

CL

CHRISTIAN LEADER

May / June 2018

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The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren

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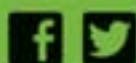
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Words to live by

What will characterize our disagreements?

Three words are highlighted on the cover of this issue: listen, respect, encourage. These words, stated in the imperative, are drawn from two feature articles—an essay by Tim Geddert, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary professor and USMB Board of Faith and Life (BFL) member, and an interview with U.S. BFL members Tim Sullivan and Jana Hildebrandt—that address contentious topics.

I hope these three words characterize U.S. Mennonite Brethren as we continue to discuss and debate hard issues. That we will truly listen to one another and show respect for viewpoints different from our own. That in doing so we will encourage one another and that those who are observing us will be encouraged by our desire to be unified in the midst of diversity.

As I think about the challenges we face in talking about things we disagree on, two contrasting words also come to mind: polarize and patient.

We use the word “polarize” to describe situations in which people are quick to anger and quick to separate into opposing factions. Polarization is the fruit of our culture. When this attitude creeps into the church, we are not the salt and light that Jesus calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount. When Christians no longer listen to and show respect to one another, we are no different from the world.

To be patient is to be slow to anger even when there is something worth being angry about. To be patient is to delay a decision even when action may be justified. Patience gives us the opportunity to develop unity where polarization eliminates that opportunity. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit and marks us as followers of Jesus. Being patient acknowledges these are important issues and says that we will give God the space to bring us together, to move us toward one another.

The word “patient” does raise some questions: Can Christians be too patient with regard to the core beliefs and values of other followers of Jesus? Am I being too patient if I’m committed to listening to and respecting those who hold a different understanding of the atonement or who disagree with me on the role of women in ministry? How do I maintain my convictions while also prioritizing fellowship with other Christians?

These are difficult questions, and there are no easy answers. As we grapple with our differences and work toward unity, I invite us to pray for the men and women within the district and national conferences who are leading us. I also urge us to prioritize walking this journey of faith together, choosing to practice patience as we listen, respect and encourage one another.



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USMB convention includes workshops

USMB is offering a variety of workshops during the 2018 National Pastors' Conference and National Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 24-28, 2018.

Five workshops will be offered July 25 during the National Pastors' Conference. Workshops unique to the National Pastors' Conference will be a discussion of pastor finances and insurance by Jon Wiebe, president of MB Foundation, and a panel of pastors' wives who will share their struggles and joys in life and ministry.

Three workshops offered during the pastors' event will be repeated at the convention. Daniel Rodriguez, pastor of Iglesia Agua Viva in Omaha, Neb., will talk about intentional discipling; his presentation will be in Spanish. Practical ideas for leveraging technology for ministry will be given by Rick Bartlett, director of theological education and assistant professor of ministry at Tabor College Wichita; Kyle Goings, chair of the National Youth Commission; and Dave Buller, associate pastor at North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan. Russ Claassen, Southern District Conference youth minister, will present a workshop for youth workers.

During the national convention, workshops will be offered Friday, July 27.

Paul Robie, lead pastor of South Mountain Community Church, will discuss Mormon culture, beliefs and practices. Mark Burch and Gord Fleming, C2C, will speak about church planting. J.L. Martin, pastor at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church, will share how parents can point children to Christ, focusing on how grace and the gospel changes parenting.

Representatives of Tabor College and Fresno Pacific University will explore the role of the Christian college and university in maturing and sending leaders into the church and society. MB Mission leaders will discuss the ways God's missionary work in the world is accomplished through his church locally, nationally and globally.

A Mennonite Central Committee panel—ethnicity and gender equity specialist Dina Gonzalez-Piña, Tabor College assistant professor of criminology and restorative justice and representative to MCC U.S. board Jill Schellenberg, and MCC west coast executive director Nate Yoder—will discuss immigration, exploring the issue through the lens of Scripture, testimony and current U.S. law.

For more information, visit: www.usmb.org/2018-national-convention/. —USMB

CL receives four EPA awards

The *Christian Leader* received four awards from the Evangelical Press Association (EPA) for the magazine's work in the 2017 calendar year. The EPA holds two annual contests. EPA member publications compete head-to-head in 41 Higher Goals competition categories. The Award of Excellence contest is a "best of" competition and awards are given in divisions by type of publications; CL competes against other denominational print publications.

The CL received three awards in the Higher Goals contest, including a first-place award given to columnist David Vogel in the devotional category for his essay, "Creation is a living hymn." CL writer Kathy Heinrichs Wiest was awarded third place in the reporting category for her article about Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary's Center for Community Transformation.

The magazine received a third-place award in the Higher Goals redesign category for designer Shelley Plett's work revamping the magazine in 2017. Plett's design talents were also recognized by an Award of Merit in the denominational category of the Award of Excellence contest. The judge wrote: "Best covers in the competition. A clean design—appealing. A feast of content. Everyone at *Christian Leader* can be proud of the effort it takes to produce such valuable communication. God bless you, and congratulations!" —CL



Tabor College faculty member Wendell Loewen was a workshop presenter at the 2016 USMB National Convention. *Photo credit: USMB*

USMB Church giving lags

The U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB) finished the 2017 fiscal year in the black with a positive operating balance of over \$60,000, reports USMB bookkeeper Donna Sullivan. However, USMB leaders are disappointed in the level of 2017 church giving and are concerned that

the decline in contributions from local congregations will continue in 2018. Church contributions of \$382,028 in 2017 came in under budget by about \$28,000.

Three months into the 2018 fiscal year, church giving is again lagging. In mid-March, Don Morris, USMB national director, sent letters to USMB churches requesting that local congregations contribute “first fruits” financial support of 2.5 percent of their general offerings to fund USMB ministries.

For congregations that are not currently contributing to USMB, Morris asks that in 2018 they consider sending 1 percent of their general offerings, with the goal of growing that to 2.5 percent over the next three years.

“Overall member church support for USMB was less in 2017 than for any year over the past 17 years,” Morris says. “This has caused considerable concern.... Without support from our member churches, the U.S. Conference would not exist and could not provide the wide array of ministries that we make available to our family of churches.”

While the 2018 USMB income budget of \$410,000 in church contributions is the same as 2017, the total 2018 budget increased by more than \$120,000 so that USMB can pursue a variety of ongoing and new projects. The 2018 budget of \$940,000 is a 15 percent increase over the 2017 budget of \$819,840. —USMB

LAMB holds convention in February

The Latin America District Conference (LAMB) held its convention Feb. 17 at Grace Point@La Grulla (Texas). The convention’s theme was “Building up the body of Christ,” based on Ephesians 4:11-12.

“Our goal for this year’s conference was to provide each church in attendance practical resources that would edify the individual for the good of the whole church,” says LAMB district

minister Aaron Hernandez. “The workshops, led by (USMB national director) Don Morris and (MB Foundation president) Jon Wiebe, were current, practical and applicable. The speakers provided actionable next steps that would lead towards greater kingdom impact. I believe that this year’s conference was a step in the right direction toward a future harvest of more focused and intentional leaders.”

After the workshops and a traditional Mexican dinner, a team from Grace Point@La Grulla led worship, and Hernandez and district chair Moi Tagle led attendees in prayer. Guest speaker Jorge Maisonet from Reynosa, Mexico, used the convention’s theme verses for his text. Communion was served after the message, and Morris prayed for the pastors present, concluding the convention. —CL

Youth event set for New Mexico

The USMB National Youth Commission announced in late April that the next U.S. Mennonite Brethren National Youth Convention, YouthCon 2019, will be held April 3-7, 2019, at Camp Eagle, a 2,100-acre conference center previously known as Glorieta Conference Center located about 15 miles southeast of Santa Fe, NM. The cost per person will be \$395, and registration will open in the fall of 2018.

Over the past three years, the National Youth Commission has been working to expand its ministry beyond a four-day event to also provide opportunities for ministry-minded high school students to serve their communities and for youth



Jon Wiebe, center, president of MB Foundation, participates in a prayer for LAMB pastors and leaders at the close of the district convention Feb. 17. Photo credit: USMB

workers to collaborate. A new website (www.usmbyouth.com) launched at the end of April outlines these new developments and opportunities. —CL

Celebrate 2019 to be held in Omaha

Celebrate 2019, an event for senior adults, will be held in Omaha, Neb., Sept. 27-29, 2019. Hosted by MB Foundation, the event will be the third gathering of its kind. Previous gatherings were held in Denver in 2017 and Kansas City in 2015. Celebrate 2017 saw a 40 percent increase in attendance from the first event.

