

CHRISTIAN LEADER

January / February 2018

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THROUGH

The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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Pictured: David and Essey
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(Aurora, Colo.)

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How's your follow-through?

Our goal should be living like Jesus

I've never played a competitive sport, but my children have, and I've sat through enough basketball games to understand the importance of following through once a player has released the basketball. When a player shoots the ball, her arm comes up and straightens and then she flicks her wrist to release the ball. To follow through means to hold that position until the ball reaches the hoop. This gives the shot greater accuracy.

Follow-through takes practice. Coaches know that while reminding their players to follow through is important, the best way to help players with follow-through is the various practice drills that have players repeat the follow-through motion over and over again until that motion becomes automatic—until it's a habit.

It turns out that the Christian life also requires follow-through. Pastor and author Chuck Swindoll says: "The goal of every Christian should be to live like a Christian... not just to think about it, not just to learn about it, but to do it—to carry it out. The Bible commands it, the Lord empowers it, the world expects it, the church needs it. In fact, the greatest advertisement for Christ is the individual who models that life."

How's your follow-through? That's the underlying question addressed by the feature articles in this issue—the three printed in the magazine and the two additional essays posted online (www.christianleadermag.com). Pastor Lynn Kauffman challenges those of us who struggle with anger to do more than just manage that negative emotion. Are you spiritually stuck? Karen Bartlett tells how spiritual direction helped her move forward in her relationship with God. When you retire, will it be an extended vacation or will you continue to use your talent and time to serve, asks Dennis Fast, who recently retired and now has two part-time jobs. Our online articles highlight the important role parents play in their children's faith journey and how walking and talking with the Good Shepherd can nourish our desire to forgive the way Jesus did.

Helping U.S. Mennonite Brethren practice their follow-through—what we often call discipleship—will be the focus of USMB efforts in 2018, says Don Morris, USMB national director. Just as a coach helps athletes develop good follow-through habits, USMB ministries will focus on assisting local churches with intentional disciple-making efforts. As a USMB ministry, one of our 2018 goals for the *Christian Leader* is that the feature essays, columns and news stories we publish will encourage and inspire you to follow through. Living like a Christian—following through on the priorities that Jesus outlines in the Gospels—means that we daily review and rehearse what that obedience involves, until more often than not, our responses reflect what Jesus would do. May we be empowered by the Holy Spirit and encouraged by one another to not just think or talk about modeling our lives after Jesus—but to do it. ▀



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Giving Tuesday raises \$14,000-plus

Donations to USMB on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017, totaled \$14,566. Funds raised will be used to benefit internships for potential leaders, LEAD initiatives and church planting.

“I appreciate so much those who donated much-needed funds for USMB mission and ministry on Giving Tuesday,” says USMB national director Don Morris. “These donations will be used to serve our MB pastors, leaders and churches to help maximize ministry potential—reaching more people with the gospel. It’s about Jesus. We do this together, and it has eternal impact. Thank you to all those who gave.”

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. In the five years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed more than \$125,000.—
USMB

Boards hold fall meetings

The U.S. Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life (BFL), Leadership Board and National Strategy Team held their fall meetings the last week in September 2017, in Denver, Colo.

The U.S. BFL met Sept. 26 and resumed ongoing discussions on a variety of topics and projects, including plans to host the first-ever summit of district and national BFL members. The goal of this gathering is to build bridges between the districts and to share ideas and resources, says U.S. BFL chair Tim Sullivan. One topic that will be discussed is credentialing women in pastoral roles.

The USMB Leadership Board, meeting Sept. 28-29, approved an historic cooperative partnership between USMB, C2C Network, the



Brent Warkentin, Tim Sullivan, Scott Thomas and Fred Leonard at the NST meeting. *Photo credit: USMB*

church planting ministry of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches that works across denominations, and MB Mission that will enhance U.S. Mennonite Brethren evangelism and church planting efforts, as well as the USMB commitment to leadership development and discipleship. With this new partnership, C2C US will assume responsibility for church plant project management. The Leadership Board also approved a budget of \$940,200 for 2018 that includes significant increases in funding for internships and Leadership Education And Development (LEAD) initiatives.

When the National Strategy Team (NST) met Sept. 27, the focus was on working through details related to the new partnership between USMB, C2C US and MB Mission. The NST, comprised of the five USMB district ministers and the MB Foundation CEO, MB Mission general director and USMB national director, met for the morning with C2C US director Scott Thomas, C2C North American director Gord Fleming and the C2C US Lead Team, which is Brad Klassen, Fred Leonard, Paul Robie and Brent Warkentin.—*CL*

CDC grows by eight churches

Between 125-130 pastors and delegates gathered for the 107th Central District Conference Convention and Leadership Summit at Henderson, (Neb.) MB Church, Nov. 3-4, 2017. In a historic moment, the conference welcomed eight new churches into the CDC family, including three church plants and five churches from the former North Central Conference of Mennonite Church USA.



Delegates and guests gather around leaders and pastors from the eight churches that joined the CDC for a time of prayer. *Photo credit: Janae Rempel*

With a theme of “Holding Fast to the Treasure,” the event included worship and business sessions, workshops and round table discussions and a celebration banquet.

Other business included a financial overview of the budget, District Ministries Council reports and reports by Mennonite Brethren and inter-Mennonite agencies. Scott Thomas, C2C US director, gave a series of messages encouraging attendees that believers are jars of clay, victorious through Christ who, because of the power of God through Jesus, can face suffering and who can be renewed in spirit by faith in a resurrected Christ. —CL

PDC convention celebrates diversity

Celebrating its diversity was the focus of the Pacific District Conference (PDC) biennial convention held Oct. 27-28 at Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif. Delegates welcomed two established churches as members of the PDC: El Rey Ya Viene Iglesia Cristiana, a Spanish-language congregation in Arleta, Calif., and New Beginnings Community Church,

a 10-year-old congregation in Fresno with 300 members. Three congregations were presented as free-standing church plants: Christ Community Church Sellwood, Portland, Ore., Friends of Jesus Church, Las Vegas, Nev., and Axiom Church, Phoenix, Ariz.

Memorable portions of the convention included the Board of Home Missions’ dinner and program Friday evening that highlighted many of the 15 PDC church plants and other congregations involved in community outreach. An emotional moment occurred when PDC minister Gary Wall read a statement affirming the district’s Hispanic Council and asking for forgiveness for times when he was insensitive and inattentive to Hispanic pastors, leaders and churches. Wall demonstrated his commitment to serving all PDC congregations by washing the feet of Ramon Arguello, chair of the PDC Hispanic Council. —CL

Central and Southern districts hold youth conferences

The Central District Youth Confer-

ence was held at Inspiration Hills Camp near Inwood, Iowa, Nov. 9-12, 2017. The theme of the conference, attended by 152 students and leaders, was “By Grace, Through Faith,” based on Ephesians 2:8-9. Bob Lenz from Life Promotions, a nonprofit organization in Neenah, Wis., was the guest speaker.

“Bob did an amazing job connecting with the teens in each of the five sessions,” says Anthony Lind, a member of the Central District youth committee. “He did an excellent job of balancing funny and serious stories, Scripture and personal application.”

Stephen Humber, regional mobilizer for MB Mission, led a session on intercessory prayer, and representatives from FaithFront, Tabor College and MB Mission gave presentations. Saturday, camp staff led groups through team and leadership-building activities focusing on communication, teamwork and encouragement.

The next weekend, the Southern District Youth Conference was held Nov. 17-19, 2017, at Buhler (Kan.) MB Church. More than 500 youth and adults attended the conference. The theme was “The Missing Peace.”

“At SDYC, we experienced some things from different perspectives and worked at becoming equipped to handle multiple areas of conflict—bullying, race relations, truth versus grace discussions—in a healthy way,” says Russ Claassen, SDC youth minister.

Speakers were Keith Spencer, social media consultant and minister from Wichita, Kan., and Sam McVey Jr., leader of Disciple Nations ministry. The Jake Stemo Band led worship. The event also included workshops, including presentations by FaithFront, MB Mission and Mennonite Central Committee. —CL

Tabor College dedicates new Center for the Arts

Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kan., held a dedication ceremony Dec. 9 for



Representatives of the five congregations recognized at the PDC convention fill the stage. El Rey Ya Viene Iglesia Cristiana and New Beginnings Community Church were welcomed as new members. Christ Community Church Sellwood, Friends of Jesus Church and Axiom Church were recognized as free-standing congregations. Photo credit: Connie Faber

5 minutes with...

Ed Holmes



the Shari Flaming Center for the Arts. The \$13 million facility is the largest building project in school history. The program included a dedication address delivered by professor Del Gray and a composition for chorus, brass and organ written by professor Brad Vogel.

While the 823-seat Richert Auditorium was filled for the Saturday afternoon dedication, every seat was taken Sunday evening and an overflow was created in Prieb Harder Theater to accommodate the nearly 900 people who attended Handel's *Messiah*, the first performance in the new facility. Approximately 190 vocalists and orchestra members filled the stage for the annual Christmas concert.

"My heart is full of gratitude to all who helped make it happen," says Tabor president Jules Glanzer. "So many people have been part of this project. The thousands of donors that have given out of their abundance and sacrificially, those who planned the facility, those who raised the funds, those who designed and built the building, and those who planned the dedication service... all have helped make it happen." —TC/CL

Commentaries published

Herald Press has announced the release of two new volumes in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. *1 Corinthians*, the 32nd volume in the series was published Oct. 10, 2017 and is written by pastor Dan Nighswander. *Leviticus*, the 33rd volume in the series published Oct. 31, 2017, is written by Old Testament scholar Perry B. Yoder. Both commentaries are available at <http://store.mennomedia.org>. —HP



years of drag racing, Holmes, from Trailhead Church in Littleton, has won six track championships, two of them in the 2017 season.

Tell us about your car.

It's a gold 1971 Dodge Charger RT with a 493 cubic inch motor—a 440 block bored 0.030" over with a 4.15" crankshaft with a compression ratio of 13.5:1. The car is big and pretty heavy but moves pretty good.

Is it specially made for racing?

I can drive it around town, but it's a little rowdy. Sometimes people rev their engines next to me. I shake my head – but then I usually leave them at the stoplight. On the track I can run in most E.T. [elapsed time] brackets from the street car class to a full-out race car class.

How does the NHRA (National Hot Rod Association) E.T. bracket competition work?

You don't have to have a fast, full-blown car to go racing. The competition is to meet your "dial-in" – the time you predict it will take your car to drive the quarter-mile track. Cars race two at a time. The slower car takes off first and as they get close to the finish both cars will come side-by-side and in theory finish at the same time. Typical races are single elimination.

What makes for a win?

Getting your dial-in right is key. You make a couple of time trials, then you use factors like wind speed, humidity, temperature and air density to calculate your dial-in. Factors change dramatically here in Denver so you have to keep adjusting.

How about the human factor?

Reaction time is time you don't get back. At the starting line, there's a half second between the last yellow and the green light. The key is to get the car and driver to react consistently together for a .020 to .035 second reaction time. Take your foot off early and go "red" is jumping the start. Leave too late and your competition gets around you at the finish line. If you have a 0.1 second reaction time most generally you're going home.

