Bakersfield, Calif., Klassen was an active Catholic as a youngster and accepted Jesus as her Savior at a Christian retreat while in high school. But without spiritual guidance her new life soon "grew dim." Although she was a popular cheerleader, with a football player boyfriend she adored, "things looked good on the outside, but my insides were full of fear and loneliness," Klassen says. Her home life, with an alcoholic father and a mother who, "dealing with her own demons," attempted suicide, was no place of refuge. Klassen's boyfriend left her brokenhearted. She began shoplifting and sneaking out of the house at night to be with friends. She finished high school looking like a big success, but in reality she was a lost soul in search of love and security.

After high school I got a job, attended college and dated many boys, always looking to fill that empty place inside me. One day my father's coworker came to my parents' home and invited my dad to a Local Church* meeting. Although my dad declined, I accepted the invitation.

At Local Church I found an immediate family to hold and protect me. I learned that God loved me, especially if I conformed to the group. I burned my school books in the fireplace because I had found God and did not have to look any further. I burned pictures of my family and

gave my heart and soul to the church group. I was happy for the first time in a very long time.

I met Stan Klassen in a church meeting. We married six weeks later and made our home in Fresno. Since I barely knew Stan, our marriage was not a happy one for several years. I always wondered if we were actually married since an elder from Local Church was the one to marry us. We stayed in Local Church for 11 years, during which time we cut out both of our families, old friends and all outside contact with Christianity because "Christianity was Christ-less." Our sole focus was Christ and

Local Church. All reading material was written and distributed by the Living Stream Ministry, the publishing division of Local Church.

Stan and I had two boys while with this group. One of my biggest regrets is not being there for my sons as they grew. Although I worked fulltime, we attended church meetings every night, once Saturday morning and twice on the Lord's Day, leaving very little family time. Striving to be more Christ-like, the women of the church gave up pants and only wore skirts and dresses. The "sisters" always sat in the back row at the meetings and always with a head covering.

In early 1986 I developed hepatitis and was hospitalized twice. We were taught in the meetings that illness is an indication of sin in your life, so very few church members called or came over to offer support. We were also taught that Christ was only in the meetings, so we were in darkness if we were not there to hear him speak. I had to remain in bed for nearly six weeks after my release from the hospital, and during my convalescence I felt rejected by God and very alone.

But one miraculous morning, Jesus spoke to me! He assured me he loved me, and that if I listened, I would hear his voice crying out to me. I was shocked, since I totally believed Christ was only in the church meetings. But that day I heard his sweet voice telling me he loved me. It felt like blinders were taken away and my heart basked in Jesus' love for me. This was the Jesus I met so long ago and had left behind. This was Jesus, my Lord and Savior!

My strength began to come back, and my labs gradually returned to normal. My skin was no longer yellow but glowed with this new life in me. When I returned to the church meetings, people barely spoke to me, and the head elder made some quip about my absence. The meetings began to lose their allure and paled in comparison to the Jesus who spoke to me with such kindness during my illness. I had to leave! I did not fit any longer.

As clear as if it were yesterday, I remember holding our youngest son and telling my husband I was leaving the church. If that meant I would leave him behind, that was okay with me. But miraculously Stan said he did not want to lose me and the children. He would follow, and we attended our last meeting in March of 1986.

The adjustment back to the world was harder than I had anticipated. We had no support system since we had cut off our families and friends. The boys had attended our private church school, and now they had to attend public school. Stan and I renewed our marriage vows, deciding love was a choice and we would choose love. New life filled our marriage, and for the first time in 11 years I fell in love with my husband.

We moved from Fresno to Kingsburg in 1989 because Andrew, our oldest son, was having trouble transitioning into public school life. We settled into a small house. Andy joined Little League and quickly became a home run star! He loved it in Kingsburg, began writing poetry and excelled in both school and sports.

At the end of 1989, Andrew was diag-

I still have great difficulty opening up to people because of past hurts and false teachings. But over the past year I find myself opening up to both Christ and his church once again. I am learning to recognize and run after that sweet voice, and I still am in awe that Jesus loves me!

nosed with Lymphoblastic Lymphoma and died 13 months later at the age of 13. During his illness, he and I both struggled with the idea that God was punishing us for leaving the church. We had been taught this, and its poison still lurked in the shadows of our minds. I don't really know how God did it, but he showed us differently. Illness was not from God as a punishment but came with the fall. We read in the book of Revelation every night about the streets of gold and the gates of pearl. It became like a travel brochure. When asked if he was saved, Andy said, "Every chance I get!"

An angel named Victor visited Andy and was there when Andy died. Before he died, Andy had said that if people only knew how great God is they'd come running! A few nights after he died, both Andy's nurse and his grandmother had the same dream of Andy standing up in a convertible with a group of kids. He was waving his arms and shouting, "Tell Mom I'm all right!"

Three months after Andrew went to heaven, his little brother, Sandy, was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1991 at the age of 10 years. The journey began again. Sandy eventually had surgery in 1997, performed by a leading pediatric neurosurgeon, to de-bulk the tumor. The tumor was diagnosed as a slow growing cancer called an Astrocytoma. Because the surgeon was unable to get all the tumor, Sandy underwent six weeks of radiation. As a result Sandy lost half of his vision and does not feel comfortable enough to drive. His memory gives him fits. His left side is smaller and weaker than the right, but he is here! He is an amazing person, kind hearted and very industrious, and we love him so.



Looking back, I have to say God has been with me every step of the way. Even when I couldn't hear him and was looking in all the wrong places, my precious Jesus was there. But to be truthful, after Andy died, I was angry for a very long time. It was a sort of quiet, desperate anger that defies all logic. While I knew Andy was with God, he wasn't with me and that hurt beyond words. My Sandy was dealt a bad hand, and I couldn't fix it. On my darkest days, I sometimes wondered if God had forgotten him.

After Andy died, I did not feel strong enough to attend any church, but after years of wandering in the wilderness, God has begun to speak to me again. He is drawing me to himself. He has provided a loving church family to support me and walk alongside of me. My wounded heart is finding peace and healing.

I still have great difficulty opening up to people because of past hurts and false teachings. But over the past year I find myself opening up to both Christ and his church once again. I am learning to recognize and run after that sweet voice, and I still am in awe that Jesus loves me!

Titus 3:5-7 says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

This is my Jesus and I stand in awe of him.

Linda Klassen is retired after 36 years with the State of California Department of Social Services, where she worked as a disability evaluation analyst and later a team manager. She enjoys quilting, cooking and reading. She lives in Kingsburg, Calif., with her husband of 42 years, two cats and five chickens and dotes on her son, Sandy Klassen, who resides in Fresno, Calif. ▀

* For the purposes of this article, we have capitalized the name Local Church. However, churches affiliated with the "local churches" movement do not take a name except a geographic marker such as "the local church of Bakersfield."

God's inspired silence

Reflections from the book of Lamentations

Does God speak to you? Lucretia's bubbly faith overflows with testimony to God's direct communication. Lucretia testifies that God will wake her at midnight when Child Services is about to bring more abandoned children to her short-term orphanage ministry. No baby formula? No worries. God will speak with news of a milk delivery.