“These Celebrate gatherings are becoming a highlight of our ministry at MB Foundation,” says MB Foundation president Jon Wiebe. “While at first blush, many would not think of Omaha as a destination location, we think we have selected an excellent venue to facilitate our time together, and we’ll enjoy the quaint setting at Old Market.”

Plans are already in motion for Celebrate 2021 in California.

Registration information and other event details will be available from MB Foundation (800-551-1547) as they develop. —MBF

5 minutes with...

WCMMC performs in Midwest

The West Coast Mennonite Men's Chorus (WCMMC) performed three concerts in the Midwest the first weekend in May. This was only the second time in the WCMMC's 40-year history that the group traveled outside of California to perform. Forty-two of the choir's 120 members made the trip to Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado.

"It is exciting to be able to share our unique ministry with people in the Midwest," said Leon Thiessen, chair of WCMMC. "Many in our chorus grew up in Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado and still have family in these locations."

The chorus performed May 5 at Fairview (Okla.) MB Church; May 6 in Hillsboro, Kan., at Tabor College; and May 7 at Foothills Bible Church in Littleton, Colo. An offering was taken at each concert to benefit Mennonite Disaster Service's work rebuilding homes destroyed by wildfires across the West Coast.—WCMMC

KS sale, chorus turn 50

The Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale (KMRS) celebrated its 50th anniversary with a Friday night program April 13 that featured the Kansas Mennonite Men's Chorus (KMMC), which was also organized 50 years ago and sang for the first time at the 1968 relief sale. Other 50th anniversary events included a scavenger hunt and a time capsule—to be opened in 25 years—into which churches and the sale committee put memories.

The two-day sale, held April 13-14 at the Kansas State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson, Kan., raised \$559,000 for Mennonite Central Committee. The relief sale began in Hillsboro, Kan., in 1968, and later moved to Newton before settling at the state fairgrounds in Hutchinson.

KMMC is an all-volunteer male choir with a recent membership of more than 300. Offerings received at KMMC concerts are donated to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and total more than \$600,000 throughout the years. —KMRS/KMMC



Thomas Terry

Rap musician Thomas Terry (aka Odd Thomas) is founder of hip-hop record label Humble Beast.

He is also an elder on the staff of Trinity Church, a Mennonite Brethren church in Portland, Ore. In his pastoral role Terry can be found at coffee shops around the city, discipling people from his congregation. En route to his next coffee appointment, Terry took time to talk about how hip-hop music reaches people for Jesus.

What drew you to rap music?

As a young teen in Los Angeles I found solidarity and community among the culture of hip-hop artists. It was my primary means of expressing myself. When the Lord was so kind to save me at age 18, that radically changed the way I expressed myself through music.

Why is your record label called Humble Beast?

In a hip-hop context, if you are a beast you are excellent. Humble means you excel in a posture of humility. Jesus came excellent but in the most humble posture. He is the most humble beast.

Who do you reach with your music?

Most of us at Humble Beast came up in an urban context. Young urban creatives were the ones we were concerned about reaching. But hip-hop has become the most popular genre in our day, and we have all types of people engaging with us.

What makes rap music an effective means of sharing the gospel?

Hip-hop is an art form designed to communicate truth, to shape your thinking about the struggles of society. Music, rhythm and repetition seem to burn things into your mind. In the same vein, hip-hop helps people take in who God is. If we put theology in music, it helps put this stuff deep in your heart.

Why does Humble Beast give music away for free?

Identity as a hip-hop artist is wrapped around how many units you can sell. We wanted to cultivate humility in the life of our artists by getting rid of that competitive nature. We model humility by saying "this is the best of our efforts and we want you to have it because we want you to engage with the content." These records cost a lot of money to produce, but we want to model the generosity of Christ who gave his life freely.

For a sample of Thomas Terry's work go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YggGjlfUONA>

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Three steps to networking

Building connections in multiple spheres

Starting something from scratch is hard. It takes guts. It takes faith. It takes foolishness. And it is entirely worth it. In any new endeavor, connections are absolutely necessary. Here are the three steps I took in building a network of connections as we planted Lighthouse Church.

Be well read. When my wife and I first moved to Denver to start Lighthouse, I realized that if I was going to network with key leaders, I needed to be able to speak their language. Which meant I needed to read what they read.

Not a single one of my connections knew who Andy Stanley was or what John H. Walton was writing about in his new *Lost World of the Old Testament* series. But, they were avid leadership theory readers, TED talk watchers and entrepreneurial-trend magazine subscribers. Which meant, if I was going to connect with them in a meaningful way, I needed to read what they read.

The purpose of reading what they read wasn't to learn exactly what they were passionate about. But rather, it was to honor them by showing interest in their passions. And as you honor them, you are building a lasting connection.

Be well equipped to dialogue. When you go out of your way to establish a new connection, you need to be equipped to dialogue with them. Not pitch them. But dialogue with them.

Dialogue is a process of learning about your connection, being invested in a conversation and finding ways to intertwine your passions with theirs. Dialogue is so important because it builds trust. In my own life, the people I can dialogue with are people who have taken the necessary steps of honoring our relationship and investing in quality communication. These are the people who I love to contact when I have an idea. These are the people I

connect with when a need presents itself to our church.

The more equipped you are to have a genuine conversation (which necessitates taking notes, coming prepared with questions, etc.) the more you are able to build a lasting connection with a high-quality individual.

Be ready to ask—at a later point. In the first year of planting Lighthouse Church we found ourselves in a bind. We needed to rent a building for church services, and we needed it in less than three weeks.

At the time, I had a connection with a high school principal and a nonprofit CEO who worked with the mayor's office and humanitarian efforts in our city. But at that point in the life of Lighthouse, I had never once asked my connections for anything. I had never asked the principal for a building or the CEO for a meeting with the mayor. But the time now came for the "ask."

So, I sent an email with the subject line "HELP!" to my two connections, and within 15 minutes I had two meetings set up. In the end, the mayor approved a church meeting in the school, and the principal agreed to our lease terms for the school auditorium. I asked, but I waited until the time was right.

Some of your best connections are people you don't need right away. You see potential in the connection, but you wait. You wait a couple days, a couple weeks, a couple months to pull in a favor. But once you do, you know that you have built enough rapport with your connections that you can ask them for the world.

Networking with proper connections is a process of being willing and ready. And I hope that by reading, dialoging and asking, you grow in your own personal network. ▀



Josh Shaw
is the pastor of
Lighthouse Church in
Denver, Colo. In
2016, Josh and his
wife, Brianne, and a
small group of 12
college students began
Lighthouse with a
dream of guiding the
city of Denver back to
the kingdom of God.
Since that time, the
fledgling congregation
has grown to 280 in
attendance, has sent
missionaries across the
globe and has had the
privilege of baptizing
30 new believers in
Jesus Christ. Shaw is
the father to two boys,
Ezekiel and Asher.

Hope shines through

God's miracles, second chance transform former meth user

I lay unconscious and dying on a couch in a trailer on the outskirts of Colorado Springs. I was 23, and the chains of addiction held a tight grip on me. It was during this dark time in my life that I first encountered Christ. Today, I'm free from meth, the drug Satan used to attack me.

I had a bittersweet childhood. Both of my parents struggled with addiction. They divorced, and my papa and grandma helped raise me. Their influence in my life, nurturing me with the love of Christ, enabled me to survive and eventually break free from bondage.

In my early 20s, my father died suddenly, presumably of a massive heart attack. My grieving was unfathomable, considering I didn't know Christ at the time. I surrounded myself with people immersed in the drug scene as I sought to fill the void. I turned first to heroin, then meth, and was immediately taken captive by the chains of addiction.