How fast do you go?

The car is set up to run 11.60s to 11.70s here in Denver. Sometimes the air is better and I'll run the quarter mile in the 11.50 second range. At the finish line, I'm going between 114 and 117 miles per hour depending on weather conditions.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Do you preach?

Reflecting on two years as a multisite campus pastor

“Do you preach?” That’s typically the question I’m asked after people hear that I’m a South Mountain Community Church (SMCC) multisite campus pastor. There are a lot of misconceptions regarding the “multisite” model, so I get it.

Multisite churches come in lots of different shapes and sizes. There’s satellite campuses, video-venues and “families of churches” led by location pastors, site pastors and campus pastors. My role is so much different from traditional planting that the title “church planter” might not fit, but then again, my role is also different from most campus pastors I’ve met.

“Campus planter” might best describe my last two years here at SMCC Lehi. To clear up confusion regarding my role and to counter the negative impression some might have regarding multisite, let me quickly give you two reasons why I love it and why I would not change the last two years for anything.

We’ve reached lots of people in a very short amount of time. Two years ago, we started a brand-new ministry in Lehi, Utah, a place that is less than .005 evangelical. And in two short years we have seen over 100 people join a group, 100 people join a team and we have baptized over 30 adults. We’ve hired new staff, started midweek ministries for all ages and launched a second service. I don’t care what you call our model or what you call me, but that’s why we’re all in on this kingdom-building approach. At SMCC, multisite is more about church planting than anything else. Simply put, we want to reach as many people as possible.

Multisite has been a gift to my family. My wife and I are nowhere near burnout, which cannot be said about many of my church planting friends. My wife, Carrisa, has dozens of other close friends on staff and so do I. These relationships strengthened us when we landed in a brand-new city 1,000 miles from home. Did we parachute in? Yes. Did it feel like that? No. Why? The multisite model.

I work on a team of great leaders who are my best friends. Since we have a central support team that serves my campus administratively, I’m free to spend the best part of my hours leading people, leading teams and growing the Lehi campus.

Now, let’s change gears for a minute. Here’s something else you should know: It’s really hard. I wrestle with all the insecurities that any church planter might experience. We had a crowd on Day One but no community. We had to solve that. We had to build relationships, build trust, build teams and build out a building—and we did all that in five months. It was, and still is, hard.

I can’t take credit for SMCC Lehi, and that’s part of why I love it. I stand on the shoulders of years of vision casting, fund raising and healthy ministry. I can’t say I’m the lead pastor, and that’s fine with me. There are days I pinch myself because I’m living a church planter’s dream. This is not by accident; this is the strategic advantage of multisite.

So, the next time you meet a person who serves at a multisite church, ask what excites them. Don’t ask if they preach. By the way, I preach about 45 weeks a year. ▀



Eric Nelson is the campus pastor of South Mountain Community Church Lehi, in Lehi, Utah. Eric and his wife, Carrisa, are the parents of Nora and Jack. After a 10-year career in student ministry in the Pacific Northwest, the Nelsons journeyed to Utah to plant SMCC Lehi. Eric is passionate about church planting, preaching and all things leadership. He would love to connect with you about church planting or the multisite model of SMCC. Contact him at eric.nelson@smccutah.org

God's wonderful plan

Buying a house brings family to God

My name is Yadira Toledo, and I would like to share some of the things God has done in my life. I grew up Catholic and attended church regularly but felt that what I was hearing did not help me. I filled my life with parties and always enjoyed socializing. Yet, I felt empty and unsatisfied with life.

A few years ago, my family and I were looking for a house. When we entered this one particular house, I had the impression that this was the right house for us.

"This is the house I want," I told my husband.

Little did we know that God was orchestrating his plans behind the scene. We found out later that one of our neighbors was Pastor Juan Wall and his family. During the 2016 vacation Bible school, which included a class for mothers, they invited us to attend.

I never expected it, but when I attended the church, it was such a wonderful experience. I could have never imagined that God had such wonderful plans for me and my family. I never imagined that by purchasing this home, we would find God and be saved.

During worship on the second

Sunday that we went, we were singing a song about how beautiful the Lord is and I knew then that this was for me. It was during this service that the Lord touched my heart, and I was born again.

It hasn't always been easy since, especially with my extended family and friends who have opposed the new direction of my life. They do not understand why I am changing, and they want the old Yadira back. But the old Yadira does not exist; Jesus has transformed me into a new person. The Lord has kept me strong. I know the Lord is with me, and with him all things are possible.

I thank God every day for touching my heart and the hearts of my family. My husband gave his heart to Jesus recently, and I am so grateful. My son, who is 7 years old, is such an encouragement. He is very public about his faith and challenges adults to do the same. He prays at school for lunch and is unashamed of his newfound faith. I am so blessed to be able to say that God lives in our hearts and in our home.

I encourage everyone that has not given their heart to Jesus to turn to the Lord. **D**



Yadira Toledo
Yadira Toledo lives in Selma, Calif. She and her husband, Oscar, have two children, Jazmin and Jonathan. The family attends Iglesia Fuente de Vida, a USMB congregation in Parlier, Calif.

Beyond Managing OUT anger

Gracious engagement extends beyond managing anger

Years ago, I participated in anger management classes held on our church campus. A secular counseling group rented one of our rooms and led the year-long course made up of weekly two-hour sessions. The 20 or so guys in the class were court-ordered to attend because their specific anger issues had led them to adopt violent behaviors towards their spouses or girlfriends.

While I have never physically violated my wife or daughter, my anger issues once led to shameful verbal outbursts toward both. At times my co-workers were also on the receiving end of these wrathful flare-ups. Perhaps as destructive as these emotional explosions was my ability to mask my seething anger between these explosions. My beaming smile on the outside almost always was accompanied by emotional torment on the inside. It was destroying me both relationally and emotionally. So, I was grateful when the counselor allowed me to join the class. I had something to offer others, but I still had room to grow.

Three types of anger

The Bible is an amazing resource when it comes to understanding the nature of anger. There are three basic words for “anger” in the Greek New Testament. Each appears in Ephesians 4.

In Ephesians 4:26 Paul writes, “*In your anger do not sin...*” This is *orgē*—righteous anger. *Orgē* should be the first emotion we feel when we witness injustices or experience wrongdoings at the hands of others. However, if left unchecked it can lead to stronger expressions of anger and more destructive behaviors. Our physical bodies also can begin to suffer the consequences of unrestrained anger. When responded to correctly, righteous anger will lead to righteous ways of living and a righteous reaction to remedy the injustice or wrongdoing at hand.

Both Jesus and Paul use this same word—*orgē*—with a negative connotation. In these situations, the word refers to an unrighteous anger. The context determines if it is righteous or unrighteous anger. Jesus even goes so far as to say this kind of anger is the same as murder, since both unrighteous anger and murder “will be subject to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22).

In Ephesians 4:26 Paul goes on to say, “...Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” The word “angry” here is *parorgismos* and refers to an anger that is accompanied by exasperation, indignation and irritation. I liken this anger to the smile-on-the-outside-but-storms-on-the-inside type of anger. This anger is a stronger form of *orgē*, and it can easily morph into the more destructive *thumos* anger mentioned next. For this reason, Paul says, “Do not give the devil a foothold” (v. 27). Satan is all about moving us from bad to worse. He delights in moving us in the direction of “all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (v. 31).

Thumos anger is the shortest in duration. It is the most destructive type of anger. *Thumos* refers to an intense feeling of anger, fury and rage. It produces a turbulent commotion within that moves us to live out our anger in more destructive ways.

The joy of forgiveness

I have felt each of these emotions. At the same time, I can gladly say I have also experienced growing victories over the destructive forms of anger. I am profoundly grateful for the spiritual and emotional healing that God has brought to my life as I have sought his forgiveness.

I am also grateful for those brothers and sisters I have hurt in the past that have forgiven me. The words, “I forgive you, Lynn,” are music to my ears, whether they are spoken by God or by those I have sinned against.

The benefits of forgiveness and reconciliation have been many. Last week I had lunch with a brother in Christ with whom I “lost it” over 10 years ago. Over the years, God has changed me from essentially hating this brother in my heart to having a heart that now honors him. I once avoided him at all cost. Now I enjoy being in his presence.

Years ago, I was amazed to see a brother in the faith on the pastoral search committee that was discerning my candidacy for a pastoral ministry. Years earlier I had had numerous run-ins with him. My relationship with him was broken. Sadly, I also had let too many suns go down on my anger. And I suffered because of this. Today I greatly admire this person. He too forgave me when I sought his forgiveness. I am always delighted when our paths cross.

Until I die I will face the temptation to move from righteous anger to unrighteous anger and on to anger that potentially ruins relationships. Satan will never give up. That’s just his nature.

Blessings of gracious engagement

A new tool in my spiritual arsenal involves engaging graciously with others, especially with those who have hurt me. I believe God wants to lead us beyond managing our anger to guiding us into the blessed waters of gracious engagement. Anger management is good, but gracious engagement is better. Much better! Actually, it is gracious engagement that enables us to deal more effectively with our anger and work toward reconciliation.

Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:31 to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” is about anger management. Verse 32, where Paul calls us to be “kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,” is about gracious engagement.

Gracious engagement with others is not something developed overnight. Paul literally says, “Be becoming kind and compassionate.” To engage graciously with others is a long, difficult and painful process. It doesn’t come naturally to be kind, gentle, friendly, full of compassion and forgiving toward those who have hurt us.

Growing in these graces best happens when we remember God’s forgiving ways toward us. Paul states, “...forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (v 32). Notice how Paul calls us to remember God’s forgiving ways toward us in the past. We remember his benevolent spirit, gentleness,

“

When responded to correctly, righteous anger will lead to righteous ways of living and a righteous reaction to remedy the injustice or wrongdoing at hand.

”

friendliness and compassion toward us when we hurt him in the past. And then we demonstrate mercy and forgive others in the present.

The Greek word Paul uses for “forgive” is much more extensive than just pardoning somebody. It speaks of showing one’s self gracious (thus the expression “gracious engagement”), kind, benevolent; to pardon, give graciously, give freely, etc.

Remembering God’s graciousness toward us in the past provides us with an example of how we should be gracious toward others in the present. Jesus said something similar about love: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34-35). As we recognize his loving ways toward us, so are we to love others. As we recognize God’s merciful ways toward us so are we to be merciful toward others.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” We are blessed and made happy when we choose the path of gracious engagement. The blessings are many as we seek the way of Jesus in our fight against unrighteous anger, bitterness, wrath and clamor. And it all begins with Jesus. Jesus shows mercy to us and then we show mercy to others.

Lynn Kauffman is a bivocational pastor at Grace Community Church in Sanger, Calif., and serves the church’s Spanish-language congregation. Kauffman also works as a part-time chaplain in a major medical center in the Fresno area. “Hospital chaplaincy has been one of my best jobs ever,” says Lynn. “There in recent weeks I have witnessed firsthand the results of choosing the path of hate, bitterness and unforgiveness or the path of forgiveness and mercy. Withholding forgiveness and mercy pays horrific dividends spiritually, mentally, emotionally, relationally and physically speaking.”