Or is your experience more like that of the veteran pastor who says that after a lifetime of preaching about God's restoring voice of hope, he himself has never heard from God. Day-long retreats? Weeks of fasting? God has never spoken.

Which vignette matches your experience? Does God's silence in the book of Lamentations sound uncharacteristically bleak or reassuringly mysterious? Using a variety of voices, Lamentations addresses God from Jerusalem's chaotic exile. Unlike Job or Psalms, in Lamentations God remains silent. God does not respond. God offers no word of cheer.

Poem One: A cry of grief

The first highly stylized poem of Lamentations 1 opens with "How lonely sits the city once full of people." The first voice describes the crushing, oft-prophesied loss (1:1-11a), mourn-



Lamentations

ing for the former princess Jerusalem, now a widow whose children have been enslaved. The destruction is all the worse because “the Lord has made her suffer” (1:5). A grieving mother, “Jerusalem remembers... all the precious things” (1:7).

The description of Jerusalem’s travail shifts to a first-person cry of grief midway through the poem (1:11b-22). Jerusalem weeps, lamenting the loss of children and abandonment by leaders and priests (1:11b-19). She addresses the author of her devastation, “O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me... My groans are many and my heart faints” (1:20-22).

An acrostic, each of the 22 verses of the poem, begins with a successive letter of the alphabet connoting that all the destruction of the world, the evil from A to Z, has been Israel’s experience. Sixty-six lines of the poem put into words the loneliness of those to whom God no longer speaks.

Poems Two to Four: The cry intensifies

Lamentations 2 uses a similar form. Like the first, the second poem is a 66-line acrostic. The tone shifts to angry protest against God’s devastation (2:1-12): “The Lord has become like an enemy; he has destroyed Israel” (2:5). In verse 13 the poem addresses Jerusalem directly: “What can I say for you, O daughter Jerusalem, O virgin daughter Zion? Who can heal you?” Too exhausted to speak, Jerusalem breaks silence only in the final verses of Poem Two. As if speaking to one too callous to care, she cries, “Look, LORD, and consider! To whom have you done this?” (2:20).

Poem Three intensifies the acrostic (each Hebrew letter begins three consecutive poetic lines). A new voice, a sort of G.I. Joe, speaks. The “mighty-man” poet uses violent images to describe God’s judgment (3:1-20). This valiant warrior tries to make sense out of nonsense by speaking faithful words about God: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases” (3:21-22). Won’t good theology trump existential heartache? “His mercies are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness!” (3:23-24). The strong man stoops to the burden, accepts the well-deserved abuse (“give one’s cheek to the smiter”), plays the part of the strong, silent type (“sit alone in silence,” 3:27-30).

But even the valiant spiritual athlete is overcome. “Does not the Lord see it?” he asks (3:36). As if tortured by a modern superpower, the poet reports being pursued by a drone-like opponent—“My enemies have hunted me like a bird” (3:52)—and tortured by waterboarding sadists—“Water closed over my head” (3:54). “I am lost,” he says.

After this failed attempt at orthodox lamentation (all but two of the psalms of lament match complaint with a word of hope), the poet turns to Poem Four. The acrostic form is retained, but the fourth poem has but 44 lines. The third-person lament describes cannibalism (mothers in Jerusalem eat their own children in 4:10), attributes the trouble to the Lord (4:11,16) and blames the leaders’ sin (4:13). The closing verses again switch voices: “Our eyes have failed, ever watching vainly for help; we were watching” (4:17).

Poem Five: Chaos overwhelms

Poem Five demonstrates utter collapse in poetic form, in message and in experience. Reduced to just 22 lines, the poem no longer follows the acrostic form. As “chaos speech,” the poem abandons logic, jumping from one complaint to another. “Remember, Lord,” the poem begins (5:1-2). “We have become orphans. Our mothers are widows” (5:3). “Our ancestors sinned, but we bear the iniquities” (5:7). We have been raped (5:11), tortured and dishonored (5:12) and enslaved (5:13).

One last plaintive cry for help escapes the poet’s lips: “You, O Lord, reign forever... Restore us to yourself, O Lord” (5:19-21), only to deteriorate into a whimper, “unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure” (5:22).

Through it all God remains silent. The city is devastated, but the God who has issued nonstop warnings throughout the prophets utters not a word. The people of God ask for the slightest acknowledgement that God is aware, but there is nothing. God is silent in the time of deepest need.

God’s inspired silence

Lamentations, for all its melancholy, guides us to solidarity with those devastated by pain. In a society where one in six is medicated for anxiety and depression, here is new therapy. Though silence alone may not be enough, deep listening gives pastoral care.

In bright, up-tempo weekly worship, lament is a lost art. How might Christian worship incorporate plaintive cries of pain? Congregational prayers often include pleas for failing health. On specially designated days, we pray, too, for the persecuted church.

God’s sacred silence also instructs pastoral care. Reflecting on Lamentations, I have gotten in touch with my own personal grief. When as a 16 year old I lost my dad to death, I felt the need to plan a funeral service to emulate King David’s reaction to the death of his infant son. 2 Samuel records that David rose from fasting, anointed his face, worshiped God and ate and drank. Now I wonder: Where was the wise soul to offer the wisdom of Lamentations? To help me recognize the comfort of God’s silence in that moment of loss?

We know people who live with “chaos stories” akin to exiled Jerusalem. Their lives have been disrupted. They cannot speak in ways that make sense. Broken by abuse, the violence of war or unsought divorce, they need someone who will listen to their story. And yet, they also need the sound of silence. May we learn from the sacred silence of God to extend both a listening ear and patient presence.

Learning from Lamentations, may we structure grieving into our worship patterns. May we allow intense loss to “have its say” when we prefer to speak comforting “God-words.” May we extend grace to those communicating in “chaos speech.” Let’s remember that the sound of silence is an act of true faith in the night of the soul.

Lynn Jost is professor of Old Testament at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and plans and leads Sunday worship gatherings at College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif. ■

Partnership between Arizona, Kansas churches benefits both

Churches take next step in “dating” relationship

Axiom Church, a church plant in the Phoenix, Ariz., area, and Hesston (Kan.) MB Church have been “dating” for several years now.

“I say dating because we’ve had an attraction for each other for a long time,” explains Axiom church planter Gavin Linderman.

When a team from Hesston MB visits Axiom for a spring break mission trip this month, it will serve to solidify a long-distance partnership that benefits both.

The first glance across a crowded room was almost five years ago, before Axiom even officially launched. The Lindermans found themselves facing daunting medical expenses, and Brad Burkholder, pastor of Hesston MB, found out about the need through word of mouth. So Hesston MB encouraged the congregation to donate to the Linderman family and Axiom as part of Advent giving that year.

“We were stoked,” Linderman says, that a church in Kansas would be thinking about Axiom and helping them out in such a tangible way.

The Lindermans returned that simple first move with a thank-you video.

Burkholder laughs as he recalls the endearing authenticity of the family dogs running across the couch during the filming. “It fit,” he says. “That was the first time we got to know them.”