For the next five or six years, I was a hardcore IV meth user. I lost everything, living in motel rooms and alleyways. I was homeless. I found myself in several abusive and toxic relationships with men. A lot of the people around me died from drug overdose, suicide or even murder. It was terrifying.

In 2010, by a miracle from God, my mother found me on that couch in my unconscious state. At the hospital, doctors diagnosed me with a staph infection I had contracted from a dirty needle. I had strep in my blood and liver failure from the prolonged infection.

That night, two women from a church came to my hospital room and laid hands on me and prayed over me in Jesus' name. I felt the peace and the presence of Jesus wash over me. I knew then it was God and longed to fall in love with him.

For several years after that, I struggled to get clean. I kept immersing myself in drugs. Yet I never forgot the peace, comfort and unconditional love I felt that

night in the hospital.

God gave me a second chance to surrender my heart when I came to another crossroads in 2012. I was living in a motel in downtown Colorado Springs, and I knew if something didn't change, I would die there.

I found a Bible in my motel room and slept with it under my pillow when I felt scared. As I opened it and began to read, I fell in love with Psalm 23. It's hard not to fall in love with Jesus. He's just such a beautiful mystery.

I began to pray adamantly for a way out, and I felt God fighting for my life and my soul. Once I started praying, it didn't take long for hope to shine through.

By another miracle, my aunt found me on the street. She knew my struggles, and she offered me hope and a chance for a new life if I would come and work alongside her in ministry on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

By Christ's strength and my own faith, I put down the drugs and picked up my cross and followed him. I was just three days clean off meth when my aunt brought me to South Dakota. I never could've done it on my own, but because I willingly opened my heart to him, Jesus carried me out of that dark place.

My aunt and I worked in ministry together in Whiteclay, Neb., a town near the reservation with 14 residents and four liquor stores. Many people lived on the streets and struggled with alcoholism and drug addiction. Experiencing the brokenness of others and showing them God's love helped me forget about myself and my own problems.

Not long after that, I gave my life to Jesus at a church in Rapid City, S.D. It felt like my heart and soul were dipped into a pool of cleansing water, and I was immediately healed.

Coming out of addiction was hard, and



Meghan Shagla is church secretary at Bible Fellowship Church in Rapid City, S.D., the church where she was married to her husband, Caine, was baptized and now works. Meghan frequently shares her testimony at the "Passages" program for women transitioning out of prison. She has ministered to people struggling with addiction and held Bible studies, using every chance she gets to tell people what Jesus has done in her life. When she's not working at Bible Fellowship Church, Meghan works in property management.

See **SHAGLA** on page 30

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

Stories, lessons on prayer from a Brazilian MB pastor

Do you believe that God can do more in the next years than he has done in the past years? Three years ago, we asked this of our Mennonite Brethren church in Curitiba, Brazil. Only 10 percent of the congregation believed it could happen. So, the leaders called the church to pray and ask God for revival.

One year later, a group of Haitian immigrants have become a part of the church. Despite the considerable differences in culture and color, God moved the traditionally German members of the church to welcome these new people. Through prayer, God transforms hearts when we are willing.

Frequent prayer

When we study the practice of prayer, we must go back to Jesus. Even though he is God, Jesus was a person of prayer. He prayed regularly; he prayed very often. The busier Jesus became, the more he talked with God. Why? Because he knew God! Jesus knew God as Abba, his Daddy, his loving Father, whose main interest is to love, teach and heal.

Jesus also shared his fears and his anguish with God. He experienced God not only as a source of compassion but also of strength. In the Garden, Jesus turned to God to find the strength he needed to complete his task (Mark 14:36). Jesus's actions are a model that we can imitate.

Faithful prayer

Jesus assumes we will pray.

My impression is that many of us don't really pray, not only because we don't sense the need, but because we believe God will accomplish his will whether we pray or not. And we don't pray because we do not know how.

Often, we distort the conversation with him, merely "saying prayers" without hearing what comes out of the heart of God. In Brazil, we say that we should remain in prayer long enough that our internal voices quiet so we can hear his voice. That is when praying truly begins.

The disciples saw Jesus praying often, so they asked him: Lord, teach us to pray. And he did. Similarly, the apostle Paul commands us to pray, showing us that the Christian life depends on prayer. So, prayer is something we work at doing until we do it well.

Responsive prayer

I worked for more than 30 years in a multinational company. When the boss called for a conversation, I never dared to say: I do not have time for you now. The consequence could be instant firing. More than we obey an employer, we should obey our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

Jesus calls us to have regular conversations, a real relationship with him. How sad that we do not hear the call. Most likely we also should be fired, for Jesus is an authority more important than any employer.

We should not consider praying as a "must," however. As W. Bingham Hunter suggests in *The God Who Hears*, God

“
Jesus also shared his fears and his anguish with God.
He experienced God not only as a source of
compassion but also of strength.
”

gives us the privilege of cooperating with him in the out-working of his will. Through God's Spirit, he moves us to pray; in response to prayer, he accomplishes his will. Whoever enters into the presence of the Lord never returns the same.

Repentant prayer

For many years, the Brazilian MB conference had no growth. As leaders, we got down on our knees and asked God what the reason was. He spoke very clearly to us: if you will not repent from the sins that have been swept under the rug for so many years, there will be no growth. So, for several weekends we met in a cabin for prayer and planning. At these meetings, we opened our hearts, confessed sin and asked God to transform our lives. We decided to willingly obey and follow the orientation of the Holy Spirit.

Since then, a group of more than 25 churches who had left the conference returned and are becoming reintegrated into our church family. Some leaders protested: We cannot take them back, they are too charismatic. To discern an answer, we went on our knees. God showed us that the Core (Jesus Christ) should be in the center and the rest would be solved.

Fervent prayer

This difference in the key role emotion plays for those in the Southern Hemisphere compared to the role of the intellect in the Northern Hemisphere is a challenge for the Mennonite Brethren in Brazil, who have members oriented both ways. Emotional people cry and pray; rational folks think it through.

So, what does Scripture teach? “Fervent prayer avails much” (James 5:16, NKJV). In *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby explains: “Fervent prayer means we purposefully spend sufficient time in intercession. Fervent prayer means we cry out to the Father, sometimes in tears, with our heart and soul. Fervent prayer comes as the Holy Spirit assists us in praying with groanings too deep for words (Rom. 8:26).”

With my German background, I had to learn this from my Brazilian colleagues. One of our “comeback” churches in São Paulo rented a mountain for prayer, not only for their own church but for all those who would want to pray. An average of 50,000 people go to the mountain to pray every month. Of course, our prayers depend on our hearts, not our location, yet this mountain experience is special not only for

us but very important for the expansion of God's kingdom.

I have learned to move from a mathematical prayer to a relational prayer that connects me a lot closer to the Lord. Prayer does not give us spiritual power. Instead, prayer aligns our life with God so that God demonstrates his power through us.

Forty days of prayer

My church in Brazil started 2017 with a 40-day prayer movement for revival. As the year wore on, people shared testimonies of transformation. Until then, several participants said, they had never heard God speaking personally to them.

Eight months later, God began a revival in our church through the teenagers. The participating group increased from 60 to 140. Before Christmas, we celebrated the baptism of 24 teenagers.

Now we needed leaders who would help disciple these young people. As we prayed to the Lord of the harvest, he showed us that we already had the workers, they just had to be trained. We never imagined that God would be starting the revival through this young group.

Finally, we are learning that prayer is not dumping my stuff before Jesus and racing away. The purpose of prayer is not to convince God to change our circumstances but to prepare us to be involved in God's activity.

Christians who are growing in spiritual maturity change their prayer attitude. They communicate with the Lord, then intentionally move into a period of silence (solitude). They wait for the Lord to speak.

We have been challenging people to make a commitment for one year to take 15 minutes of silence before the Lord each day. My period of silence defines my agenda for the day.

I believe God is speaking and transforming, able to do more this year than in the last. What will I learn as I follow Jesus in prayer in 2018?

Paul Duck is pastor of Boqueirão MB Church in Curitiba, Brazil. Read more about the revival of the Brazilian Mennonite Brethren church: <https://christianleadermag.com/bowling-prayer-gatherings-visionary-leadership/> This article was first published in MB Herald, the Canadian Conference of MB Churches magazine.