He and his wife, Mary, have served as missionaries in Spain for 20 years with MB Mission and have pastored three different USMB congregations in the Fresno, Calif., area.

By Karen Bartlett

LETTING GOD GUIDE

Spiritual direction helped me get “unstuck”

I distinctly remember waking up one morning desperate to find a deeper understanding of faith and reason for a relationship with God. Life had become dull and spiritually dry, with very little excitement or motivation for connecting with God or others. My faith felt shallow, and I was bored by what I was reading in Scripture. Somehow I knew in my gut that I had to experience God on a deeper, richer level in order to continue on my faith journey and to give me hope that following Jesus had a real purpose.

I decided to seek spiritual direction to help me with what I was feeling, and a friend recommended Sister Pauline. I met with her, felt comfortable with her style and continued meeting her for the next two years. Talking with a spiritual director allowed me to begin encountering God in the caverns of my soul, where past pain resided and held me hostage. The Holy Spirit began to invade the recesses of my heart and slowly brought healing and restoration to unresolved life experiences.

My spiritual director continually pointed me to my faith experiences—good and bad—and helped me connect experiences with my feelings of God’s presence and absence along the way. She simply listened or invited me to specific times of silence and reflection while I pondered my present and past and poured out what I could not say in other settings. And in doing so, she allowed my soul to be heard in ways I had not even been aware needed to be voiced.

Soul searching often leads us to an encounter with God that cannot be second-guessed, that reaches into the depth of our being and creates a sense of connection and being known by our Creator. Sometimes when we have questions about life, it is appropriate and necessary to have a counselor or mentor give us guidance or answers. But there are times when we need to allow God to be the one who leads us to a new and deeper understanding of ourselves and faith. This is what spiritual direction did for me.

The inner being is where transformation begins, and hurts or doubts can be explored within the context of allowing God to reveal what is going on inside of us in order for further transformation to occur. The attributes of peace, joy and goodness cannot be fabricated. These emanate from the very essence of our soul, from what is happening within us. As God meets us, these characteristics become more authentic. Spiritual direction simply taps into what is going on in our soul that is helping or hindering us to live in the most healthy way possible, in living life to the fullest with God and in community.

Who are spiritual directors and how are they trained? Spiritual directors are trained in cohorts, usually for a minimum of two years, through various programs led by more experienced directors. However, each director is unique in how they approach direction because it stems from the director’s unique personality and experience.

Each program is also unique in that it may focus on different aspects of direction. Some may focus more on healing, some on listening, some on traditions of Catholicism and some with a Protestant approach. When searching for a director, one needs to be aware that there are directors who are not Christ-centered; this is a caution to note and to be cognizant of when talking with a potential director.

What does a spiritual director do? I see my role as a spiritual director as simply creating space for people to encounter God by providing a quiet, calm environment where

questions, doubts, pain and joy can be explored.

Susan Phillips, author of *Candlelight, Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction*, says, “The presence of a spiritual director helps another person articulate what is usually experienced in silence.”

In other words, spiritual direction is the practice of attentively and compassionately listening to the soul and heart in relationship to God, relying on God to be the ultimate director.

Hence, one ear is open to the directee, the other ear is open to God.

Spiritual direction is an ancient practice within the Christian tradition, going back centuries. Direction is an art, a practice of listening. It is not counseling or advice-giving. It is not goal-oriented. The sole purpose is to help the directee encounter God in the deepest places for the sake of moving forward on the faith journey, to help someone get “unstuck.”

How often does one meet? There is not usually a set expectation. Sometimes people commit to meeting only once in a while, while others are keen to meet more often. Some people make monthly appointments and others make appointments as needed. The directee initiates meetings, and the director is available upon request. There is often a fee associated with the sessions, and this varies with each director. Although face to face is preferable, Facetime, Skype and phone calls are options for long-distance sessions.

As a director, how have I observed spiritual direction help others? After a time of silence and reflection, a directee said she had felt Jesus sitting next to her, leaning in to hear what she was saying and providing a sense of comfort and peace despite an unsettling situation.

Another person stated she felt God’s unconditional love in a way she had never felt before while praying through a particular Scripture passage, and this gave her courage to make a difficult decision. Another person’s face was transformed from troubled and confused to a brighter countenance and a wide grin.

Not every session ends with clarity or life-changing decisions, but these are just a few examples of what happens during spiritual direction. God meets people where they are in surprising ways. I could never fabricate what happens authentically between directee and God through Christ-centered conversation and focus. I am often equally amazed at what happens during a session, but I can say without hesitation that every session provides hope and concrete evidence that God is ready to engage with us anytime, anywhere if we just stop and listen.

Spiritual direction has changed my life. I feel more connected to God through Christ than ever before because of the exercises and disciplines I have learned with my director and through training. Direction may not be for everyone, but it helped me discover the “more” to faith that I was searching for and has brought me into a vibrant and life-giving understanding and hope for my future.

Karen Bartlett (LMSW) lives with her husband, Rick, in Wichita, Kan., where she is a school social worker for K-12 students with social/emotional needs. She attended MB Biblical Seminary (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary) in Fresno, Calif., earning a certificate in theology and became a spiritual director after attending two years of training through the School of Sustainable Faith.

RETHINKING

What will you do when you can
do whatever you want?

A green arrow-shaped sign pointing to the right, mounted on a wooden post. The sign has a white border and the word "Retirement?" written in large, white, sans-serif font. The sign is slightly tilted upwards and to the right. The background is a plain, light color.

Retirement?

RETIREMENT

By Dennis Fast

In the spring of 2016, I transitioned out of senior pastoral leadership at Reedley (Calif.) MB Church. Connie, my wife, and I enjoyed 17 wonderful years with that congregation, following 16 years with Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church. That followed six years of growing as Butler Ave. MB Church in Fresno, Calif., loved us and nurtured our call to pastoral ministry.

Today, hardly a week goes by that someone doesn't greet me with, "So how is retirement?" I hesitate and say, "It's great, and I enjoy both of my jobs."

Connie and I rarely discussed a typical retirement, but we did contemplate a transition to another kind of ministry once our senior pastoral leadership concluded. Conference ministries helped shape our thinking, as I served on the MB Mission board and held U.S. Conference and district leadership roles. These allowed us to visit Mennonite Brethren churches across the U.S. and Canada and see God at work in Latin America and Asia.

These experiences generated in us a desire to keep serving in another capacity when we "retired." In the needs of smaller churches, global ministries and para-church organizations we felt drawn to bring the gift of experience to one or more of these entities. Today I serve as church relations director for MB Foundation and associate pastor at Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church—both part-time positions.

What will you do when you can do whatever you want? Will retirement look like an extended vacation or will it be shaped by your vocation? What would it

look like for you to rethink traditional retirement?

I was inspired recently by a phone call from Ron Voth, a friend in Fairview, Okla.

"Dennis, we are selling our land and our livestock, but we don't want to sit around drinking tea and playing golf," he said.

Ron and his wife, Pam, are unique in that when they had a desire to serve they set out to find a place where their passion and gifts could be put to good use. How many of us would actually take a road trip to visit a series of ministries in order to discover a good fit for giving our time in service? I'm guessing Ron and Pam are the exception, but they are convinced that more of us would volunteer if we just knew where we are needed.

The headline of a recent article caught my attention. It read, "Meaningful vocation or perpetual vacation." Author Beryl Jantzi suggests that retirement can be divided into the go-go stage, the slow-go stage and the no-go stage. He calls those of us in the go-go stage to dream new dreams about making this time of life fulfilling.

Jantzi also quotes an article from The Motley Fool, a multimedia financial-services company, which reports why some current retirees may carry more anxiety than their parents did. The report shows:

- 59 percent are relying on Social Security as their primary source of income;
- 45 percent have no retirement savings;
- 30 percent postponed retirement because they can't afford to stop working; and
- 44 percent are carrying significant amounts of consumer and mortgage debt.

It is true that the traditional "retire at 65" with a modest income of Social Security and work-place pension can no longer be taken for granted.

Boomers were not great savers, and the economic

“
*...by thinking
“transition” more
than “retirement”
you will gain a
fresh perspective
and add life to
your years.*
”

downturn of the last 10 years changed the retirement landscape for many. Twelve percent of those responding to a CareerBuilder survey claim they don't think they will have enough money to ever retire.

Another reality is that at one time you retired at 65 and expected to live until 70. But not anymore. Many of us can expect to live well into our 80's and beyond. What will we do with all this time?

One way to explore this question is to find a model—people who inspire and teach by example to make your 'retirement' years some of your best.

One such couple is Gordon and Karen Wiebe of Reedley, Calif. While serving with the U.S. Conference Christian service program in Nova Scotia back in the 1970's, they met an elderly couple who had left their farm to be caretakers of a Christian camp on Prince Edward Island. Wiebes recently wrote from Princeville, N.C., where they were on assignment with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), that the model set by that couple over 40 years ago stuck with them. They determined then to at some point leave their farm and give themselves in service.

Just from observation, I would say the Wiebes are having the time of their life. In just a few years they have served with MB Mission in Mexico, MDS in North Carolina, Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS) and with Christian camps in Utah and California—multiple times. They also frequently serve close to home.

Another model for me is Ron Hudson, a friend who worked in public school teaching and administration. He turned down a job offer in Oregon near family and grandchildren to serve at Immanuel schools in Reedley, Calif. He based his decision on a commitment he and his wife, Ann, made to live out Colossians 1:28: "We proclaim him, teaching and admonishing everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

The joy Ron and Ann exude spills over and is part of their secret in relating to young students while they are retirement age. He says that recently Psalm 71:18 has been an inspiration: "So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might

to another generation, your power to all those to come."

A common denominator among the three couples I've referenced is a strong desire to be kingdom people, seeing God's kingdom advanced and lives changed. None of them is asking, "What's in it for me?"

Here's what Gordon and Karen say: "Don't 'retire.' Instead, change your focus. With more discretionary time, ask God how you can serve him. There are many opportunities when you are available and willing. Serving is not in the going but in the doing. You can serve far away or across the street, full-time or part-time, physically or by praying. As long as you have breath, God can use you as you are today."

Ten thousand Baby-Boomers are turning 65 every day, and many are looking for a meaningful life. If you have chosen a more typical retirement, this article is not intended to pile on the guilt. There are hundreds of variations on what I'm trying to convey, and not all of them are ministry related.

Let's take another look at the gift of these years and ask God to fill them with purpose and meaning. Just because the word "retirement" is not in the Bible doesn't mean it's wrong to stop working. But as believers, transition may be a healthier concept, because if we have breath and a heartbeat, God has a meaningful purpose for our lives.

At MB Foundation we frequently talk about leaving a legacy. While that requires creative financial planning, it certainly need not be limited to money. How about your use of time and your service? What an excellent legacy you could leave with some flexibility and out-of-the-box thinking. Ask God to guide and inspire you to keep serving in these years we call retirement. And for those of you about to arrive at this stage, by thinking "transition" more than "retirement" you will gain a fresh perspective and add life to your years.