It wasn’t love at first sight, however. The long-distance relationship has grown slowly, as individuals from Hesston MB prayed for Axiom and leaders from the two churches sought each other out at USMB national events. When Burkholder found himself in Phoenix for an unrelated trip, he made



One of the ways Hesston (Kan.) MB Church and Axiom Church, Phoenix, have built a relationship is by leaders meeting at national events, as pastors Gavin Linderman (left) and Brad Burkholder did at the 2016 USMB National Convention. While it might be “more efficient” to partner with a congregation in the same district, Burkholder says, it’s been just as natural to build a relationship across district lines, thanks in part to modern technologies and travel. *Axiom Church photo*

time to visit the Axiom staff and facilities firsthand. It was kind of like meeting one another in person after testing the waters online: “Are we as attracted to one another as we thought?”

After several years of slowly getting acquainted, spending significant time together is the natural “next step” in the relationship. So Hesston is sending a multigenerational team of more than 25 to visit Axiom March 18-23. While serving together in the Axiom community will be a key part of their time to-

gether, continuing to build the relationship is just as important.

“For us this is a relationship trip,” Linderman says.

He notes that while monetary support is important for a church plant, relational support can’t be underestimated. It’s been that kind of relational support from across the USMB family that has helped Axiom start strong.

“I dare to say Axiom is one of the most blessed and supported church plants that has ever been planted in the

history of the United States,” Linderman says. “That’s just how good the people in the Mennonite Brethren community have been to us.”

He adds, “We need to raise the relationship bar as high as the financial support bar.”

Accordingly, the spring break trip itinerary will allow ample time for those from Hesston MB and Axiom to play together, eat together and get acquainted.

No doubt they’ll discover differences as they get to know each other: Hesston MB is a multigenerational congregation in a small town in the Southern District Conference and Axiom is a congregation of mostly young adults and young families in a metro area of the Pacific District Conference. But, Burkholder points out, learning to understand and appreciate differences is part of any healthy relationship.

And, he says, they have much in common. Both are church plants—Hesston MB was planted in 1978 by Koerner Heights MB Church, Newton, Kan.—and both have a deep-seated passion for reaching the lost: “different places but same Jesus,” Burkholder says.

As the two congregations rub shoulders and share ideas for reaching out in their unique contexts, both expect to be inspired and encouraged.

“We hope to catch each other’s bugs a bit,” Linderman says.

By the end of the trip, the expectation is that this growing partnership will take on a more official tone. Already, Hesston MB has made the relationship more official by including giving to Axiom in the church budget. But what the relationship will look like beyond that is yet to be seen.

“I think they have something to offer us that hasn’t been revealed yet, and we have something to offer them that hasn’t been revealed yet,” Linderman says.

He anticipates that as the two part ways at the end of the spring break visit, it will be with an attitude of worship and thankfulness for what God has

done, both in terms of mission and in terms of relationship.

Burkholder says the relationship thus far has been so beneficial that he would love to see every USMB congregation connect with a church plant, whether by praying, giving, going to serve or actually planting a church.

“I see great possibilities,” he says. “When we as a body, the MB Conference, start saying, ‘How do we help each other and work together,’ that to me brings excitement. That helps churches grow and helps plant other churches, too.” —*Myra Holmes* ▀

Congregation “covers” family in crisis

Trailhead’s support an example of God’s care

Brent and Courtney Orrange and their children, Brooklyn and Sam, then ages eight and seven, moved from Littleton, Colo., to Sierra Leone in August 2012 to work with survivors of sex trafficking in a recovery center operated by World Hope International, a Christian relief and development organiza-



Brent and Courtney Orrange went to Africa to help traumatized children only to find themselves back in the U.S. five weeks later due to their young daughter’s traumatic illness, ministering to their own children. “We are getting to help people who’ve gone through trauma; we just didn’t realize it’d be so close to home,” Brent says. *Orrange family photo*

tion. While the transition to a new culture had its challenges, they were still in the honeymoon phase—a mere three weeks into their new life—when Brooklyn got very, very sick.

Over the next two weeks the family experienced a rollercoaster

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While it's always good to ask what's needed, sometimes those in crisis can't identify what they need.

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of hope and desperation surrounding Brooklyn's downward spiral. It included kidney failure, life-threatening complications, near amputation of Brooklyn's arm and emergency evacuations spanning three countries. Only five weeks after their arrival in Africa, the family was back in Denver, traumatized and in need of healing. For a detailed account of the crisis, see www.usmb/orange-family-crisis

The Orrange family still refers to their harrowing experience as “The Catastrophe of 2012.” But through this time of extreme crisis, their church community, Trailhead Church, a USMB congregation in Littleton, showed extraordinary support.

“They covered us,” Courtney Orrange says, “covered us in prayer, covered us in logistics, covered us in just being our community in a time when we were not able to be at our best.”

That covering came in five specific ways that the Orranges say can be applied in more common kinds of crisis as well.

Support begins with relationship

Trailhead's support of the Orranges began even before the family hit Africa's soil, with deep-rooted relationships. Authentic relationships are a core value for this congregation, and the Orrange family was an invested part of the congregation. Sending the Orranges to Sierra Leone was more than simply sending a check; it was sending part of the family.

“We loved the Orranges deeply,” says Jeff Nikkel, who was Trailhead's pastor at the time. So when word came that these members of their community were hurting, “well, you're hurting,” Nikkel says. “And if there's something you can do, well, you do it.” When the church fosters deep and authentic relationships, Nikkel says support flows naturally when crisis hits.

The importance of prayer

The first thing Trailhead did was to pray corporately and individually. Trailhead worship pastor Anne Griffin began a “Pray for Brooklyn” Facebook group to share news quickly, and the group's reach exploded well beyond the small congregation. The prayer movement on Brooklyn's behalf eventually reached to 40 states, four Canadian provinces and 17 countries.

Far more than a last resort, Brent and Courtney say that prayer is a powerful and meaningful way to help those in crisis. Especially when those in crisis know they're being prayed for. The Orranges received countless photos of people holding “praying for Brooklyn” posters. Each note, poster and encounter was encouraging. Courtney says, “It's not a burden to let them know.”

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The value of being there

Trailhead also gave the gift of presence. Nikkel was immediately convicted that “somebody needs to be there,” a belief affirmed by church leaders. So they quickly put Nikkel on a plane to meet the Orranges, who had been evacuated to London.

For a week, Nikkel “ran point” for the family, doing laundry, figuring out which tube station was nearest the hospital, taking Sam to the zoo and sending updates to the prayer network.

“But the biggest thing was just being a representative,” Nikkel says.

In the years since, Nikkel says, many have expressed surprise that Trailhead would send him to London, but for him and for Trailhead, it was a no-brainer.

Courtney still tears up as she recalls the power of the simple gift of presence: “I was so thankful that someone would just be there.”

Help you can touch

Support also came in the form of tangible gifts. In a short 45 minutes between the decision to send Nikkel and his drive to the airport, a steady stream of people brought gifts for the family. Despite rules to the contrary, the cards, posters and stuffed animals from Nikkel’s suitcase filled Brooklyn’s ICU room, and those tangible expressions of love were especially meaningful to the kids.

“It seemed like billions at the moment—from everybody,” Brooklyn says. “There were so many fun and good things around me, and I knew that everyone cared about me.”