THINKING ABOUT THE ATONEMENT

Restoring the relationship between God and people

By Tim Geddert

Christ died and rose for our salvation. But what does that mean? How does it work? The biblical doctrine of the atonement has been the subject of discussion and debate in many Christian settings lately. Although atonement is about “getting together again,” the tragic irony is these discussions sometimes drive us apart. And where there are controversies, there is often a great deal of miscommunication.

Too often, in our attempts to be faithful to the Bible’s authority on this central aspect of our faith, we end up speaking past each other, shrinking the Bible’s teaching to a single viewpoint, or quickly charging others with unfaithfulness to Scripture. My goal in this article is to help us understand what is going on in the doctrine of the atonement. I pray it will be helpful in clarifying our communication, perhaps even helping us “get together again.”

What does atonement mean?

“Atonement,” both in the Bible and in theological discussion, has many facets. But the meaning of the word itself is pretty clear—it is about parties becoming “at one” (i.e., at-one-ment happens). The word is usually used to talk about the restoring of the relationship between God and people, and that is the focus of this discussion.

There are many aspects to a restored relationship with God, and as a result, discussions about the atonement can also become complicated. Bible scholars and theologians have put a

great deal of effort into working out precisely how the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplish “the atonement.” Unfortunately, defenders of various views sometimes use the word “atonement” as though it means *their view* of how it works. The conversation is usually clearer if we use the word “atonement” simply to mean “becoming reconciled with God” and not also to label a particular conviction about how this works.

Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection are not the atonement, they are the means of the atonement. Theories about how this all works are also not the atonement, they are simply theories. (The word “theory,” commonly used in this context, should be understood to mean “a way of explaining”; a model.)

What brings about atonement?

Here the Bible is very clear: Christ accomplishes the atonement and most centrally through his death and resurrection. On the basis of Christ’s salvation work, we can be reconciled to God.

Even Old Testament saints were reconciled “through Christ’s work,” though they lived before it was accomplished. Their reconciliation with God sometimes involved animal sacrifices and sometimes did not (e.g., Leviticus 4:26; Psalm 32:1-2; Isaiah 6:7).

In New Testament times, we can also be reconciled with God without fully understanding how Christ’s finished work

Confession of Faith Article 5: Salvation

God’s Initiative

We believe that God is at work to accomplish deliverance and healing, redemption and restoration in a world dominated by sin. From the beginning, God’s purpose has been to create for himself a people, to dwell among them and to bless them. Creation and all of humanity are without hope of salvation except through God’s love and grace. God’s love is fully demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God’s Plan

Throughout history, God has acted mightily to deliver people from bondage and draw them into a covenant relationship. Through the prophets God prepared the way of salvation until finally God reconciled the world to himself by the atoning blood of Jesus. As

accomplishes the atonement. We are called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are clearly taught, “Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). As soon as we probe further, asking “and how does that work?” we find the Bible gives diverse responses, and theologians formulate diverse theories and doctrines. Let’s be clear: We are saved by Jesus and specifically by his death and resurrection; we are not saved by believing the correct doctrine of the atonement.

What are “atonement theories”?

The main “atonement theories” proposed throughout church history can be differentiated like this:

“**Ransom theories**” focus on the fact that we are enslaved to the wrong master until, through Jesus’s death, we are set free. The dominant image here is “manumission”—the act of setting slaves free. God ransomed Israel from Egyptian slavery, setting them free. So also, through Jesus’s death, we are set free from slavery to sin and death. Some texts speak of Jesus “buying us” so we can be made slaves of a new master, our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 7:23; Colossians 1:13; 1 Timothy 2:6; Revelation 5:9).

“**Combat theories**” focus on the fact that through Jesus’s death and resurrection God won the decisive victory over the “evil powers,” sin (not merely personal sins, but sin as a power), death and (behind all of these) the devil. The Latin expression *Christus Victor* is often used to speak of this (see 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Some theologians combine these first two theories into one theory.

“**Penal satisfaction theories**” focus on the penalty for sin that God’s righteousness demands, and on the fact that Jesus “took our place,” satisfying God’s demand for justice (see Isaiah 53:5; Romans 3:25; 5:9; 1 John 2:2). This is probably the most widely accepted theory among many conservative evangelicals today, but it has not been the most widely accepted theory by the church through much of its history.

“**Moral influence theories**” focus on how Jesus, by willingly accepting even death as an expression of love, leads others also to choose a life of love and self-sacrifice in response (1 John 4:10,11,19).

Why pluralize “theories”?

The four categories above are not four theories but four types of theories. There are variations on a theme, sometimes even contradictory claims, within each of them.

Ransom theories sometimes speculate on who was “paid off” to set us free from slavery. Did God pay Jesus to the devil?

Did God trick the devil by taking the payment back again in the resurrection? Early church theologians often wisely stopped short of working out all the details. It is an image, after all, a metaphor, not an exact explanation of some salvation mechanism.

Combat theories sometimes focus mostly on the death of Jesus, emphasizing how Jesus exposed the futility and helplessness of the systems of evil and behind them, God’s ultimate enemy (cf. Colossians 2:15). Others focus mostly on the resurrection as the place where death and the ultimate death-dealer, Satan, are decisively defeated.

Penal satisfaction theories emphasize God’s just demands and the dire consequences of rebelling against them. Jesus’s “atoning sacrifice” builds a bridge across the gap that our sin creates between humanity and God. Sometimes the focus is on how Jesus’s death covers our sin and changes us; sometimes it is on how Jesus’s death satisfies God’s honor and changes God’s disposition toward us (sometimes referred to as satisfying God’s wrath).

Moral influence theories highlight the way Jesus served as a model of love, challenging us to live up to that ideal. This view is inadequate as a theory of the atonement. Nevertheless, we neglect important biblical teaching if we do not emphasize the “modelling” function of Christ’s sacrificial death. Christ’s death was not only “in our place,” it was also a visible demonstration of how we also are to respond to others (1 Peter 2:21).

Because I consider moral influence inadequate as a theory of the atonement and because it is better to see our modelling ourselves after Jesus’s example on the cross as part of the discipleship that follows atonement, I will leave this category of atonement theories out of the rest of this discussion.

In what sense is Jesus our substitute?

The Bible presents the atonement through Jesus’s death on the cross as a “substitutionary atonement.” When Jesus died for us, he died to take our place, to do what we could not do, to accomplish what we could not accomplish. This is the most important point I want to make in this article: *All the major atonement theories present Jesus as our substitute.*

Ransom: We could not buy back our own freedom from slavery to sin and death, so Jesus paid the price and set us free (free to be Christ’s slaves). Jesus did what we could not do; in paying the price, he was our substitute.

Conquest: We were too weak to defeat our enemies (and of course God’s); only God acting in and through Jesus could de-

people place their trust in Christ, they are saved by grace through faith, not of their own doing, but as a gift of God. God forgives them, delivers them from sin’s bondage, makes them new creatures in Christ, empowers them by the Holy Spirit and seals them for eternal life. When sin and death are finally abolished and the redeemed are gathered in the new heaven and the new earth, God will have completed the plan of salvation.

Humanity’s Response

Though Jesus entered a world ruled by sin, he chose not to submit to its allure and broke its domination. Through his obedient life, his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection, Christ triumphed over Satan and the powers of sin and death, opening the way for all people to follow. Convicted by the Holy Spirit, people turn from sin, entrust their lives to God, confess Jesus Christ as Lord and join the family of God. All who receive Christ are born again, and have peace with God, and are called to love one another and live at peace with their neighbor. Those whom God is saving no longer live for themselves for they have been set free from sin and called to newness of life.

feat the power of sin and death, could defeat the arch-enemy, Satan, and therefore deliver us from Satan's dominion. Jesus did what we could not do; in overpowering the enemy, he was our substitute.

Penal Satisfaction: The penalty for sin is death; if we had needed to pay for our sins, death would have been our final fate. But Jesus paid the penalty for us; he became our substitute.

So why does it get confusing?

First, many who prefer the penal satisfaction theory call it "substitutionary atonement." That is unfortunate, because all three main theories are about the atonement and all present Jesus as our substitute. To claim that those who favor other theories more than penal satisfaction are "denying substitutionary atonement" is just plain wrong.