Dennis Fast was lead pastor in three Mennonite Brethren churches for 35 years. He is currently the associate pastor at Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church and church relations director for MB Foundation, both part-time positions. He and Connie have been married for 47 years and enjoy their soon-to-be 13 grandchildren. His hobbies are tennis and motorcycle riding.

WHERE TO SERVE

Need an idea for where to serve? Here are a few ideas:

- Christian camps or conference centers
- Christian colleges or universities, including Tabor College (www.tabor.edu), Fresno Pacific University (www.fresno.edu) and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (www.fresno.edu/admissions/biblical-seminary)
- MB Mission (www.mbmission.org); regional offices located in Fresno, Calif., and Hillsboro, Kan.)
- Mennonite Disaster Service (www.mds.mennonite.net)
- Mennonite Central Committee (www.mcc.org)

Former MC USA congregations join USMB

CDC welcomes five churches

In a historic moment, the Central District Conference (CDC) welcomed five churches from the former North Central Conference (NCC) of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) into membership by unanimous vote during its 107th convention hosted by Henderson (Neb.) MB Church, Nov. 3-4, 2017.

"We are honored that God brought the former NCC into our district," says Rick Eshbaugh, CDC minister, in an email interview. "Their love for God's Word and enthusiasm for ministry have encouraged us, and we look forward to partnering together. We are blessed to have them with us."

The addition of these five churches brings the total number of CDC congregations to 33, located in Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Indiana and Wisconsin.

100 years of faithfulness

The NCC was established in 1920 as the Dakota-Montana Conference, later expanding to become the North Central Conference with more than 25 churches in Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin, although that number has declined.

"The biggest thing for me as I think about the past 100 years is the faithfulness of the ones who have gone before us," says Jesse Swiers, former NCC moderator and pastor of Lake Region Mennonite Church, in an email interview. "All have been volunteers in the Lord's Army and never received a salary."

Each year, an annual assembly included business sessions and fellowship and sharing of stories testifying to God's faithfulness. Men's, women's and cou-



Jesse Swiers, pastor of Lake Region Mennonite Church near Detroit Lakes, Minn., speaks during the CDC convention in November as representatives from the eight churches joining the conference listen. Five of the new member churches joining the CDC are former MC USA congregations. "God is renewing us, geographically, to work together," Swiers said. "I look forward to being a pastor in the Central District." *Photo credit: Janae Rempel*

ples' retreats offered rest and refreshment, while a pastor enrichment weekend allowed pastoral couples to gather and pray.

Bible schools reached a record high of 13 in 1972 with 840 children attending. Churches hosted youth rallies three times a year, and an August summer camp for children ages 10 to 18 was held at Sand Hill Lake Bible Camp in Foston, Minn. Staffed by volunteers, this camp continues today.

The NCC partnered with Mennonite Mission Network, the Mennonite Church USA mission ministry, to plant churches in Argentina. Other ministries included Women's Mission and Service Commission and a gift and thrift shop in Minot, N.D. The conference partnered with other Anabaptist groups for the Upper Midwest Relief Sales. The NCC Bulletin was published quarterly from 1965 to 2013.

"Although the NCC organization has ended, the conference mission lives on," says John Kauffman, NCC historian. "Our congregations and their families have birthed and mentored many people over the years who are now serving in other places near and abroad.

"We now look forward in joining a larger family of like faith, to continue building on the past with renewed hope for the future," he says.

Embracing a new direction

During its annual assembly July 17-19, 2015, the NCC passed a motion to begin the process of withdrawing membership from MC USA.

Earlier that month, during a convention in Kansas City, Mo., MC USA delegates passed a resolution calling for forbearance regarding same-sex covenanted unions. While delegates also affirmed the 2001 Membership Guidelines that uphold traditional marriage and say pastors may not perform same-sex marriages, the NCC congregations were concerned that approval of the Membership Guidelines was by a smaller margin than a call for forbearance.

"The NCC has come to recognize and identify ways in which MC USA has moved away from what we understand to be traditional, orthodox interpretations of Scripture from an Anabaptist perspective," said then-NCC conference minister Fred Kanagy in a 2015 interview with *Mennonite World Review*. "The movement of many in MC USA in thinking, discernment and practice has created a separation, and the trajectory seems to indicate a widening divide, which we feel requires of us that we either change our convictions or change our affiliation."

The Evana Network, the Conservative Mennonite Conference and the CDC extended invitations to the congregations, and in June 2017, the conference voted to dissolve, leaving the churches to vote independently regarding their next steps. The conference board did express a desire for the churches to stay together and recommended the CDC.

Eshbaugh visited several of the churches and presented at the NCC annual convention. Church leaders attended the CDC's Renewal Conference in July 2017.

While three churches remain in discussion, five voted to join the CDC. The process of affiliation culminated at the CDC convention when the five churches were unanimously approved as members of the CDC family.

Representatives from four of the churches spoke, all affirming the decision to join the CDC, expressing thanks for the warm welcome and anticipating a shared partnership moving forward.

"God is renewing us, geographically, to work together," Swiers said. "I look forward to being a pastor in the Central District."

Meet our new members

The five NCC congregations have a diverse history but share a commitment to ministry in their communities.

Coalridge Mennonite Church, Dagmar, Mont., was started by settlers in 1912. Sunday morning attendance is around 30, mostly current or retired farmers and ranchers. The church has been without a minister for more than 10 years, so one of three elders brings a message. Because more than half of attendees live 30 miles from the church, the congregation eats lunch at church each Sunday. Ministries and outreach include a twice-monthly Bible study, singing at the local nursing home and caroling and passing out fruit baskets. The church is in need of a handicapped-accessible facility.

Exeland Mennonite Church is a rural congregation near Exeland, Wis., with roots in an early 1900's Amish settlement. The present structure was com-

pleted in 1953. The congregation consists mostly of elderly people, including singles and individuals and families with special needs. Farming, forestry and service industries are main sources of employment. The church, which added a handicapped-accessible fellowship hall in 2010, holds yearly banquets, funerals for the community and fellowship dinners. A year ago, the church's pastor resigned because of illness, and lay leaders alternate giving sermons. The congregation prayerfully seeks a pastor, as well as families with children.

Lake Region Mennonite Church is located in the rural woods of Minnesota lake country 15 minutes east of Detroit Lakes. The congregation, led by pastor Jesse Swiers, was established in 1929. Sunday attendance is between 25 and 50. Ministries include singing at a nursing home, a weekly public school Bible lesson, annual vacation Bible school and serving at the community thrift store. The church has an active youth group and annually helps operate a week of youth camp.

Sand Lake Chapel in Stone Lake, Wis., is in an area boasting lakes and winter sports activities. People from northern Indiana moved to the area to farm and planted the church in the early 1970's. Today, approximately one-third of church attendance is comprised of preschool and elementary-aged children. The rest is young and maturing adults. Sunday mornings are for encouraging, discipling and sending. Pastor David Hochstetler has visions to update the building to include a wheelchair-friendly entrance and to facilitate a community game night once a month.

Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church is located on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Ogema, Minn. The church began in the 1940's when Pennsylvania missionaries came to initiate an outreach to the Native American people. The church, which officially began in 1946, offers Sunday school, vacation Bible school, youth groups and summer camps to children and youth in the community. Many church members are self-employed. Average attendance is about 60, a number that increases to 80

in the summer when people come to their lake homes in the area. As a result, an additional outreach is to summer attendees. Current needs include youth leaders and help with music. Delmar Yoder is currently the pastor. — *Janae Rempel*

Church planting initiative spans two USMB districts

California congregation plants seven daughter churches

When Southern District Conference minister Tim Sullivan first heard about a church plant in Milan, Mo., that needed assistance with paperwork, he immediately offered to help, even though he knew little about the church.

As Sullivan discovered, Iglesia La Senda Antigua, planted in 2009, is one of seven daughter churches of Iglesia de Restauracion La Senda Antigua, a Pacific District Conference church in Pa-coima, Calif.

The church in Milan needed help registering as a corporation in the state of Missouri, Sullivan says, and had reached out to Pastor Rafael Paz in Pa-coima, who contacted pastor and PDC Hispanic council member Juan Wall, who connected the church with Sullivan based on his relative proximity to the church. Sullivan lives in Wichita, Kan.

Sullivan says although the church initially was not looking to join the USMB family, he still offered to help, and together, they successfully filed the paperwork.

Sullivan maintained communication, three times visiting Milan—a town with a population of 1,960 in the 2010 census.

"I think there's a fairly significant migrant Hispanic population (in Milan) because of the packing plants and the agriculture in the area," he says, adding



Donna and Tim Sullivan, SDC minister, fifth and sixth from left, stand with pastors from California and Missouri during Iglesia La Senda Antigua's anniversary celebration in Milan, Mo., in October 2017. Pictured with the Sullivans, from left, are: David Galdamez, Romeo Garcia, Iris and Tino Zuniga, Irma and Rafael Paz, Patrocinio and Carmen Vicente, Lela and Luis Alberto. *Photo credit: SDC*

that the congregation itself is comprised largely of Central American immigrants and holds its services in Spanish.

When Pastor Patrocinio Vicente moved to Milan, a group of brothers talked with him about starting a church in an unfinished building.

"I remembered the vision I had," Vicente says in an email interview. "The church I saw was not completely finished, but it was half-way built. Then I called my pastor, Rafael Paz, from California. He told me that the church would buy this building."

Four individuals worked to finish the building.

"It was difficult, but we were dedicated to finish the church for God," Vicente says. "After nine months of dedication to build the church, it was opened up in August 2010."

Connecting with the SDC

Sullivan invited the congregation to the SDC convention in Wichita, Kan., in July 2017. About 20 adults and children came.

"What I enjoyed this last summer in the Southern District Conference was that I was able to know other pastors from the Southern District," Vicente says. "I also enjoyed testimonies from the preachers that day. Also, I learned how to be a better leader in the church from the advice they gave."

At the end of the convention, Vicente told Sullivan he wanted his church to be

part of the USMB family.

"I have heard great testimony from the Mennonite Brethren," Vicente says. "Our general pastor, Rafael Paz, told us

how many blessings they have received when they joined."

The church is working through the application process, functioning as a

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member of the SDC, although without voting privileges. The congregation is expected to be formally received as a member at the 2019 SDC convention.

Sullivan says the prospect of engaging with the church in Milan is exciting but will also provide challenges.

“It’s going to be challenging because we don’t have any churches that are really within any real relating distance,” he says. “(Pastor Vicente) and his wife both work full-time jobs. Building connections and networks is going to be tougher.”

The SDC has another church in Missouri—Watershed in Kansas City, and one Hispanic congregation—Templo Betania in Ulysses, Kan.

The church in Milan will bring vitality and a richness of culture to the SDC.

“They bring in enthusiasm and a deep, deep love for Jesus, for the Word of God, for living faithfully,” Sullivan says. “They bring a richness. The Ethiopian churches are a bit the same way in terms of being more attuned to visions and dreams and spiritual warfare. That’s stuff that I think we can learn and benefit from.”