Sam was not forgotten. The gifts included activities and small treasures for him—like a Yoda pen for the Star-Wars fan. “I still have it!” Sam exclaims.

That tangible help continued when the Orranges returned to Denver to continue healing both physically and emotionally. Since they had sold most of their belongings before they left, then hurriedly left Sierra Leone with just a

change of clothes and a Bible, the family arrived with very little. Quietly, the church community provided clothes, a place to stay, transportation and meals. Someone welcomed them with a cake for Brent’s nearly-forgotten birthday. Another family brought joy with secret Santa gifts. Even months later, a friend brought Easter outfits for the kids when they were still too shell-shocked to think of such details.

While it’s always good to ask what’s needed, sometimes those in crisis can’t identify what they need. “Help tangibly, but don’t wait for them to ask,” Courtney says. Put yourself in their shoes, offer help before asked and risk being told that’s not what was needed. It takes “finesse,” she cautions.

Brent adds, “Be willing to serve thanklessly.” He says that while the family was thankful, they simply didn’t have the emotional capacity to express gratitude for each gift.

Being long on patience

Coming “home” to Denver wasn’t all “unicorns and rainbows,” to use Brooklyn’s term. Brooklyn needed painful physical therapy, and all four of them were deeply traumatized. All had significant questions for God.

“In some ways the real work began at that point,” says Nikkel. “There was profound disappointment and disorientation.”

Brent and Courtney say that space to heal—for a long, long time—was a significant gift. Trailhead was long on patience and short on expectations—expectations to get back to normal, figure out next steps. “Or even expectations to be the same,” Courtney adds. “We weren’t the same.”

The couple notes that support is almost always needed long after the immediate crisis is over: “It will take a lot longer to go through than you think.”

By the time the Orranges had been back in Denver about a year, the wounds were less fresh, but not gone.

And Trailhead acknowledged that by hosting a service to mark the one-year anniversary of the crisis, providing space to remember, reflect and celebrate. “A year in and they were still walking with us in that process,” Courtney marvels.

Now, more than four years in, Brooklyn proudly displays her physical scar that runs from wrist to armpit, but other scars are less visible. Sam pauses to fight tears as he retells his part of the story; Courtney pulls him close, not bothering to fight the tears.

“I think it always will [hurt],” she says. “And that’s OK. It doesn’t mean I’m ignoring what God has done.”

Through the hurt and despite answers that remain foggy, Courtney says this is clear: God uses people—the church—during times of crisis. “People can be evidence of God when you’re not sure how to understand him,” she says. “A lot of times we wish God was here and tangible, and he really was through our community.” —Myra Holmes

NYC is dreaming big

National Youth Commission envisions deeper connections, greater impact

Since 1976, the USMB National Youth Commission (NYC) has focused primarily on planning the National Youth Conference, a once-every-four-year event for high school students. These gatherings have provided a way for youth and youth workers from Mennonite Brethren congregations across the U.S. to connect, worship, serve and learn. For countless numbers of students, National Youth Conference has been a turning point as they’ve made first-time commitments to Christ, renewed their faith or answered a call to ministry.



While the National Youth Commission is considering changes to the 2019 National Youth Convention, the event will continue to offer USMB teens the opportunity to connect with one another just as they did at Named 2015, the most recent national youth event held April 9-12, 2015 at the Colorado Convention Center in downtown Denver, Colo. *Christian Leader photo*

That's about to change—for the better.

While the national events are good, a few days every few years simply isn't enough to go deep, says NYC chair Kyle Goings. "We realize we need to expand our focus."

So the NYC is working on a new strategy that will expand connections and impact for youth ministry in USMB congregations. The strategy will focus on the student, the youth worker and the desired impact.

Student connections still important

The national gathering isn't going away. Now called the National Youth "Convention" to delineate it from district "conferences," the event will continue to be an important way for students to connect.

But Goings, who also serves as youth pastor at First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., says that in his own ministry, his impact is greater when he becomes more than an "event planner" and actively empowers students to embody the gospel in their families, school and community. Similarly, the NYC is turning attention to empowering ministry between gatherings, and the convention

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Our Mennonite Brethren churches are filled with great youth leaders; let's find a way to use that to make our ministries better.

”

will become a time to celebrate the connection and ministry that's happened in the interim.

This shift in focus might mean a change in venue. The past three conventions have been held in major cities to provide opportunities to serve, but a more intimate camp setting could be a better fit for celebration and connection. The NYC is exploring options and will be asking for input this summer on possible locations for the 2019 convention.

Connecting youth workers

NYC hopes to invest in USMB youth workers through what they are tentatively calling the "National Youth

Worker Network." All those who work with youth ministry in USMB congregations, whether full-time staff, part-time volunteer or "anything in between," will have the opportunity to connect and tap into resources to encourage and equip their ministry.

"We want to be intentional about helping youth workers connect with one another in order to encourage and support each other and to share their passions, talents and resources to build stronger youth ministries at the local church level," says Russ Claassen, Southern District youth minister and network director for the NYC. "Our Mennonite Brethren churches are filled with great youth leaders; let's find a way to use that to make our ministries better."

Claassen says that connecting with other youth workers locally is valuable. As youth pastor at Koerner Heights MB Church, Newton, Kan., he regularly meets with such a group himself.

"A network of USMB youth workers would not replace that, but enhance it," says Claassen.

In addition to a common passion for youth, USMB youth workers share a common theology and perspective on

the issues youth face. And, he points out, the network could be a place for church planters, churches that don't have youth workers or parents to find support.

Opportunities for connection have already begun. NYC partnered with Group Publishing, a well-known resource for church ministry, to offer discounted registration for their Simply Youth Ministry Conference and with the National Association of Evangelicals to offer free registration for a webinar on ministry to teens and young adults. Claassen says response to both opportunities was small, "but it's a start."

In the future, NYC hopes to offer free webinars through a partnership with the

Wichita, Kan., campus of Tabor College, the USMB school in the Midwest. And a new website being developed will include a "resource bank," where youth workers can share ideas. NYC hopes to launch the new website this summer.

The first step toward developing such a network is finding and contacting USMB youth workers, which is easier said than done. There is no USMB database of youth workers, especially volunteers, so the NYC has been investing significant time in contacting churches. Goings says that congregations can help by simply letting their youth workers know that resources are available.