Second, because some theologians defend only one theory, arguing that only one can be right, they typically highlight the positive aspects of their chosen theory and exaggerate problems with the ones they reject. That makes it difficult for ordinary Bible readers to know "who's right." It is hard even to know what the main theories are, for they are described so differently by their supporters and by their critics.

The Bible majors on images, symbols and narratives, while we split hairs over philosophical concepts and formulas.

But doesn't the Bible clearly favor "penal satisfaction"?

Those who favor this theory often claim it is the central picture, the main storyline, what "really happened." Other images are not rejected but interpreted within the penal satisfaction framework.

What I find in Scripture is a strong focus on all three of the major theories (or types of theories) and references to many more symbols and images besides these.

Some respond, "But does the Bible not say over and over again, 'Christ died for our sins' (which for many readers implies penal satisfaction)?"

The answer is that it does not.

Most of the verses in the New Testament that say "Christ died" end with something like "for the ungodly" or "for us" or "for all" or "for the brother" (e.g. Romans 5:6,8; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 8:11). Only a few refer to sins, and when they do, they sometimes explicitly define a theory of the atonement other than the penal satisfaction theory. A clear example of this is Hebrews 9:15: "He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins."

Moreover, the Old Testament sacrifice that is most closely associated with Jesus's death is not the "sin offering" but the "Passover lamb." And that sacrifice was not to

atone for Israel's sins; it was a substitute for the firstborn. God accepted Israel's Passover sacrifice and thus defeated their enemies (combat theory) and rescued them from slavery (ransom theory). Yes, Jesus died for our sins. But Jesus also died to defeat sin and to set us free from sin.

What really happened is that God accomplished the atonement through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is something like an innocent party paying a legal debt for the guilty, something like a victorious warrior defeating sin and death, something like a new master ransoming someone out of slavery. Out of these images and metaphors we construct theories and doctrines. But the theories and doctrines need to correspond to all the biblical images and metaphors in order to offer a balanced statement of what God did through Christ.

Some suggest that "Penal Satisfaction" must be the main theory because Jesus's death is portrayed as a sacrifice. But not nearly all sacrifices in the Bible have to do with removing sin or with paying its penalty. The Passover sacrifice was more about combat and liberation than about paying the penalty for sin. Some animal sacrifices were acts of thanksgiving and praise. Some were part of a cleansing ceremony. Some celebrated covenant-making.

When sacrifices were about sin, the focus was on removing the sin or satisfying God's justice, more than appeasing God's wrath. Outside the book of Hebrews, Jesus's death is called a sacrifice very rarely—once in Romans 3:25, where a form of penal satisfaction may be in view, once in 1 Corinthians 5:7, where a ransom theory is implied, and once in Ephesians 5:2, where neither theory is clearly present (compare Ephesians 5:2 with Philippians 4:18).

Where do we go from here?

We dialogue about these things by trying to communicate as clearly as possible. We listen charitably to one another and refrain from crying "heresy" when someone appears to reach conclusions we have questions about. We go back to the Bible and try to take all its metaphors and images seriously. I think we are better off if we accept the best of all the theories than if we limit Scripture by pressing all its claims into narrowly defined boxes. "Jesus died for us!" That is the main thing.

What is the best concise statement on the atonement I can find anywhere? It's the article on salvation our denomination has adopted in our Confession of Faith.

It encourages us to accept the breadth and depth of the whole witness of Scripture to this central aspect of our faith.

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How do we respond to
our different views on
women in ministry?

When we DISAGREE

For almost 20 years, the U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB) has followed the policy regarding women in ministry that was adopted by delegates to the 1981 General Conference convention and affirmed again in 1999. That policy says: “Resolved that women be encouraged to minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate. The church is to invite women to exercise leadership on conference boards, in pastoral staff positions and in our congregations, institutions and agencies. We ask women to minister as gifted, called and affirmed. We call the church to be increasingly alert to the gifts of women and to become more active in calling them to minister. We further call people in the Spirit of Christ to relate to one another in mutual respect as brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The U.S. Board of Faith and Life (BFL) has recently been considering how best to address the various opinions among U.S. Mennonite Brethren regarding credentialing women as lead pastors. In January 2018, the U.S. BFL hosted a summit that brought together district BFL members. The primary focus of the agenda was credentialing women. Christian Leader editor Connie Faber sat down with U.S. BFL chair Tim Sullivan (TS) and member-at-large Jana Hildebrandt (JH) to talk about the summit and next steps regarding credentialing women as lead pastors.

CL: Why did the U.S. BFL gather all district BFL members to discuss credentialing women as lead pastors in USMB churches?

TS: We felt it would be good to connect with district BFLs, to listen and to get their counsel for how to proceed. We also don’t know that there’s ever been a time when the district BFLs have met with the U.S. BFL. We thought it would be a great opportunity for us to affirm a working relationship and get to know one another. So, the value of gathering was broader than just this issue.

CL: Did you have specific goals related to the topic of credentialing women?

JH: There’s a broad spectrum of opinions among us on this issue. We thought it would be helpful to put faces to these various opinions, to respect each other in terms of relationship and to see each other as USMB family. I also think people forget that this isn’t the only place we disagree. So, it’s helpful for us to sit together and to figure out what it looks

like to work together and to be in community even though we’re not in 100 percent agreement on every issue.

TS: One of the specific goals was that we wanted to test an option for revising the current policy to see if it would have any merit with our district BFLs. Basically, the model we proposed was the Canadian approach—that each member church makes its own decision based on that church’s understanding of Scripture, conviction and practice to call and affirm gifted men and women to serve in pastoral leadership. Twelve years ago, when the Canadians discussed and adopted this model, they hoped we would also discuss this proposal. But at that time, we were not ready to engage in this conversation.

CL: And how did the district BFL members respond to this idea?

TS: Their strong recommendation was that we not go in this direction.

JH: The first evening former seminary president Larry

Martens led a Bible study from Acts about how the early church addressed their differences. Larry reminded us that differences of opinion are part of community, and community can be messy. So even though the U.S. BFL proposal wasn't well received, we talked about it with grace.

TS: Both complementary and egalitarian viewpoints reflect core beliefs about what the Bible says about women in ministry. There are egalitarians for whom it is a core belief that women should serve as lead pastors, and they hold their view just as passionately as those who are complementarian and believe women should not be credentialed as lead pastors. And there are some in the middle that have a perspective on this, but it's not a core conviction.

These differing opinions exist on our U.S. BFL and among members of the district BFLs. They exist among our churches, including churches in relatively close proximity to one another.

CL: Given the wide-spread disagreement, how did the summit format help to create unity?

JH: We sat at round tables. Each district BFL had time to have discussion among themselves. We also gave each district BFL time to share with the group. That allowed us to really hear each other well. I also think Larry's Bible study was key in giving us the perspective that the apostles had to work through this kind of thing.

We also communicated very clearly that there weren't any expected outcomes. We weren't planning to walk away from the summit having made a decision. So that kind of took the pressure off.

We've been talking about women in ministry for 65 to 70 years, and we have not resolved the issue. Nobody has argued somebody else one direction or the other. No side has gained any traction. That's a hard place to be. So, what do we do with that?

CL: Did the U.S. BFL succeed in what you set out to accomplish with the summit?

TS: Yes, we did. We got the boards together, and we had face-to-face conversations. I think people felt free to share. Each district was definitely heard. Based on comments coming back to me, people gained some understanding of others who have a different view and maybe regard each other with less suspicion now.

JH: I think there is a sense now that people want to stay in conversation because we value each other and that's huge for me. It gives me hope that our MB family can find our way through this in a way that honors Christ and preserves our relationships with each other.

CL: So, what's next in this conversation?

TS: While the U.S. BFL does have the authority to make policy, the decision about credentialing women for lead pastoral ministry came out of a resolution at the General Conference level that we affirmed and have carried forward as our policy. We (U.S. BFL) don't feel like we have the authority to change this without taking it back to the churches. Since the summit, the U.S. BFL has been talking about holding a study conference in 2019 on women in leadership, and we will announce details once we've done a bit more planning.