Expanding the family

The church in Milan is just one of seven churches planted by Pastor Paz and the mother church, which began in Pacoima in 1990 and has an attendance of 250.

Two daughter churches are USMB members: Iglesia De Restauracion La Senda Antigua in Lancaster, Calif., planted in 2008 and pastored by David Galdamez; and Iglesia De Restauracion La Senda Antigua, in Bakersfield, Calif., planted in 2013 and pastored by Victor Alonzo.

Additional church plants are located in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico; Villa Nueva, Guatemala and El Salvador.

“My vision (for church-planting) is to win souls for the Kingdom of God,” Paz says in an email interview translated

from Spanish, adding that church planters are selected from the leaders who preach weekly in homes, who then undergo leadership training.

Paz says the mother and daughter churches stay connected.

“I visit them and preach periodically in each of the churches,” he says. “I also send leaders to preach in each one of the churches. We have a unified service once a year. And we get all of the churches together to celebrate baptisms.” —*Janae Rempel*

Deaf congregation serves in Haiti

No language barrier helps Americans, Haitians connect

L laurelglen Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif., sends short-term mission teams internationally every year. One of the biggest challenges for participants is the language barrier.

But for a team of six who traveled to Haiti in August, this was not the case. They had never been to the country, nor had they learned the native language, Creole. Instead, the American team was able to communicate with the Haitians using a language both preferred—American Sign Language.

“When we got there, we immediately connected to the deaf community,” says Jeff Jackson, team leader and Laurelglen Deaf Church pastor in an email interview. “The deaf Haitians were so thrilled to see deaf Americans, because they got to know one another and share cultures using sign language.”

Jackson, who has visited Haiti over 40 times, led the team with his wife, Maura. This is the second team Laurelglen has sent to Haiti; the first was in 2016. The group flew to the country via Missionary Flights International, with the goal of supporting the Haiti Chris-

tian Center for the Deaf.

“There are many deaf scattered all over Haiti,” Jackson says. “This is an opportunity for the deaf to have school, to have a place to learn and study reading and writing. That way they will have the capability to read and understand the gospel of good news.”

Connecting across cultures

The relationship between the Laurelglen deaf congregation and the deaf community in Haiti began several years ago. After assisting with hurricane relief in the Dominican Republic, Jackson met missionaries from the Christian Center and visited their facility.

“I was blown away,” Jackson says. “They all captured my heart.”

He returned many times over the next several years.

Unfortunately, the center was eventually forced to close, and those who were once united were scattered again, says Jackson.

But leaders began home Bible studies and worship services again, and after



Jeff Jackson, center, team leader and pastor of Laurelglen Deaf Church, brought a group of volunteers from the Bakersfield, Calif., church to minister at the Haiti Christian Center for the Deaf. *Photo credit: Laurelglen Deaf Church*

saving money for seven years, they purchased land. They constructed a ramshackle building using whatever supplies—wood, tin and cardboard—could be found.

Laurelglen provided funds for food, materials, salaries and labor. Other churches joined the effort and helped construct a building from cement and hardier material. Construction is ongoing but nearing completion.

“It’s amazing to see what’s been happening, even though they have been through several barriers along the way, such as hurricanes and bad weather,” Jackson says.

Opportunities to serve

During their time in Haiti, the Laurelglen team supported the deaf community in a number of ways.

Team members taught Bible study workshops on the parable of the sower, the fruits of the spirit and the armor of God. As a result, two men prayed to invite Jesus as their Savior. The team also led a Sunday service, providing the sermon, music, testimonies and prayer.

“It was a successful and awesome event throughout the weekend,” Jackson says. “The Haitian deaf adults were thrilled and attentive because we are deaf sharing to the deaf in their language.”

For multiple days, the team assisted with the construction of the Christian Center, painting and cleaning trash to help prepare for the start of school for 34 students and 12 staff members.

The week was capped off by baptizing six Haitians in a nearby river.

“We all celebrated with joy, giving them a huge congratulations,” Jackson says. “It was beautiful.”

Team members inspired, changed

Other than Jackson and his wife, the other members of the Laurelglen team had never been on a mission trip outside of the United States. They were changed by their experience and

wished they could have stayed longer.

Estefani Arevalo was struck by the Haitian’s dedication to gathering together. A leader of the 20-year-old group at Laurelglen’s deaf congregation, she has often observed Americans making excuses for going to church. In contrast, the Haitians would walk long distances over dangerous roads to gather.

“They really inspired me,” Arevalo says. “God opened my eyes, and being around those who are on fire for the Lord has also made me have a fire for the Lord.”

Deborah Marlatt says she learned about friendship, patience, sharing, giving, humility and standing bold in her faith.

“Life in Haiti is hard, poverty there is extreme and real, but that didn’t stop them from living for Jesus,” says Marlatt. “Their love for Jesus and each other is so contagious.”

Jackson, who plans to take more teams to Haiti next summer, is glad to see a rekindling interest in evangelism in his congregation. Only 1.5 percent of the deaf in the country know Jesus, according to the Laurelglen website.

“I definitely saw that this team was impacted in an almighty way,” Jackson says. “They came home with a different, new perspective, which motivates them to continue to share the gospel of good news in sign language to their peers.”

— Jenae Suderman

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Local churches host national livestream conference

IF:Gathering designed as discipleship tool

USMB women are among the hundreds of women nationwide and around the world preparing to host women from their congregations and communities for the fifth IF:Gathering 2018, a unique simulcast conference to be held Feb. 9-10.

IF:Gathering, founded in 2013, is the brainchild of Jennie Allen, a pastor's wife and author from Austin, Texas. The vision of IF:Gathering is to work across denominational lines to gather, equip and unleash women to be disciples who make disciples by providing resources that local church leaders can use to serve other women.

A livestream conference that brings nationally-recognized speakers to local venues is a great fit for the situation in which Rachel Baker, women's ministry leader at South Mountain Community Church (SMCC)—West Jordan Campus, finds herself.

"Utah is such an unusual place to do ministry," says Baker, who moved to Utah two years ago with her husband Kile, who is the SMCC-West Jordan campus pastor. "There were so many things available to us [in California and Colorado], and we came to Utah and there is nothing for women here," Baker says.

Being part of a large women's gathering shapes one's understanding of God and his people, Baker says. "It's so neat to commune with the larger body of Christ and to realize that God's church is not isolated. We are all connected to each other. We're this web, this beautiful large church and I think the women here in Utah had no idea that we are part of this beautiful large church."



The IF:Local hosted by SMCC-West Jordan is one way Christian women are encouraged to be disciples making disciples making disciples, says Rachel Baker. "If you live in Utah and call yourself a Christian, you are called to ministry," she says.

The opportunity to gather as the body of Christ across denominational lines is what motivated Sara Wichert, Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, to initiate a community-wide IF:Local in 2016 and again in 2017. This year the planning team involves seven women representing six churches.

"Our hope is that through this weekend, our community of women are encouraged to love God more and then to go out and love others," Wichert says. "One of my favorite parts of our time together has been gathering with like-minded believers across generations and denominations."

The IF:Local planning team in Garden City, Kan., is also comprised of women from a variety of churches, including Garden Valley Church, the USMB congregation in that city. Lesa Ensz, who represents Garden Valley on the planning team, says women appreciate attending a local conference. "There was great fellowship, worship and encouragement," she says.

IF:Gathering begins Friday evening and concludes late Saturday afternoon so most IF:Locals provide Saturday lunch. Local organizers have the option of using the IF:Gathering live-stream or purchasing the digital download. Of the five IF:Local organizers interviewed for this story, three are planning to watch

the 2018 live-stream and two will be using the download, holding their IF:Local on another weekend. The IF:Local at SMCC-West Jordan, which uses the download, also uses their own worship team.

Organizers encourage those who are new to hosting an IF:Local to provide good information on what to expect. "There are a lot of women who don't know what it's all about," says Lisa Clubb, who is on the planning team at Buhler (Kan.) MB Church.

Organizers agree that keeping it simple and being flexible is key.

"If your turnout isn't as big as you'd hoped, always remember God is in control and the ladies who need to hear what's being said will be there," says Clubb. "And if it grows bigger than you expected, God has that under control too."

Stacey Canaday, of Grace Community Church in Sanger, Calif., says IF:Gathering provides a "safe environment where women can have authentic conversations with one another, which leads to greater faith and deeper relationships. Jesus will meet us wherever and whenever we invite him into the conversation, and IF:Gathering is a great tool to help start the conversation."

—Connie Faber

Ministry to people “not like us”

The Life Center becoming more multicultural

The Life Center, a Mennonite Brethren church in Lenoir, N.C., is becoming what long-time pastor Terry Hunt has yearned for—a healthy, multicultural church.

“When we started looking for new ways to grow and impact our community some 12 years ago, we found that the huge majority of African-Americans in our community were already churchgoers,” says Hunt, who is African-American. “So, we began to pray and ask the Lord what to do, and we felt God saying that we needed to take the gospel to people who weren’t like us.”

Hunt, along with The Life Center leaders, began to ask what they needed to do to be able to reach a different culture. They found that to become a multicultural church meant that, for one thing, they could no longer focus solely on the worship style that members of the congregation had grown up with.

“We no longer just use traditional African-American music; we now sing more contemporary music that people listen to on the radio,” Hunt says.

It also meant starting the worship service on time and stopping on time.

“We used to start whenever we felt like it, and sometimes we could go on and on well past normal lunch time,” he says with a chuckle.

When asked what some of the good outcomes have been in becoming more multicultural, Hunt says. “Our church now better reflects the makeup of our community, which makes us more attractive when people come to our church, and they see people of different ethnicities. The mix of different people groups also allows us to go into various

ethnic neighborhoods and do outreach, rather than just the African-American part of our community.”

Hunt adds, “Once we got to really know people who were not like us, it changed us for the better, knocking down some of those old walls.”

When asked what advice he has for congregations who would like to change to better reflect the diversity of their communities, Hunt starts with the need to address racism.

“If churches are not currently experiencing a multicultural mix of people, a first step in becoming more diverse is identifying that racism is a sin,” says Hunt. “The church has allowed the culture to shape our views about what our

churches should look like. We’ve bought into that lie and we have segregated ourselves.”

Hunt says, “If a church really wants to diversify, it needs to take a strong look at itself to determine if the church is open, welcoming, warm and inviting for people who are not like (them.) Are we willing to make room for people who are not like us? That includes allowing people who are of different ethnicities to be involved in our small groups, worship teams, activities and even leadership roles. Our churches should model what the kingdom of heaven will look like—before we actually get there!”

—USMB



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Thomas pioneers C2C work in U.S.

God's hand evident in Thomas' journey

In light of the new collaborative partnership between USMB, C2C Network and MB Mission, the Christian Leader visited with Scott Thomas, director of C2C US, in an email interview to introduce him to readers.

Scott Thomas is passionate about helping people come to faith in Jesus and become disciples who multiply the gospel in their communities.