Bigger impact through service

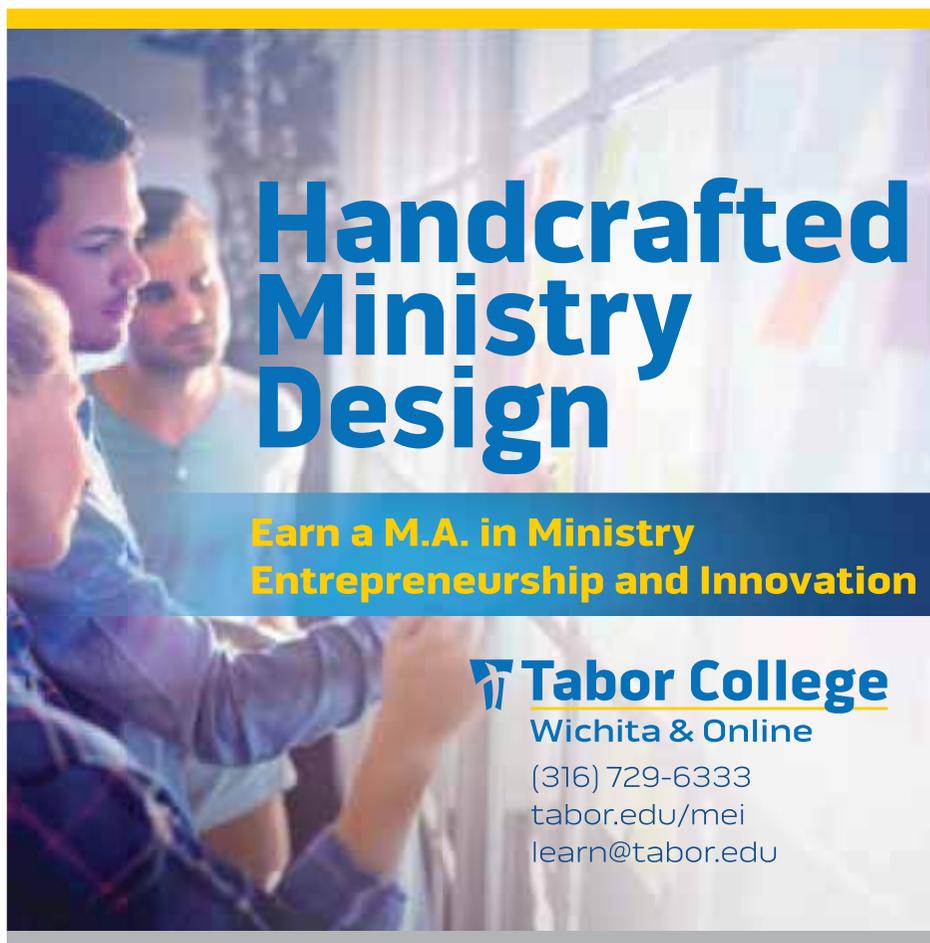
The past three National Youth Conventions have incorporated opportunities for students to serve in urban settings, which has been a powerful experience for many. But here, too, the NYC dreams of bigger things. They hope to equip students for service well beyond the convention through what they're tentatively calling Project: Serve.

Through Project: Serve, the NYC hopes to make funds available to "world changers" with ideas to serve their community. For example, suppose a youth group notices that impoverished people in their community need winter shoes. Project: Serve might help them rent a small storage unit, promote a shoe drive and distribute shoes at Christmas time.

In addition to the funds, Project: Serve will provide guidance, connecting these youth groups with reputable resources or with others who have tried similar ideas. Ideally, a "story crew" will document each funded project, and videos of the projects will be shown at National Youth Convention.

Goings cautions that Project: Serve is still a dream. While the NYC hopes to have concrete steps in place by this summer toward the next convention, youth worker network and website, it will take more time and research to implement Project: Serve. "It just means we want to get it right," Goings says.

Big dreams mean NYC is moving into "uncharted territory," as Goings says. So the NYC craves prayer as they step out in faith and seek God's guidance. They also welcome ideas or questions in this "very organic" process. Email the NYC at usmbstudents@gmail.com — Myra Holmes ▀



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Utah church grows in 2016

Gifted leaders join The Greenhouse planting team

Ten words represent 2016 for The Greenhouse Community Church, a USMB church plant in Saratoga Springs, Utah. Individually, many stories could be written about each, but collectively they tell a much larger story.

Team: After a season of prayer to raise a team of leaders, three Tabor College alumni joined The Greenhouse as bi-vocational staff. All three are gifted leaders and have quickly connected with our church, community and area. They are proclaiming God's love and grace and are living out the Good News of Jesus.

Table: Real life happens around a table. It's where we join together and our stories are shared. We share meals together at every Missional Community (MC) gathering. We gather around our tables for parties, special events and so much more. We also have begun to gather around the "table" of communion every month to share the story of God's love for us.

Gather: Weekly worship gatherings are providing more consistent opportunities to strengthen our core families and to invite others into worship, prayer, teaching and community. The addition to our team made weekly worship gatherings (versus twice a month) a reality. Allie Pankratz's focus is worship and Logan Whitney helps with the teaching. Over 80 people gathered for our first Christmas Eve gathering, many of which were Latter Day Saint friends and neighbors. Our MCs create spaces where the reality of the gospel collides with the reality of our lives. "Gathering" has taken on many other expressions this year as well.



Thanks to three recent Tabor College graduates, the Greenhouse Community Church staff grew in 2016. Drew and Allie Pankratz (far left) and Logan Whitney (far right) joined Jason and Nicole Quiring (center) and their family to serve in Northern Utah County, Utah. *Greenhouse Community Church*

Scatter: We are a church of both gathering and scattering. We gather but not at the expense of scattering. We often say we'd rather have 30 disciples who know how to scatter really well than to have 300 church-goers who only know how to gather. Scattering into where our community works and plays is especially important in an area where only .8 percent of the population are believers. The kingdom spreads through scattering.

Adventure: When we live on intentional mission every day seems to be an adventure!

Light: "I am the light of the world," says Jesus. The Greenhouse exists to reflect his light in an area where darkness masquerades as light.

Youth: After its beginning this fall, Greenhouse Youth Group (GYG) and Jr. GYG have both seen significant growth and students in our area are experiencing the gospel in new ways and many for the first time. Drew Pankratz's primary focus is youth. Within days of getting to Utah he was hired at the local high school, putting him right in the "hot spot" for getting to know the youth in our area.

Serve: From packing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to helping with the Rescue Mission's Easter event, we've continued to disciple people towards serving the world, starting at our own front door.

Celebrate: From holidays to life events, we value the opportunities to laugh and enjoy the life that God has given us.

New: 2016 was full of new experiences, connections and most excitedly new relationships in Christ. After three years, The Greenhouse still exists to "grow disciples who love God, love people and serve the world" in a very relational, organic and "missionary" way. We are continually learning new ways to live this out. —Jason Quiring

The Greenhouse Community Church was planted in 2013 by Jason and Nicole Quiring in the Northern Utah County community of Saratoga Springs, Utah. In this community, 85 to 90 percent of the area identify as Mormon while only .8 percent are Evangelical Christian, making it one of the least-reached areas of the nation. The Quirings see themselves as both "church planters" and "missionaries." Logan Whitney and Drew and Allie Pankratz joined Greenhouse in 2016.

When youth are ready to lead

How to come alongside budding leaders

“Children are our future leaders.” I often hear this phrase at children’s ministry forums, educational seminars and services directed at our youth. Quoted by kind-hearted authors, influential politicians and Christ-serving pastors, it is meant to inspire the next generation to work hard, study well and prepare for a time of service and leadership. I’m sure I have used a version of this phrase when speaking about the children in my own congregation to inspire hope for future generations.

As I walk alongside the students in my flock and hear their thoughts week in and week out, I have discovered there is a problem with this statement. Yes, these children will be leading us in years to come, but they are also ready to be leaders now.

Across the board, adult-run ministries struggle to find an appropriate spot for children to lead. And rightfully so. Most aspects of leadership require credibility and training that take years to grow into. No leadership role can be handed to a person without proper guidance and clear structure. So how do we as adults come alongside our budding leaders and allow them to serve?