JH: At the end of the summit, there were some district BFL members who realized that we aren't always in compliance with the policy we currently have, and some are wanting to better lean into the current policy. So, there's room for growth in seeing women involved in local church leadership as well as in district and national positions.

TS: The U.S. BFL does support the current policy about women in ministry, but the U.S. BFL can't mandate to district boards and to USMB churches what they do. The current resolution doesn't fully satisfy either complementarians or egalitarians. It's a compromise because we haven't been able to agree on what Scripture says.

JH: I really think the discussion needs to be more around how we graciously walk through disagreement. And do that in a Christ-like way, with grace and love. Can we disagree on this and still call each other family? Or will this issue be something that separates us?

TS: Jana frequently uses the word "relationship." It's a keyword for us as Mennonite Brethren, and it's going to continue to be a keyword for us in terms of how we stay together as a denomination going forward.

Definitions

■ **The complementarian view**

is that God restricts women from serving in church leadership roles and instead calls women to serve in equally important but complementary roles. The complementarian view believes in the essential equality of men and women as human beings created in God's image, but complementarians hold to gender distinctions when it comes to functional roles in society, the church and the home.

■ **The egalitarian view**

is that there is no biblical gender-based restrictions and that since we are all one in Christ, women and men are equal when it comes to functional roles in leadership and in the household. The egalitarian view holds that all people are equal before God and in Christ, have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God and are called to roles and ministries without regard to gender, class or race.

Giving Mormons hope, help in Jesus

SMCC brings evangelical presence to Utah

When Paul Robie moved to Utah as a church planter in 1998 he had no idea that in the 20 years that followed the church he planted would grow to encompass six campuses in five locations with more than 3,200 attenders.

What Robie did have was a sense of urgency for reaching Mormons with the gospel.

"I had developed a holy discontent for the situation in Utah, where there were very few churches that were reaching out to LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) people, and I was basically deciding that that was an unacceptable situation," Robie says. "I thought I could actually do something about that."

That passion remains today, and South Mountain Community Church (SMCC), a multisite church which Robie serves as lead pastor, is growing steadily at a rate of about 150 people per year in a state where only 1.5 percent of people are evangelical, he says.

Light in the darkness

Five of SMCC's campuses are located in Salt Lake and Utah counties within 30 miles of each other, while St. George is 300 miles from Salt Lake City in southwest Utah.

Approximately 1.5 million people live in the Salt Lake Valley, where Robie estimates there are fewer than 20 churches with an attendance of more than 200.

In Utah County, where SMCC Lehi is located, only three self-supporting churches exist, and fewer than 1 percent of the county's more than half a million people are evangelical, Robie says.

SMCC Lehi campus pastor Eric Nelson says on any given Sunday, 50 percent of attendees come from an LDS background. Utah County,



An estimated 1,000 people have been baptized since Paul Robie, left, pictured baptizing Greg Knecht, planted South Mountain Community Church 20 years ago. Today about 3,200 people attend one of the six SMCC campuses. *Photo credit: SMCC*

which is home to BYU and the Missionary Training Center, is about 90 percent LDS.

"There are very few churches in Utah County that are growing and healthy," Nelson says. "Two years ago we started this campus, and we can say we are growing and healthy."

Ministry in a highly religious community is challenging. Utah has the highest teen suicide rate in the U.S., double the next state per capita, Robie says. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the first leading cause of death for people ages 10-24 in Utah. Utah also has the highest antidepressant drug use in the U.S.

"On the outside, people are smiling, and they're super friendly, but you scratch the surface and you'll see that there's a whole lot of people that are very unhappy," Robie says. "Because that's what religion does to you. It just weighs you down."

Many people have lost all trust in the church.

"The Mormon church is hemorrhaging people at a rate that is unprecedented in their history, so that's the good news," Robie says. "But usually those people go to some form of atheism be-

cause they've lost any kind of trust that anybody's going to tell them the truth."

The SMCC Way

Robie began to consider church planting while serving as an associate pastor at Laurel Glen Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif. In March 1998, Robie, his wife Jini and their two sons moved to Draper, Utah, a town of 28,000 people without any Protestant churches.

As the Robies met people, they started a home Bible study, then another, then invited youth and music pastor Mike Bell to join the staff. The church held its grand opening in October 1998 with 50 people in attendance.

With continued growth, SMCC outgrew its 2,000-square foot meeting space, expanding to an 8,000-square foot warehouse. Expansion happened twice more to incorporate an additional 15,000 square feet in the adjoining units.

Robie attributes SMCC's early success in reaching Mormons to being well-supported and tailoring the message to a specific audience.

"From Day 1, our goal was to be the first church that came to anyone's mind when their Mormon friend, neighbor or coworker agreed to give a Protestant

church a try, leaving Mormonism,” Robie says. “So we tailor-made our services, much like a missionary would try to understand the culture that they were entering into and adapt their forms and approach to that culture.”

Robie says SMCC was intentional about ensuring an LDS person would understand everything he or she heard at church and find it hopeful and helpful. The church chose not to talk about Mormonism, instead critiquing and correcting LDS theology without ever naming it, using the term “religion” instead.

“A lot of churches, in order to encourage an ‘us versus them’ mentality, openly criticize Mormon leaders and the Book of Mormon and Mormon theology on Sunday morning,” Robie says. “We didn’t do that.”

The Bible is central to SMCC’s teaching.

In the Mormon church, their prophet is their authority, the scriptures are not,” Robie says. “So we want to highlight the contrast between us and Mormonism where we all submit to the Bible instead of to a prophet.”

Because LDS people are wary of top-down denominations, SMCC describes itself as a nondenominational Christian church with a voluntary affiliation with the Mennonite Brethren, Robie says, adding that Mennonite Brethren function with more autonomy as a conference of churches built on a familial model.

Robie says SMCC never assumed the audience had Bible knowledge, explaining every term and biblical figure presented.

“We want people walking out on Sunday going, ‘That was really helpful. I am so glad I came. It was interesting, and I don’t feel kicked in the gut like I do every time I go to the Mormon church,’” he says.

These strategies began to bear fruit, and as LDS people began coming to SMCC, they in turn reached out to their LDS friends.

“I think the first year we baptized 25 people and probably 20 of those were LDS,” Robie says. “So right away, we

had success at reaching Mormons, and so the philosophy of ministry really did pay off.”

The multisite model

Robie says he did not set out to create a multi-site church. It was an idea that came later, after SMCC planted Shadow Mountain Church in West Jordan in 2003.

Over time, Shadow Mountain—an autonomous church without covenantal obligation to SMCC—strayed from SMCC’s philosophy of ministry, which Robie says resulted in a lack of effectiveness in reaching LDS people and was disheartening given the investment. This caused SMCC to rethink its strategy for growth.

“At that point, we decided that’s not what we want to do anymore,” Robie says. “We want to make sure that everything we invest in actually follows the SMCC Way in order to maximize results and get a better return on our investment.”

The SMCC Way, Robie says, is a document clearly defining SMCC’s mission, target and strategic initiatives, which every campus pastor signs and agrees to follow.

With a new vision in place, the initial SMCC—which is now the Draper campus—began birthing new sites, beginning in South Jordan in 2006; then St. George—formerly The Springs Church with which SMCC had a loose alliance—in 2009; then an international campus (SMCC Campus International) that shares the Draper facility. Draper moved into a 42,000-square foot facility in 2012.

In 2015, Shadow Mountain returned as a campus and was renamed SMCC West Jordan, and finally, Lehi was birthed later that year.

“We probably put about \$2 million into these campuses that we raised internally,” Robie says, adding that USMB played a partnership role as well. “Both U.S. and Pacific District Conference, I think, have participated in some way in all of those campuses. They’ve been partners in each one of those, including Shadow Mountain, our original daughter church.”

MB Foundation has also partnered with SMCC in three campus building projects.

Each location has a campus pastor: Rick Henderson in Draper, Kile Baker in West Jordan, Tom Mertz in St.



Kile Baker, left, campus pastor at SMCC West Jordan, dedicates Ben and Tiffany Conner’s two sons. *Photo credit: SMCC*

George, Nelson in Lehi, Rob Ryerson in South Jordan and Alberto Lopez at the international campus.