Since August 2016, Thomas has served as U.S. director of C2C Net-

work, a multid denominational disciple-making ministry that helps assess, train and coach church planters in order to multiply the gospel in communities from sea to sea.

But Thomas' call to ministry came when he was just a teenager.

Call to ministry

Thomas and his wife, Jeannie, who currently reside in Nashville, share the same Colorado hometown where they grew up in the same church. The couple has been married 36 years and have two married sons and two grandchildren.

Sports played a large role in Thomas' early life. He attended college in Colorado on a basketball scholarship then coached the sport for 20 years while serving as a pastor.

Although Thomas grew up in church—his Sunday school teacher led him to Jesus when he was 9—his faith journey was not always smooth.

"I walked away from the church from age 14 to 19," he says. "(I) was in a dramatic and life-threatening car accident that simultaneously led me back to church and to give my life to him, to do as God desired.

"At age 19, I immediately began working in the youth ministry—although I was not remotely qualified. God used me to impact teenagers—with my athletic influence—and I took my first youth pastorate at age 20 while in university."

Thomas' call to ministry stemmed from 1 Cor. 4:1-5.

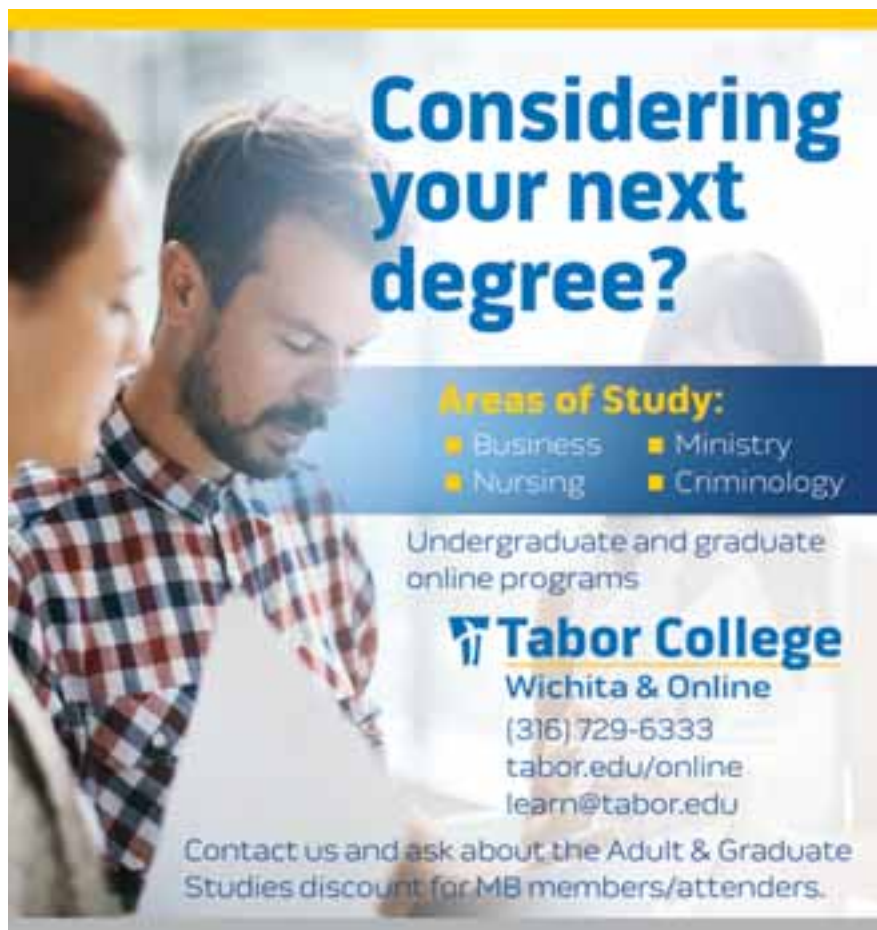
"The Lord called me to be his servant for his glory," he says. "It was a huge leap from my life of repetitive sin to a recognized son. Interestingly, I immediately felt called to church-plant at 20 years old. I knew I needed years of pastoral training. I led three replant churches before launching a new plant in 2003."

Thomas attended Bible colleges in Michigan and Colorado, earning his master's degree in Christian Leadership and doing graduate work in business administration.

He was a youth pastor in Colorado for 10 years before becoming lead pastor of a church in Idaho. Thomas held lead pastoral roles in Idaho and Colorado for 17 years before leading church-planting for Acts 29 Network from Seattle. He served 10 years there as a board member and director and then president.

Disappointment to opportunity

While at Acts 29, Thomas and Gord Fleming, current C2C North American director, were colleagues serving the same church planter with Acts 29 and the British Columbia MB Conference. Fleming and Mark Burch, C2C Canadian director, came to Seattle to share with Thomas their vision to launch a new nationwide network.



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“They will say that they raided my file cabinets, but I gave them a thumb drive that had all of our systems and practices in digital format, and I offered to help in any way they desired,” Thomas says. “Gord invited me to serve on the inaugural C2C advisory team, and I also had the privilege to coach Gord in those early years.”

In 2013, Thomas moved to Nashville to start a church-planting school. When plans did not come to fruition because of lack of funding, Thomas was devastated.

“I didn’t tell anyone during those initial distressing few weeks,” he says. “I merely sought the Lord with intense prayer. God impressed upon me that I was to equip and encourage pastors and their families in a Barnabas-type role. This was a role I had not ever taken. A couple of days later, Gord called me out of the blue to consider helping him in a supportive, ‘Barnabas’ role to serve C2C.”

Thomas began as a full-time contract employee with C2C in December 2013, becoming C2C associate national director in June 2014. Five months later, he and Jeannie moved to Toronto.

Their plans hit a detour when, on a flight to Denver in March 2015, Jeannie passed out as a result of a serious kidney condition, and per doctor’s recommendation, had to stay in Denver, living in her father’s basement for 18 months battling to become healthy enough to relocate.

Thomas returned to Colorado on weekends, and as a result, started an MB church in Pueblo, Colo.

“(I) handed it off to a planter after C2C formally expanded into the U.S.,” he says. “It remains a highlight of my life, and we had the joy of working closely with Don Morris and Tim Sullivan to partner as a USMB church and with Jon Wiebe for a church building loan from MB Foundation.”

Serving with C2C US

Thomas became U.S. director of C2C



on Aug. 1, 2016, and he and Jeannie, whose health has improved, moved from Toronto to Nashville.

As C2C US director, Thomas facilitates discernment interviews and formal assessment with potential church planters, coaches existing church planters and provides training opportunities and recruiting events.

Thomas serves on local teams providing temporary governance for church plants and collaborates with USMB district ministers and leaders for USMB church planting. He also works with Fleming and a team of USMB pastors to inspire and equip churches and planters. C2C Network depends on donations to operate so Thomas also does fundraising.

C2C’s focus is less on church planting and more on helping people who place their faith in Jesus in turn to multiply the gospel.

“We don’t just want more churches; we want to plant the right kind of churches,” Thomas says. “Nothing transforms a city or spreads the gospel more effectively than the planting of a gospel-centered, Spirit-led, mission-focused church.”

Church planters often face funding challenges and discouragement with the slow process of gathering and growing a group of believers, Thomas says. He co-authored the book, *Gospel Coach*, to help equip pastors to disciple others. He has trained about 5,000 leaders with this method, he says.

A collaborative partnership

At its September 2017 meetings, the USMB Leadership Board approved a recommendation outlining a cooperative partnership between USMB, C2C Network and MB Mission. Read more about it here: (<https://christianleadermag.com/leadership-board-finalizes-historic-partnership/>).

“The most exciting aspect of this collaborative partnership among C2C, USMB, the districts and MB Mission is that we can synergistically focus on local, national and global mission with risk-taking faith,” Thomas says. “I have really enjoyed getting to interact with the church planters launched originally with the districts and USMB. I love hearing their stories of faith, of vision, of perseverance and of patient joy in the midst of a tough challenge.”

Thomas says the sustainability of some MB churches is being threatened as people move to cities, increasing the need for church-planting in urban areas.

Thomas has these goals for 2018: establishing prayer partners in all 50 states; establishing a financial support base from USMB districts, local churches and individuals; partnering with churches to plant 12 MB churches; hiring help to enable continued expansion of services to MB church plants; launching a church-planting school; having recruiting events in every district and a major conference; establishing a U.S.-based assessment center; and developing a leadership structure for sending church planters.

Key to a successful church planting venture is empowerment by God’s Spirit, Thomas says.

“No talent, no strategy, no creativity, no method and no location will ensure a fruitful church plant,” he says. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it’ (Psalm 127:1). Jesus said, ‘I will build my church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it’” (Matt. 16:18). —*Janae Rempel*

Making disciples in all nations

Working together for one local, national, global mission

Two and a half years ago at a U.S. Mennonite Brethren leadership summit in San Diego, Calif., where the future ministry structure of the conference was being discussed, the Lord made it clear that he wanted us to consider what our ministries could give to one another rather than what a future structure could give to us. I was challenged to consider what MB Mission could contribute to the missional health of our conference and churches, not just globally but also here in North America. After extensive consultation and prayer, a collaborative vision for “one mission – local, national and global” is becoming a reality. The Canadian Conference of MB Churches recently released the C2C church planting network to join MB Mission in serving local churches and conferences in the U.S. and beyond.

MB Mission is committed to the three anchor causes of church planting, disciple making and leadership development that USMB churches have defined as the core strategy. In many ways, we have been working at all three of these causes globally for 117 years, and we are now released to also support our U.S. Conference, districts, churches and schools in these same efforts here at home.

In November 2017, we assisted all our USMB church planter couples in attending the continental C2C church planters’ summit in Quebec City. Don Morris, USMB national director, shared with the hundreds of participants why working through C2C was a strategic partnership for USMB. We heard from David and Essey Yirdaw, church planters in Denver, Colo., how God has provided resources, a better meeting location and new families in this ministry. David, the son of an Ethiopian immigrant family to Denver, described the multinational character of the church God is giving them in Denver. God is sending church planters from Africa to reach our cities. Mission is now “from everywhere to

everywhere,” and it is local, national and global.

I meet regularly with Don Morris and our district ministers as the National Strategy Team to discern and coordinate national mission strategy and resourcing. We have affirmed C2C as our national church planting resource network. A team of USMB pastors—Brent Warkentin, Paul Robie, Brad Klassen and Fred Leonard—have joined Don in providing ongoing counsel and support to Scott Thomas, the C2C US national director. This investment by leaders from missionally engaged and growing MB churches is a big win for our family. We are now also serving and networking with other denominational families who want to join the C2C network. God is using the Mennonite Brethren to serve and bless others in his kingdom as we together consider what God is asking us to share, not just receive.

Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18), and then he gave his disciples the task of making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all he commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). We believe that means all of us are called to live on mission and share the gospel in our neighborhoods locally, together through C2C nationally and together through MB Mission globally. Our “One Mission” is the mission of Jesus, and we are joining disciples of Jesus around the world in that effort.