Mentorship is key when developing our youngest community members and giving them a chance to use their craft. Ask those who are already serving in leadership capacities if they are willing to take on an apprentice. It will require more of their time and energy, but it will also provide one-on-one training and a safe person for the stu-

dent to talk to and work alongside. In the end, building relationship is more rewarding for the child than perfecting a skill.

When giving young leaders a space to serve, plan on and allow for mistakes. I have heard firsthand from adults that they are uninterested in including children in their area of ministry because they believe they will mess up...and they will! Instead of saying no, provide a space where a child can try and be given gentle correction. In time they will learn the rhythm and routine of their team.

Don’t set up our young leaders for failure. There are certain aspects of leadership that only called and qualified adults have the privilege and burden of carrying. Children should not be asked to count the offering or do work that involves confidential information. Someone without experience should not be asked to be the spokesperson. We do our young leaders and ourselves a disservice when we put them in positions of power they are not ready for.

Lastly, do your best to look like Jesus and encourage young people to do the same. Paul tells the blossoming church leader Timothy, “Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith and your purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

Let’s remember that children are not just our future leaders; they are current torchbearers who need our guidance and patience to serve their best. ■



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.

Creation is a living hymn

Understanding how things work leads to worship

One of my favorite toys growing up was a small plastic microscope. Its lens wasn't much stronger than a magnifying glass, so the image in the eyepiece was more of an isolated enlargement than a glimpse into the microscopic world. But it piqued my curiosity. I was fascinated just to observe something almost out of eye-reach, whether it was a leaf's bright green veins or the chinks in a roly-poly's armor.

I still carry that fascination. I like to see things up close, understand how they work. But it's an interest I often hold quietly.

Is it possible that quantifying the universe into a lab notebook steals beauty? Does understanding the "how" take away the mystery of creation and detract from the glorious splendor of God's design?

Sound, after all, is just the vibration of air molecules. And a rainbow is nothing more than light passing through moisture in the atmosphere.

Both statements are accurate. But not fully.

As products of Genesis 1, when we understand creation—such as what makes music and color—it allows us to better appreciate it. And appreciating how nature works is worshiping the Creator because nature itself reflects the Creator.

Psalms 148 winds its way through nature, commanding praise from the sun, moon, stars, lightning, hail, stormy winds, snow, clouds, mountains, hills, ocean depths, trees, wild animals, sea creatures, small creatures, cattle and birds. "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created" (Ps. 148:5).

It's not until the end of this list that humans are finally instructed to worship. Nature praises God long before we ever get started. I'd argue that when nature is put under a metaphorical microscope we can see this.

Sound may just be vibrating molecules, but those simple vibrations cause notes, which can be arranged into complex melodies and harmonies that can only be heard once the vibrations hit our ear, which turns them into electrical signals that our brain recognizes as music.

And a rainbow may just be light passing through atmospheric moisture, but that moisture is essentially a sky-sized prism created by billions of tiny water droplets suspended in air that refracts light into seven distinct hues that are projected across the heavens in a brilliant ribbon of color.

How can we understand that and not see the Creator? How can we understand that and not praise God?

In Romans Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Appreciating the complexities of the world around us isn't just comprehending dry textbook explanations. It's more like reading poetry, where complementing colors are rhyme, and shape and symmetry are meter.

Creation is a living hymn, and appreciating its beauty and complexities is reading the text. Like a hymn, we sing along best if we know the words. ▀



David Vogel serves as the worship director at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, where he has been on staff since 2013. He and his wife, Hanna, welcomed their first child, Claire Elizabeth, in January, and live in Hillsboro, where David operates a graphic design studio. David is passionate about using music and multimedia to create an environment of authentic and passionate worship.

Called by God

USMB pastors tell of God stirring in their hearts

Every Mennonite Brethren pastor will tell you a similar story. The details will be different for each one, but it will go something like this: Back in my younger days God began to stir something inside of me. It was an urging to lean into ministry—to teach, preach, disciple, lead, encourage and inspire others to follow the Jesus I had come to know and love. That “call” was something frightening, unmistakable and holy.

My story is like that. At Immanuel High School in Reedley, Calif., and later at Fresno Pacific College, now Fresno Pacific University, I was inspired by teachers and professors to embrace a high view of the Bible and the kingdom of God. As a Youth for Christ club volunteer, I helped lead junior high students to discover, accept and follow Jesus.

At my home church, Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., leaders gave me opportunities to serve and poured encouragement into my life. They supported me when a summer internship was proposed and endured my pathetically poor early attempts at preaching and leadership. People like Edmund Janzen, John Franz, Dale Warkentin and Ken Janzen nurtured my growth and development, urging me like elder Paul did with young Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God which is in you” (2 Tim 1:6).

The call of God and the affirmation of the church. That’s my story—and my hunch is it’s your pastor’s story too.

Leadership development is one of our core values in the Pacific District Conference (PDC). It’s also one of the three lead objectives of the USMB national ministry vision. In the PDC, we have had 123 young men and 110 young women serve as summer interns over the past 12 years. We partner with

local churches, send some financial support, host an orientation and encourage local church leaders to invest in the next generation. Some of those former interns are serving in full time ministry in our churches today. Whatever direction God leads, we trust they each have a greater love for Christ and his church as a result of their summer experience.

We recognize how important youth pastors are in the development of the next generation of kingdom leaders. In years past, the PDC hosted a youth pastor’s retreat. Significant relationships were developed and a number of these youth pastors are serving as lead pastors in our churches today! We invest in all of our pastors by hosting an annual pastors and spouses retreat as well. While not specifically a PDC ministry, we recognize the value of Faith Front and the early investment made in many high school students through this important, church-based discipleship program.

And let’s not forget the gift that both Fresno Pacific University and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary are to the MB family. My time at both of these schools was about so much more than mere educational development. These were places where relationships with lifelong mentors were formed. Note to college presidents: Be kind to those awkward freshmen...they may just serve on your board someday.

In the PDC we’re continually thinking about developing leaders. I encourage our entire MB family to do the same. We all have a role to play—praying, teaching, discipling, communicating words of affirmation and encouragement and contributing to the health, unity and vibrancy of our local churches. ■



Gary Wall has been the Pacific District Conference minister since 2002. In addition to his ministry among the 110 MB churches in the western U.S., he has been encouraged and challenged by his international MB experiences in India, Thailand and Colombia. He and Tami have been married for 31 years, and in the last six months they became Papa and Nana to Addilyn and Harper.

MILESTONES

Baptism/Membership

James Aleru, Phil Harmon, Pearl Heppner, Sokmarly In, Peggy Moore and Jason Smith were received Nov. 20 as members of **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Derrick Walter was received Jan. 29 as a member of **Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, SD**.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., welcomed five people as members Dec. 11: Matthew and Hillary Dills, Joseph DeStephano, Parker Goddard and Claire Witham.