Robie provides oversight as well as leads the Campus Support Team, which provides centralized bookkeeping, human resources, web, graphic arts and social media for all campuses. To maintain a sense of unity, updates are given across campuses.

"We try to celebrate wins across all campuses," Robie says. "That's really kind of a neat and fun aspect of being multisite. You feel like you're part of something bigger than just your own deal."

SMCC values

SMCC's values, as listed at www.smccutah.org are: members value and serve the guests, everyone can belong before they believe, maturity is measured by how well we love God and others, we trust the process in which God changes us from the inside out, and the truth of the Bible is explained in a helpful and hopeful way.

In a recent survey, Robie says 23 percent of people attending the Draper campus identified as not yet baptized believers in Jesus.

Rick Henderson, Draper campus pastor, says SMCC's values create a culture that lets people breathe.

"It makes it safe to ask questions and explore at their own pace," Henderson says. "We've discovered that a switch flips in people. Their entire lives they went to church because they had to. Now, they come because they want to."

Theological confusion is a common theme among LDS attenders. In order to win influence with a Mormon friend or family member, a person must be able to give helpful answers to tough questions such as "Why do you believe in the Trinity?" "Why would you trust the Bible?" and "Why do you obey if everything is given to you by grace?"

"Mormon theology uses the same terminology that we use," Henderson says. "They just have different definitions. This requires patience and precision when-

ever we preach or even engage in conversation."

Nelson says the questions he hears most are both cultural and theological. Mormons may question why the church serves coffee or if pastors and staff are paid. Theological questions typically regard the deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, the authority of the Bible and if people are married in heaven.

Another challenge is facing the reality that if a person leaves the Mormon church, he or she is walking away from their community and will be treated differently because of it, Henderson says.

"In Mormonism, the only people who go to hell are the people who apostatize," Henderson says. "Every first-time Mormon visitor carries the weight, 'If I'm wrong about this, I'm condemning myself to hell.' This is not a casual transition. There is a world of hurt, anxiety and anger that is commonly churning inside of each guest."

Looking ahead

Citing an elder report, Robie says SMCC had an average weekly attendance of 3,204 people in January 2018. The church continues to grow steadily. Last year, church giving grew by about 18 percent over the year before, Robie says.

Another opportunity for growth came on Jan. 30, when Robie, Henderson and four former Mormons participated in a Mormon Stories interview at SMCC Draper with host, John Dehlin, a current agnostic who was excommunicated from the LDS Church two years ago. Dehlin's podcast reaches thousands, Henderson says, and has resulted in new visitors to SMCC every Sunday since.

In light of continued growth, Robie requests prayer for the health of the church and a unified staff.

"I don't think there's anything about the Mormon church that will stop us from growing," he says. "If we stop growing, it's because we stopped ourselves, we've done something stupid. I think that as long as we're faithful to steward the gifts that God has given us

and are faithful with the people that God entrusts to us, I think we'll always be growing. Always, my prayer is that we stay spiritually, emotionally and relationally healthy." —Janae Rempel

The 2018 USMB National Pastors' Conference and Convention will be held July 24-28 in Salt Lake City. During the convention, Paul Robie will present a workshop on Mormon culture, beliefs and practices. MB Foundation is sponsoring a tour of SMCC campuses that will also outline the church's ministry and will include a stop at Temple Square to better understand Mormon culture.

Greenhouse grows disciples

Church plant offers family, not religion

People looking for garden plants will sometimes email the Greenhouse for information. "What do you guys grow over there?" they ask.

"Hopefully disciples," Pastor Jason Quiring responds.

Nurturing tender shoots of faith in people who have been misguided or hurt by past church experiences is what the Greenhouse in Saratoga Springs, Utah, is all about. Begun in 2013 by Jason and Nicole Quiring, Greenhouse is a small congregation with an organic approach to church planting.

The Quirings had their introduction to the Utah context serving two and a half years in youth ministry at South Mountain Community Church in Draper, Utah. They loved the suburban community of Lehi, 15 minutes south of Draper, where they lived during that time and four years later felt themselves drawn back to that same area.

The experience of ministering and living in a community that was in such need of a Christian witness had invigorated them. Saratoga Springs, near Lehi, was a rapidly growing city of 25,000 that



The Greenhouse congregation gathers for a prayer dedicating their shoebox gifts for Operation Christmas Child. *Photo credit: Greenhouse*

had no non-Mormon churches. They were excited to plant a church in a place where 99 out of 100 people they encountered didn't know Jesus yet.

"We meet a lot of people who have been burnt by the church and people who have fallen through the gaps," Jason says. "They don't want another big church. They want a family."

Bryan and Susanne Schmutz are a Greenhouse couple who needed time to heal from past church experiences. Both had been raised as Mormons but had left the church and wandered spiritually for about 10 years.

"It was 10 years of recalibrating from Mormonism to Christianity," Jason says.

A church that feels more like a family than a big organization is the ideal place for that "recalibration" to take place, according to the Quirings. A typical Sunday morning will see some 40 people gathered for worship and teaching at a local dance studio they rent for their weekly services.

Those who come are not "attenders," they're "participants," Jason points out. "The joy of small church family is that everybody gets to play—helping in the nursery or picking up chairs afterwards."

Community members' level of participation in Greenhouse varies widely, from the small core who regularly attend

Sunday morning worship and biweekly home meetings (called missional communities) to many others who just feel connected because of relationships with people in the church. There is a place for all of them at Greenhouse and patience to allow people time to process what it means to become disciples of Jesus.

Among the people Greenhouse connects with are former Mormons who are currently atheists. One such man is a friend of the Quirings who, with his family, regularly participates in church activities. His experience with the Mormons, including a time as a missionary and on church staff, makes him leery of someone trying to convert him. He warned Jason: "Don't try to sell me a car, because I used to be a car salesman."

"We think more like missionaries than church planters," says Nicole, who grew up in a church planting family. "You go in and build trust and you're in for the long haul. Growth is small and slow, but there is nothing slow about what we are doing in inviting people into our lives."

As a fourth grade teacher at a local elementary school, Nicole sees her role as a teacher as part of that trust-building process.

"It would be easier to just invite them to come on Sunday, but instead we are having that conversation at school, at

the bank, around the pool and at the ballpark."

Slow numerical growth requires a unique set of metrics to measure progress, Nicole explains. "We count the number of baptisms, but we also measure how much we are invited into other people's lives. It's easy for us to invite them, but do [people in the community] invite Greenhouse people into their lives? That's where we can engage on a new level."—*Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

Enid MB Church serves the forgotten

Local ministry helps churches serve locally

Members of Enid MB Church (EMBC) in Enid, Okla., are seeing their city in a new light. Through Forgotten Ministries, a local umbrella ministry that assists homeless and impoverished people, they have realized the need to become missionaries in their own backyard.

"There has been a shift from judgment to compassion," says Karen Jones, a member of the church's outreach team and Forgotten Ministries board member. "Not that we were really judgmental, but I think there were people not knowing better who felt like if someone's living like that, it's their own choice. Our being out there and meeting these people helped us realize that it could be any of us. These things aren't all someone's choice."

"Every town has that population in need"

Forgotten Ministries began about seven years ago by Hennessey, Okla., native Jeremiah Herrian and his wife, Sarah. They had been working on Skid Row in Los Angeles and when they saw that the needs present in LA were also present in Enid, the couple felt called to

invest in this Midwest city of about 50,000.

“Eventually what we want to do is introduce Christ, because that’s where the ultimate change is going to come,” Jeremiah says in a video on the Forgotten Ministries website. “We’re not focused on how much money we’re making but how much we’re changing lives.”

One way they help educate the public is by visiting churches to present videos and testimonies about the difficulties these people face, such as sex trafficking.

“That really opened their eyes because a lot of our attendees would never have a reason to go into that situation and realize this is how it is,” Jones says. “I don’t think any of us would have believed it if he hadn’t told us these first-person stories of being there and doing what he could to help.”

This perspective shift is needed everywhere, Jones says.