At our last National Strategy Team meeting we agreed to assist local churches interested in developing a local, national and global mission strategy. The local expression of that strategy must include equipping all of us to live on mission, not just those who serve internationally. We look forward to what this integrated approach to mission equipping and spiritual renewal can mean for both our church health and witness in this world. ■



Randy Friesen is the general director of MB Mission, the North American Mennonite Brethren church planting ministry whose vision is holistic church planting that transforms communities among the least reached and whose daily focus is to multiply healthy disciples and missional leaders. If you are interested in receiving Friesen's daily devotional which takes you through the Bible each year, you can sign up at www.mbmission.org. There are also stories on video that will encourage your faith and connect you to the global church.

MILESTONES

Baptism/Membership

Sheyla Villanueva, Kyrsten Wilson, Zoe Smith and Lacie Messerly were baptized Dec. 3 at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**.

Valerie Elwell Kadera, Les Lutt, Barb Lutt, Tim Rowell, Annelies Rowell, Nate Yoder and Grace Yoder were received as members Nov. 19 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**. Annelies Rowell was baptized.

Jack Maier, Tami Maier, Madi Sheppard, Janice Willems and Katie Bair were received as members at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, Nov. 19.

Jessica Heard, Lyndon Perry, Sean Williams, Julie Williams, Matt Geiger, Becca Geiger, Josh Randol, Robyn Randol, William Hawkins and Kim Hawkins were received as members at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, Nov. 19.

Alex Newkirk, Lauren Newkirk, Bella Gonzales, Klarisa Gonzales, Austin Dunn and Kylee Brewster were baptized and received as members Nov. 12 at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.** Joseph Delgado and Michael Dyer were received as members.

Laura Marrufo and Hilda Humphrey were received as members at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church** Nov. 5. Laura Marrufo was baptized.

Katie Pearson, Shayann Helm, Megan Nooriala, Kaity Haskins, Tony Kowalewski, Hallie Morgan and Ashtyn Barr were baptized Oct. 29 at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**.

Ryan Workman, Julie Workman, Neah Oleson, Jayme Garcia and Jeremi Garcia were baptized Oct. 29 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**.

Pamela Belmore, Joel LePere, Anna LePere, Mimi Perez, Charles Riley, Tonya Riley and

Michael Vaughn were received as members Oct. 29 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Ava Baechler was baptized Oct. 22 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**.

Dominik Proffitt, Hannah Proffitt, Scott Soptick and Terri Sturgeon were baptized and received as members Oct. 15 at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.** Ken Penner and Emily Soptick were received as members.

Ryan Bianchi, Tim Cotham, Derick Graham, Lukah Henderson, Mackenzie Huckeba, Colton Kaiser, Abigail Langdon, Giahna Morrison, Irijah Morrison, Drew Parks, Ashley Pavletich, Lincoln Pavletich, Cody Pray, Emalee Reynoso, Matthew Schelebo Sr., Matthew Schelebo Jr., Desirae Schelebo, Keyata Thurman and Anderson Toelke were baptized Oct. 15 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Carson Duba, Gracelyn Fast, Kerstyn Fast, Kristina Gonzalez, Kelsi Houge, Tory Reinders, Alexis Roth, Justin Roth and Avery Schumaker were baptized Oct. 15 at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**

Allison Wood, Daniel Hofer, Ethan Enns, Gavin Enns, Jackie Avila, Joshua Reimer, Nicole Ward, Stephanie Wall and Tommy Balakian were baptized Oct. 8 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church**.

Katarina Becker, Brooking Becker, Jacob Huang, Lindsey Huang, Elizabeth Whittle and Dwight Hackett were received as members Sept. 24 at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Christian Yingling, Mark McComas and Amy McComas were baptized Sept. 24 at **South Mountain Community Church, West Jordan (Utah) Campus**.

Stephanie Burkholder, Hannah Koster, Ranisha Reif, Kimberly McQueen and Tyler McQueen were baptized Sept. 24 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.** Richard Brin, Liam Buller, Olivia Davis, Jared Kisner, Analeise Knisley, Kaitlyn Knisley, Blake Larson and Jada Thomas were baptized Aug. 27.

New Hope Bible Church concludes 60-year ministry

New Hope Bible Church, Grants Pass, Ore., held its final meeting Oct. 15, 2017, with baptism, breakfast, praise and worship, baby dedication, church history and a message from Gary Wall, Pacific District Conference (PDC) district minister.

New Hope was formally organized in 1957 as the Grants Pass Mennonite Church. In 1993, the church joined the PDC. Through the years, New Hope was involved in youth classes and activities, Bible studies, various Mennonite and USMB organizations, bilingual services, support of community services, prison ministry and U.S. and foreign missions.

"I celebrate and honor the ministry and faithfulness of the New Hope Bible Church family," says Wall. "I have deep respect and admiration for the congregation and leaders who served faithfully and well. The legacy of this Christ-centered church will live on indeed."

Wall affirms New Hope pastor Lowell Stutzman for his 20-year ministry that came to an abrupt end when Stutzman died suddenly in March 2016. "Lowell's ministry reached far beyond Grants Pass," Wall says. "He impacted young men and women who are serving in overseas mission today. He inspired a congregation to embrace the Jesus way, unpopular and costly though it may be. Lowell loved people and worked diligently at building relationships with Hispanic congregation members, creating an inclusive fellowship of believers." —CL



Church receives playground equipment

Christmas came early for the children of Grace Community Church in Sanger, Calif. In September, Grace Community received playground equipment from Jackson Elementary School, its adopted school across the street. JES removed the equipment for construction

and could not reuse it once removed. Sanger Unified School District had the equipment disassembled and delivered to the church at no cost. The Playcraft equipment originally cost \$31,726. —CL

Roland Lekey and Elsie Lekey were received as members Sept. 17 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**.

Eight people were baptized Oct. 8 at **Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.**

Four people were baptized at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

WORKERS

USMB National Director Don Morris was ordained Nov. 12 at **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**

Ben Friesen was installed Oct. 15 as lead pastor at **Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**

DEATHS

Argaw, Henoah N., Aurora, Colo., member of Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Aurora, March 23, 1998—Sept. 30, 2017.

Derksen, Mary (Froese), Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, May 27, 1919—Oct. 26, 2017. Parents: Gerhard and Susie (Friesen) Froese. Spouse: Henry P. Derksen, deceased. Children: Dorothy Bartel, Wilfred Derksen, Janet Claassen, Lloyd Derksen, Beverly Staley; nine grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren.

Enns, Victor, Vista, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Nov. 30, 1930—Sept. 15, 2017. Parents: D.H. Enns and Katie (Balzer) Enns. Spouse: Katherine (Isaak) Enns. Children: Douglas Enns, Dave Enns, Sandi Greene; nine grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Faul, Donald G., Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 12, 1934—Aug. 3, 2017. Parents: Gus and Helen (Hiebert) Faul. Spouse: Marie Faul.

Gates, James Carlton, Akron, Ohio, member of College Community Church, Clovis, Calif., Oct. 1, 1952—Oct. 25, 2017. Parents: Charles and Michiko (Ikeda) Gates. Spouse: Brenda. Children: Christina Gates. Step-children: Jason Cunningham, Aaron Cunningham; five grandchildren.

Kaufman, Delora Jean (Reimer), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Feb. 6, 1956—Oct. 14, 2017. Parents: Aaron and Margie (Bartel)

Reimer. Spouse: Kim Kaufman. Children: Jesse Kaufman, Denille Johnson; four grandchildren.

Klein, Carolyn Kathryn (Faul), Munich, N.D., one-time member of Rosehill MB Church, July 27, 1929—Nov. 20, 2017. Parents: Charlie F. and Carolina (Seibel) Faul. Spouse: Leonard. Children: CleoBeth Friesen, LuWanda Schroeder, Marwood Klein, Robin Holcombe; 14 grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren.

Kliwer, Paul D., Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, April 13, 1930—Sept. 30, 2017. Parents: Dan H. and Anna K. (Hodel) Kliwer. Spouse: Rachel (Regier) Kliwer. Children: Linda Parker, Bruce Kliwer, Becky Kiper; six grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

Kountz, Pam (Kroeker), Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 18, 1956—Oct. 21, 2017. Parents: Harvey and Roberta (Kroeker) Kroeker. Children: Keith Kountz, Karen Kountz; three grandchildren.

Neufeld, Eva Leona (Martens), Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, May 29, 1926—Oct. 7, 2017. Parents: P.A. and Maria Karber Martens. Spouse: Isaac Neufeld, deceased. Children: Don Neufeld, Keith Neufeld, Jean Neufeld; six grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Neufeld, Ida (Penner), Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, March 27, 1937—Oct. 15, 2017. Parents: Dietrich and Martha (Harder) Penner. Spouse: Orville Neufeld. Children: Phil Neufeld, Chuck Neufeld; five grandchildren.

Neufeldt, Norma "Ruth" (Enns), Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Sept. 28, 1932—Oct. 22, 2017. Parents: Frank and Agnes Enns. Spouse: Emerson Neufeldt, deceased. Children: Joyce Nelson, Diana Rheingans, Philip Neufeldt, Michael Neufeldt; nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Peters, Barbara, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, April 23, 1937—Aug. 23, 2017. Parents: Menno and Vera Siemens. Spouse: Edward G. Peters, deceased. Children: Kathe Winn, Russell, Jerry, Peggy Cruz; 10 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren.

Ramirez, Josefina "Josie" R., Shafter, Calif., pastor's wife and member of Iglesia Companerismo Cristiano, Nov. 15, 1952—Oct. 4, 2017. Parents: Martin Reyna and Josefina (Martinez) Reyna. Spouse: Roy Ramirez. Children: Rogelio Ramirez Jr., Marinela G. Ramirez; four grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

Regier, Les, Reedley, Calif., of Reedley MB Church, March 7, 1945—Sept. 28, 2017. Parents: Gus H. Regier Jr. and Erna (Klaassen) Regier. Spouse: Lovella (Isaac) Regier. Children: Tami Burnett, Todd Regier; six grandchildren.

Richert, Hilda (Warkentin), Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 24, 1921—Nov. 9, 2017. Parents: Eduard and Susie Warkentin. Spouse: Talmon Richert, deceased. Children: Kenneth Richert, Gerald Richert; 15 grandchildren; 35 great-grandchildren; six great-great-grandchildren.