Wayne and Sue Dudley, Sean and Jennifer Wilson and VT and Jo Willems were received Jan. 1 as members of **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

Ashley Kroeker, Breanna Bond, Nazrawit Tewodros, Julie Gossett and Madison Schroeder were baptized Oct. 23 at **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Dean Carmen, Chelsea Scheffer and Andy and Scarlett Gard were received Dec. 18 as members of **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.**

Brian Loosli, Stacey Loosli and Adrian LeBaron were baptized Dec. 11 at **South Mountain Community Church Lehi (Utah) Campus**.

WORKERS

Vanessa Guzman is the new pastor of spiritual formation at **Garden Park Church, Denver, Colo.** Justin Hiebert has resigned as lead pastor; his last Sunday was Jan. 29.

DEATHS

DeFehr, Cornelius A. "Neil," 84, Fresno, Calif.,

member of North Fresno Church, Oct. 10, 1932-Jan. 2, 2017. Parents: Abraham C. and Velma (Litz) DeFehr. Spouses: Martha, deceased; Luella, deceased; Sonia Niemotka DeFehr. Children: Karin Calcote, Richard, Gretta Peterson; Sonia's children: Maria Gabrielson, Anthony Niemotka, John Niemotka; five DeFehr grandchildren; seven Niemotka grandchildren.

Friesen, Norman W., Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, May 1, 1934-Dec. 20, 2016. Parents: Jesse and Lydia (Wiens) Friesen. Spouse: Doris Friesen. Children: Kelly, Rick, Rex; seven grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Isaak, Walter P., Clovis, Calif., member of College Community Church MB, Clovis, Oct. 8, 1933-Dec. 25, 2016. Parents: Peter and Helen (Duerksen) Isaak. Spouse: Eunice Wichert. Children: Matthew, Jason; five grandchildren.

Miller, Herb, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Sept. 11, 1919-Jan. 2, 2017. Parents: Otto and Anna (Foote) Miller. Spouses: Clara Frey, deceased; Jean Cain. Children: Gary Miller; stepchildren: David Cain, Pamela Lane; three grandchildren; two step-grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; three step-great-grandchildren.

Schwartz, Steven Allen, Clovis, Calif., of Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., May 21, 1941-Nov. 24, 2016. Parents: Harold and Norma Schwartz. Spouse: Lillian Unruh Klassen Schwarz. Children: David, Jennifer Endicott, Juliet Doty, Barbara Cook, Brian Klassen, Cheryl Blide; 18 grandchildren.

Staley, Eileen Naomi, Fresno, Calif., of North Fresno Church, Nov. 29, 1922-Dec. 14, 2016. Spouse: John, deceased. Children: Doug; Carol Conrow; three grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandchild.

Wiebe, Harold, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, April 22, 1927-Dec. 21,

Colorado church expands for ministry impact



The Rock Community Church, a USMB congregation in Littleton, Colo., celebrated their new facility with a grand opening Jan. 22. The 50,000-square-foot building includes an 873-seat sanctuary, 10,000 square-foot children's wing and large youth area to accommodate significant growth. Some 1,850 people attended the grand opening, including a significant number of visitors, and 35 people responded to an altar call during the two services. Bruce Fosdick, lead pastor, hopes that kind of impact will continue; The Rock hopes to see 400-600 new decisions for Christ and at least one new church planted each year through the church's efforts.

The new facility and increased ministry was made possible by a merger in April 2015 of The Rock of Southwest, a congregation of about 1,100 associated with Converge, a network with Baptist roots, and Belleview Community Church, a USMB congregation of about 120. The new building is located on the site of the former Belleview church, and a new name for the resulting congregation, The Rock Community Church, was unveiled with the new facility.

SD church encourages hospitality

Share the Care," a new ministry at Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, SD, is designed to increase hospitality within the congregation. Each week in 2017, individuals or families draw a name of another church attendee, then call and visit that person during the week. Participants are encouraged to take simple

food such as muffins or coffee to share, spend at least 30 minutes visiting, pray for that person or family during the week and fill out a response card to share their experience. Singles may visit with those of opposite gender in a public place, and couples are asked to visit together.

2016. Spouse: Carol. Children: Warran, Ward, Wade; 11 grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

Wiebe, Pete L., Otis, Oregon, former member of Birch Bay Bible Community Church, Blaine, Wash., and Dallas (Ore.) MB Church, Feb. 3, 1934-Oct. 2, 2016. Parents: Bernhard D. and Katherine (Buhler) Wiebe. Spouse: Janis Wiebe. Children: Sandra Alvarez, Gale Riley, Carol MacNeill; seven grandchildren; two great-grandsons.

REACHING IN

DISCIPLESHIP

Buhler (Kan.) MB Church and **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** hosted local IF: Gathering women's events via live stream Feb. 3-4.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church offered a class on "Human Trafficking 101" Jan. 26.

About 130 people from **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** and **Iglesia Compañerismo Cristiano, Shafter**, answered the Asset Based Community Development "gifts" survey questions, then put their gifts on display at Shafter MB Church. The conversations about assets will continue from the pulpit, in newsletter articles and conversations.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., offered a workshop Jan. 28 with Joshua Ryan Butler, author of *The Pursuing God*.

Lustre (Mont.) MB Church hosted an "Art of Marriage" enrichment weekend Jan. 20-21.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church and the Fresno, Calif., office of MB Mission hosted training on intercessory prayer Jan. 20-21.

An Advent series for adult Sunday school at **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND**, focused on "Looking at Advent through the Old Testament."

Henderson (Neb.) MB Church offered an Alpha Course for those interested in exploring the Christian faith, beginning Jan. 11.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., is offering a class on raising godly sons, based on the book *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, January through June.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., offered a three-part class on discerning and using spiritual gifts in January.

FELLOWSHIP

Families from **Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD**, gathered at a local restaurant after worship Feb. 12 for a "Jesus Loves Me Banquet" that celebrated "a love far greater than Valentine's."

North Fresno (Calif.) Church organized a Thanksgiving "turkey trot" Nov. 24. Participants brought nonperishable food items for a food pantry.

A Jan. 19 gathering of "wise, wonderful widows" from **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, featured "stone salad." The lettuce was provided, and each woman brought something to add.

Men from **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** held a wild game supper Feb. 11.

Women from **South Mountain Community Church St. George (Utah) Campus** wore pajamas, played Bunco and drank cocoa for "Bunco in our PJs" Jan. 20.

Families from **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gathered Feb. 3 for a game night.

Women from **Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif.**, went snowshoeing Jan. 21.

The children's Christmas program at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** was followed by a pie social to raise funds for the youth group.

Women from **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** and the community were invited to a craft day Jan. 21 to work on scrapbooks or other unfinished projects. They brought snacks to share and unwanted craft items to swap. Church women made Christmas-themed gifts Dec. 3 for "Craftapalooza."

Deacons from **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a Christmas luncheon for senior adults Dec. 11. The event included music from a men's quartet, a devotional and Christmas carols. Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church hosted a free concert by nationally-known singer and speaker Kathy Troccoli Feb. 19.

Families from **Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, ND**, went caroling at a local nursing home Dec. 4, followed by Christmas goodies.

Women from **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND**, packed shoebox gifts for Operation Christmas Child during a gathering Nov. 9.

Participants of a "Soup and Swap" Jan. 30 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** brought five gently-used items to swap following a meal of soups, zwieback and cookies.