Schmidt, Darlene, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, March 27, 1935—Oct. 17, 2017. Parents: Herman and Kathryn (Hildebrand) Klaassen. Spouse: Malvin W. Schmidt. Children: Jerry Schmidt, Leroy Schmidt, Kelly Schmidt, Malvina Schmidt; four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Siemens, Rose (Friesen), Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, June 14, 1923—Oct. 23, 2017. Parents: Isaac and Helena Friesen. Spouse: William M. Siemens, deceased, Elbert D. Franz, deceased. Children: Sally Uhl, Mark Franz, Randy Franz, Marilyn Friesen; Stepchildren: William Siemens, Wayne Siemens; 14 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

Siemens-Lamb, Ruby (Rubena) Linda, San Jose, Calif., member of Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif. Oct. 30, 1926—June 29, 2017. Parents: Dietrich Joel (DJ) and Sarah Penner Wiens. Spouses: Harry James Siemens, deceased, Vaughn Lamb, deceased. Children: Laura Taylor, Barbara Bruckner, Carole Lane; five grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

Sperling, Ruben Leslie, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, June 13, 1924—Nov. 13, 2017. Parents: Abraham and Katherina (Penner) Sper-

Bethany Church hosts drive-through story

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., again staged "Journey to Bethlehem," a free drive-through experience of the Christmas story. Guests are given a CD that they listen to in their cars as they drive through the busy marketplace of Jerusalem and into the small town of Bethlehem. The live event includes townspeople working outside their homes, angels dancing in the fields and Roman guards collecting taxes. The production is staged on the church's large, un-

developed property and the journey ends in the church's front lawn where hosts talk with guests and refreshments are served around campfires. Bethany first presented "Journey to Bethlehem" in 2014 and the event was well received. The event, which pastor Brian Wiebe describes as the congregation's gift to the community, continues to draw more and more visitors. "Journey to Bethlehem" was presented Dec. 19-22, 2017. —*Holly Goble*



ling. Spouse: Aganetha Sperling. Children: Leanna Wiens, Merl, Larene Hester, Gale, Dale; nine grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Suderman, Emery L., Enid, Okla., member of Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla., Oct. 7, 1935—Sept. 22, 2017. Parents: Leonard and Christine (Epp) Suderman. Spouse: Inez Javorsky. Children: James Suderman, Carol Garrison, Timothy Suderman; eight grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

Thaden, Donald Robert, Sheldon, Iowa, formerly of Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., April 7, 1923—Nov. 8, 2017. Parents: William and Grace (Hassebroek) Thaden. Spouse: Ruth (Hofer) Thaden, deceased. Children: David Thaden, Tom Thaden.

Vix, Wesley D., Minot, N.D., member of Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, May 24, 1926—Sept. 22, 2017. Parents: Emmanuel C. and Martha (Seibel) Vix. Spouse: Mavis Vix. Children: Lyndon Vix, Kenton Vix; seven grandchildren.

Willems, George D., Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, July 24, 1928—Oct. 23, 2017. Parents: George C. and Lizzie (Dick) Willems. Spouse: Mary Ann Willems, deceased. Children: Debra Scott, Gary Willems; four grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Yutzy, Lloyd Edward, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, March 14, 1942—Oct. 17, 2017. Parents: Edward and Emma (Miller) Yutzy. Spouse: Judy Balzer. Children: Brian Yutzy, Michael Yutzy, Tammy Houge; 11 grandchildren.

REACHING IN

DISCIPLESHIP

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church hosted a leadership training session with material from the Global Leadership Summit Nov. 5, the first of four Sundays focused on growing as leaders.

FELLOWSHIP

College Community Church, Clovis, Calif., held an All Saints' Day service Nov. 5 to remember loved

ones who have died. People were invited to bring a memento or token of remembrance.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

People from **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, visited seniors on Christmas Day, bringing gifts and stuffed animals.

People from **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** served at the Hutchinson Soup Kitchen Dec. 16 and baked cookies to bring. The church also purchased gifts and provided donations for people in need through its Christmas Outreach initiative.

People at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** that participated in an "Advent Conspiracy Class" were encouraged to purchase at least one less Christmas gift and to use that money to support NFC's five Advent Conspiracy projects. The congregation also donated socks to The Light-House Recovery Center benefiting women and children in need.

People at **Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.**, filled stockings with essentials to give to deaf women and children.

People at **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, made sandwiches Dec. 8 to be distributed to the homeless by HOPE Sanger.

Women at **Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, met Dec. 1 to sing hymns, drink hot cocoa and collect feminine products to help homeless women.

Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., joined area churches to provide Thanksgiving meals for 100 families. The church contributed 240 cans of green beans and money to purchase 10 turkeys.

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif., blessed families in its church body and neighborhood with boxes of food through its Christmas Blessing Tree.

The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., hosted "Merry Christmas Bakersfield," a free event Dec. 15 that included inflatables, hay rides, face painting, interactive crafts, hot chocolate and

snacks...the congregation also provided 1,000 turkeys for Thanksgiving meals that were delivered Thanksgiving morning. People from the church gathered on "Turkey Tuesday," Nov. 21, to put the meals together.

Garden Park Church, Denver, Colo., volunteered with Colorado Feeding Kids Nov. 26 to pack 3,000 meals in one hour.

Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., donated 94 food baskets to Main Street Ministries for needy families in the area. Everence matched \$2,000 of the church's donations.

First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., bagged and distributed turkey dinners to families in the Oaklawn community, Nov. 18-19.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church hosted its second annual SMBC Invitational wrestling tournament Nov. 18.

Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Denver, Aurora, Colo., held its annual holiday bazaar Nov. 11, selling handmade arts, crafts and thrift to benefit church missions.

Women's ministry at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** created ornaments for the community Alternative Gift Market Nov. 4.

Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash., hosted its 24th annual Crafts of the World sale Nov. 4.

The Food for the Badge group at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, took plates of Christmas goodies to each person working at the police department Dec. 11.

Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., partnered with Salvation Army's Harvest of Love to collect food for needy families in the community.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., hosts a Marketplace the first Saturday of the month to give free food to the community in partnership with the California Food Bank and the Good Neighbor Center. Oct. 7, 25 volunteers served 100 people, giving out 6,000 pounds of food. Dec. 2, they gave away 8,400 pounds of food.

Stony Brook Church provides gifts, groceries for needy

Stony Brook Church in Omaha, Neb., is helping local families in need by partnering with Project Wee Care (PWC), a local charitable organization providing food, clothing, school supplies and gifts to needy families. PWC supplies the names of families and children to the church, and members of the congregation buy gifts for a child or purchase a grocery gift card for a family. Fam-

ilies wrap gifts and bring them to church, then church staff delivers the gifts to PWC.

Noelle Riesenber, pictured right, shopped with her parents to provide a Christmas gift for another young girl. After this year, PWC will have helped more than 10,000 families. —CL



Photo credit: Stony Brook Church

GLOBALLY

USMB congregations that participated in Operation Christmas Child include **Enid (Okla.) MB Church**, which packed 95 boxes and an additional 10 boxes online; **New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.**, where AWANA participants assembled 100 shoeboxes; **Bethesda Church, Huron, SD**, that collected 54 shoeboxes and **Salem MB Church, Freeman, SD**, that packed 40 shoe-

boxes and filled 300 Mennonite Central Committee school kit bags.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church supported the Freedom Textiles ministry in Thailand with its Christmas stocking project.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., is resourcing World Shine Foundation Nursery and Primary School in Rwentobo, Uganda, by raising \$7,800 to enhance the school's dining hall. The church is also sending a team to minister at the

school. In the past, the church has given funds for a new kitchen and dining hall and school uniforms and shoes.

Volunteers at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, assembled 12 quilts in 12 hours on comforter construction day to donate to MCC.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church's Meals for Missions sold frozen lasagnas, sauces and tri tip seasoning to raise money for an orphanage in Thailand.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Job Openings

Associate Pastor—Children and Family Ministries: North Fresno MB Church is seeking a full-time associate pastor of children and family ministries. The church is located in an urban area of the 500,000-plus city of Fresno, Calif., and is very involved in the surrounding neighborhood. Main responsibilities include pastoral leadership and oversight of children's ministries, as well as other opportunities depending on the giftedness of the candidate. The candidate should have a passion for Jesus, the church and the city as well as demonstrated ability to disciple and equip children and the volunteers who serve them. For more information or to apply please contact Jill Brooks, search team chair, at children@northfresnochurch.org.

Ministry Job Openings

On-Site Staff: Main Street Ministries, Inc., a non-profit ministry in Hillsboro, Kan., that serves women and their children, has an immediate opening for on-site staff. This position includes some administrative/clerical support to the director, assisting residents with physical, emotional and spiritual needs such as transportation to appointments, etc., emergency/crisis intervention, supervision of residents' scheduled classes and/or babysitters, monitoring curfew hours and other duties as needed. Normal hours are daily 6 p.m. until 8 a.m. the following morning, every other weekend and on the director's day off. If the Lord leads you our way, please contact Karen Sites, MSM director, at 620-947-3393.

Executive Director: Grace Children's Home, Henderson, Neb., is actively seeking applications for

the position of Executive Director. For many years, the primary focus of this ministry has been providing residential care for teenagers that have been placed out of their home by the court system. The successful candidate will work with the Board of Directors to determine both short term and long term goals of the organization as we move forward. Inquiries can be sent to chuck@gracechildrenshome.com or call 402-363-5725.

University

Faculty: Fresno Pacific University is seeking qualified candidates for positions in Social Work, Spanish, Theater, Business, Biology, Health Care Administration, and Nursing. Complete job descriptions and application requirements may be viewed online at the Fresno Pacific University website: www.fresno.edu/careers.

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Friends bring friends to Jesus

Evangelism lessons from a Westie on what not to do

If effective evangelism, reaching more people with the gospel, were left up to my dog, there wouldn't be many people coming to faith in Jesus anytime soon. My dog is a cute, white Westie with a comical personality that loves to sleep away most of every day. Except for a few random forays into the backyard each day to look for critters, bark a little and perhaps bask a few moments in the sun, he does little else but lay around.

Westies are known for liking high places, so typically you can find him asleep on the back of a chair or the couch. He also likes to sleep next to people, and if you nudge him in the middle of the night he gives a grumpy little growl. He's just a lazy little dog who likes to eat once in a while.

I thought of my dog's lazy approach to life when I consider that only 5 percent of believers in the United States have been instrumental in someone else's decision to become a Christ-follower. I also recently read a related statistic: 75 to 90 percent of people who come to faith in Jesus are led to him by a friend or family member. That means that Sunday school, church visitation, TV evangelists, pastors and other means add up to less than one-fourth of those things which introduce people to Jesus and then bring them to faith.

Let's get this straight. Over three-fourths of all people come to faith through a friend or relative and yet only 5 percent of friends and relatives are ever involved in doing so. These statistics are mind-numbing. If even 10 percent of Christians led a friend or family member to know Jesus, our overall evangelism in America would almost double! So, why don't we help lead people to know Jesus?



There are many reasons we cite to justify why we don't tell people the good news: "I'm afraid I'll get it all wrong or say the wrong thing" or "Everyone in my city has heard the gospel and has already made their choice, and I don't want to bug them." Or here's a good one: "I don't know enough Scripture."

I think one of the main reasons we have such a shortage of "I know Jesus, so should you" conversations is that it takes lots of effort to develop relationships that ultimately get to the point where such conversations *can* take place. It involves time, energy and being a good friend over time for that to normally happen.

No, Westies don't make good evangelists. They're too focused on being cozy at home. I don't necessarily think it's because we're just lazy that we don't tell people about Jesus. But, when I allow it to sink in that countless people I know and likely six billion of the people currently walking the planet are headed for an *eternity* apart from God—that should cause me to want to help at least *some* of the them come to know our wonderful Savior. Shouldn't it?

I think this should be the most pressing thing we are about as Mennonite Brethren. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Let's join him.▶



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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