The children's Christmas program at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** Dec. 11 was followed by a "tasting party." Attendees were asked to bring a large tray of homemade Christmas goodies to share.

Women donated toiletries and blankets for gift bags for a local organization when they attended a retreat Jan. 20-21 at **Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, SD**.

Hispanic congregation, Garden Park Church merge

About 100 people gathered Jan. 15 to celebrate the official joining of a Hispanic congregation with Garden Park Church, an established USMB congregation in Denver, Colo. According to Tim Sullivan, Southern District Conference (SDC) minister, this is a unique union—the first time in the SDC that a Hispanic congregation and a predominantly Anglo congregation have merged.

Peter Heim, pastor of community engagement at Garden Park, describes their first joint service as "an extraordinarily moving moment," comparing it to descriptions of heaven in which all peoples

come together to worship. "We can actually stand up to our very diverse neighborhood and say we are a truly diverse church," Heim says. "We don't just preach about God loving all people; we actually demonstrate that now."

Vanessa Guzman, now pastor of spiritual formation at Garden Park and a leader with the Hispanic congregation, says, "I think it's so important for the church and the children of God to be spearheading racial reconciliation, especially at a time when our nation needs to see us stand up and fully embody who we say that we are."



Mothers and daughters were encouraged to wear pajamas to a "PJs and Piggies" party Jan. 20 at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.** The evening included pedicures, a photo booth, crafts, a fashion show, dinner and dessert.

"Christ is the true beauty" was the theme for a women's retreat Feb. 3-4 at **Trinity Church, Portland, Ore.**

Brave youth and attendees of **Birch Bay Bible Community Church, Blaine, Wash.**, participated in a polar bear plunge Jan. 1 while others cheered them on.

Women wore ugly Christmas sweaters and exchanged holiday cookies for an event Dec. 10 at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

WORSHIP

Attendees of **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gathered in the church courtyard Jan. 1 for an evening of worship and prayer based on the theme, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name." Coffee and hot chocolate were served.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., honored first responders and law enforcement during worship Jan. 15. A potluck followed the service.

Jan. 15 was "Back to Church" Sunday at **Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, SD.** Attendees were encouraged to bring friends.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Volunteers from **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND**, sponsored a "Birthday party for Jesus" at the local elementary school Dec. 16. A Good News Club was held at the school beginning in January.

Volunteers from **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, aimed to give a plate of Christmas goodies to each of the 41 workers at the local police department in December.

GLOBALLY

Fairview (Okla.) MB Church sent a team of nine to Uganda for a medical outreach in January.

"Grants" encourage ideas, outreach

As Axiom Church builds a new facility in downtown Peoria, Ariz., they are offering funding to help build presence in that community as well. According to church plant pastor Gavin Linderman, the church has set aside a tithe of all funds given to the capital campaign, and these funds are being made available to small groups

for outreach. Groups are encouraged to pray about ways to bless the area, then apply for funds to help flesh out their ideas. Linderman says the intention is to encourage small groups to take on the church's mission for the new community, then give them fuel to do it.



CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Job Openings

Lead Pastor: Cornerstone Community Church in Harvey, ND, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. Responsibilities include preaching, teaching and providing leadership to the congregation. Please read through the brief statements of the Mennonite Brethren at www.usmb.org and the NAB's at www.nabconference.org and if in agreement, submit your resume to harveycornerstone@gmail.com

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

Lead Pastor: 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

Youth Pastor: Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., is seeking a full-time youth pastor. We want to employ someone who is in general agreement with the MB Confession of Faith and who is "dynamic" and wishes to build genuine relationships with the youth currently connected to our church and with youth in the community. Resumes or correspondence regarding details should be sent to Pastor Matthew Hamilton at mdh3939@icloud.com

Ministry Job Openings

Director: Good Neighbor Ministries, a nonprofit ministry located in Omaha, Neb., is looking for a

candidate to fill the role of director. Responsibilities include organizing work volunteers, managing service projects and building relationships with neighbors, community organizations and churches. Requirements include strong communication and interpersonal skills, some degree of handiness, vision of neighborhood renewal, working closely with the neighborhood church, Faith Bible Church, and relocating to provided housing in the Columbus Park neighborhood. Compensation includes housing, utilities and a monthly stipend of \$1,500 with the freedom to raise personal mission support. Please send resume to stephen@goodneighbornetwork.net. For more information, call Stephen Stout at: (402) 616-1250.

Agency Job Openings

Faculty: Fresno Pacific University invites applications for faculty member and program director in the School of Business. Two positions are available. This position is a full-time or part-time (to be negotiated), 11 month faculty appointment. View the complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/careers

Do we need a national conference?

USMB serves churches in many ways

Do we really need a U.S. Conference (USMB)? If it ceased to exist, would it make a difference? Let me begin answering these questions by emphatically saying, “Yes, it would be a huge loss if the U.S. Conference was not a part of the Mennonite Brethren family in the U.S.” And yet, I get asked these questions quite often. Sometimes an additional question is, “What does the U.S. Conference actually do?”

In answering these questions, I could point out that the things USMB provides for our conference of churches is a long, long list. Things that sometimes go unnoticed like the 501c3 tax exemption covering for our churches. We fund our national Board of Faith and Life (BFL) that provides theological oversight and provide significant funding for the National Youth Commission.

USMB is co-owner, along with the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, of MB Mission and provides four MB Mission board representatives. We also join with the Canadian Conference to subsidize the binational Historical Commission.

I could continue, and I shall: USMB provides a healthy subsidy to the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) delivering crucial ministry among our many national MB conferences all over the world. Faith-Front, a youth leadership development program of Tabor College, receives substantial USMB subsidy. The list of smaller investments for ministry goes on and on.

Some of the larger initiatives provided by USMB include the *Christian Leader* (CL), the bimonthly magazine keeping us all connected and informed. In addition, the CL staff provides C-Link every two weeks, giving up-to-date news from the MB world. Snapshot is produced twice each month and sends out the latest in church planting news.

Add to these social media communication like Facebook and Twitter and there are a lot of news bits flying to and fro keeping our MB family together. There’s more: We are creating a new USMB website to provide a wealth of resources, information and connection.

I haven’t yet mentioned Mission USA and church planting. There are currently 11 church plants receiving USMB subsidy and project management support. We are reaching countless people with the gospel.

Networking among our churches is a hallmark of the Future Story. In light of that, I have been sitting down over coffee with dozens of MB pastors simply asking, “How can USMB serve you and help you connect with other MB churches? How can we help you maximize your church’s God-given ministry potential?” I have had many meaningful conversations.

In my previous column, I mentioned that I’ll work hard at being forthcoming and not hiding information. So I’ll honestly mention that not every pastor is enthusiastic about the Future Story or even USMB. I’ve had a couple of pastors indicate that they are removing their church’s support because they don’t like the Future Story. My response has been that even if a church or pastor doesn’t resonate—at least yet—with the Future Story, there is so much that we do together that, as I said at the beginning, we would truly miss USMB if it were to cease to exist.

USMB is our MB family umbrella. USMB helps keep us all together. It provides many things, some visible, some not so visible, but all are vital. We’re planning to do much more as we serve our U.S. family of churches, increasing impact—together. We invite everyone and every church to jump on board! ■



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



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