“Every town has that population in need. We just have to be willing to open our eyes and see it. And if God points us in that direction, we need to be prepared to serve.”

“This is my mission, right here in Enid”

Forgotton Ministry’s motto is “the church has left the building” and the ministry has several project arms, including:

- The Mercy House, a nighttime shelter used during severe cold or heat, weekly hot meals served at a local park,

- Five80 Coffeehouse, a pay-what-you-can venue, which also provides funding for the ministry,

- The Oasis, transitional housing for men leaving incarceration, a clothing ministry, where items are given at no cost, after-school programs, new this year, and a community garden, which is just getting started.

Multiple churches in the area provide volunteers. Members of EMBC primarily help with The Mercy House and the park meals.

EMBC is responsible for one park meal a month. Teri Mendel has been cooking the meals for several years. With the help of another church mem-

ber, she spends up to four hours preparing the meal the evening before. She then takes it to the park and helps serve it the following night to 50 to 150 adults and children.

“It has made me very appreciative of my blessings,” she says. “It’s just hard to believe that it was right under our noses and we didn’t notice. Now I see those people walking on the street on my way to work, and I think, ‘I wonder where he slept last night.’ This is my mission, right here in Enid.”

Some of those served are originally from the Marshall Islands and are not used to brisk Oklahoma winters. Some arrive without coats or shoes.

“That’s what I enjoy most. Just seeing the faces and the appreciation,” Mendel says. “The fact that we’re giving them something they really need. It’s rewarding seeing what God is doing through us as we spend time, and it’s such little time.”

The youth group, which volunteers somewhere locally each month, has assisted with The Mercy House and the clothing ministry.

“One main focus is humility and selflessness,” youth sponsor David Rader says about their service in town. “The world is too self-absorbed. I’ve noticed it helps them think about the other person more than themselves.”

This has translated into nonchurch time, like when they willingly helped Rader with his own yard work.

“Without hesitation we had kids doing stuff that you probably couldn’t pay me to do,” he says. “They’re realizing the world is a better place if we reach out and show love.”

“God has provided for every need”

In many ways, Forgotten Ministries has helped EMBC understand and meet the needs of their community. Children have learned to be thankful; adults have begun to pray for strangers and members donate generously when there is a need.

“One of our goals is that we are doing what we can to help reach our local neighbors,” Jones says. “This ministry seems to be currently the most effective way to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community.”

“Another goal is that we always have an opportunity to physically serve in mission in front of the members of our congregation, especially our youth,” she says. “There’s just so many ways our young people can learn what’s out there to do once they leave home.”

It has also opened their eyes to God’s provision, as the ministry does not receive any governmental funding, but relies on private donations.



Diane Olson, left, is one of the volunteers from Enid MB Church that helps to cook meals at Mercy House, a seasonal overnight shelter for the homeless. Mercy House is a ministry under the umbrella of Forgotten Ministries, a local organization that provides people with opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus outside of the four walls of their church.

Photo credit: Enid MB Church

“From the beginning of this ministry, every time when prayer is sent up, it will be answered almost the next day,” Jones says. “I come from a background where I have to plan everything. This ministry is so counter to that because God has just provided for every need as we pray for it. I’ve never seen a ministry that is as blessed by God as this is in such specific ways.” —*Jenae Suderman*

Dinner table counteracts loneliness

Int’l students share Sunday with NOCC families

At North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan., sharing a meal provides the backdrop for relationship between church families and international students attending Fort Hays State University (FHSU).

It all began 30 years ago, when Rachel Ediger and her husband, Ken, who pastored NOCC, first came to Hays. Sensing a need and seeking to fill it, the Edigers began inviting international students into their home for meals and other family activities.

Today, as the ministry has grown, that passion has translated to others in the church, and together families reach out to international students through Sunday meals and a Christmas event.

“Loneliness (is) very definitely a challenge for almost every international student I’ve known,” Ediger says. “So really, what I would consider a minimal offer of friendship is very meaningfully received usually.”

As the group of students the Edigers invited into their home grew, “Sunday suppers” were born. Families agree to open their homes for meals and provide drinks. Ediger coordinates the food, making a schedule for the semester with four families providing food for meals each week. Ediger purchases paper goods for the meal with church funds, invites students and arranges transportation—all volunteers—to bring students to the supper.



As many as 26 international students attend Sunday evening meals in the homes of North Oak Community Church families that are organized by Rachel Ediger, second from right. Ediger and her husband, Ken, left, are the North Oak pastoral couple.

Photo credit: North Oak Community Church

Time in an American home

Sunday suppers are scheduled to accommodate students’ schedules and avoid busier times of year.

“It’s a chance for an international student to be in an American home, which is kind of rare sometimes,” Ediger says. “It’s really sad. A lot of students can come to America, and, especially if they only come in a one-year program, it’s easy to be here a whole year and never be in an American home.”

More than 300 international students attend FHSU, Ediger says, a majority of whom are Chinese. Many do not believe there is a God, but that is not to say they are anti-God, she says.

“Sunday suppers is one of the main things our church does to give the gift of hospitality and plant seeds of friendship and give opportunity to actually meet real Christian Americans,” Ediger says, adding that through the suppers, friendships are born, allowing space for deep conversations about faith to happen.

As many as 26 international students attend any given Sunday supper.

Sharing holiday traditions

Another outreach North Oak has organized the past two years is “The

Christian Tradition of Christmas,” a Christmas tour of three homes, which Ediger advertises in FHSU’s international newsletter.

Students split into three groups and spend about 30 minutes in each home, during which families present a Christian American Christmas tradition. Traditions have included a discussion of decorations centering around a nativity collection, making Christmas cookies—students get to decorate a cookie, and sharing about Christmas music—students learn “Silent Night.”

FHSU’s international staff helps with transportation.

After the tour, students are given the option of meeting in North Oak’s gathering area to hear the biblical account of Christmas. Last year, everyone chose to stay for the message, Ediger says, during which Ken used a large nativity to explain the Christmas story and share about God’s love.

In addition to having three families open their homes for the tour, church people help as drivers and snack-makers.

The event has grown from 35 or 40 attendees the first year to 60 last year, and Ediger says she hopes to continue the event this year.

Friendships lead to faith discussions

Ediger says these events allow friendships with students to form, which can lead to opportunities to share about faith.

“The big events aren’t necessarily so much for one-on-one conversation, although at the Sunday suppers, many conversations are just opportunities to learn about each other and then oftentimes opportunities to share faith and how that fits into our life,” she says. “I’ve found most international students, even if they believe something quite differently, (are) very interested to know what we believe and why we believe it.”

Ediger first connected with the international student community through FHSU’s “Friendship Families” program, which pairs international students with local families. While that program no longer exists, Ediger and others have continued opportunities to get to know students through North Oak’s information table at FHSU’s back-to-school picnic, and by serving sloppy joes during another FHSU event.

Ediger says she sees the international student ministry as an opportunity to fulfill the mission mandate to preach the gospel to every nation.

“The world comes to us with international students,” she says. “Right here at home we have great opportunity with actually a lot more freedom than you might have by going and learning a whole other language in another country.” - *Janae Rempel*

Gospel Fellowship rebuilds after fire

ND church looks toward completion of new facility

Pastor Bruce Bogar of Gospel Fellowship Church in Wolf Point, Mont., was listening to the radio



The Gospel Fellowship Church congregation has volunteered its time and energy to work on the interior of its new church building. Church leaders anticipate that the building, estimated to cost \$2,611,000, will be completed this fall. *Photo credit: Gospel Fellowship*

Nov. 28, 2014, when he heard that the fire department was responding to a fire at his church.

Though the outside of the building remained intact, inside, smoke and water had damaged even areas untouched by the fire. This loss marked the beginning of three years of tough decisions for the Wolf Point congregation.

Insurance adjusters assessed the damage to determine whether the church could fix the existing building.

“They said, ‘It’s doable, but it’s really not feasible,’” Bogar says. “It would cost as much to fix it as it would to rebuild.”

Once the decision was made to rebuild, the next question was where and how. Members looked into purchasing a house next door to the church to expand the available land. However, the decision was made to look at other potential locations and contractors. The search went on for about a year before an investment

group donated three and one-half acres of land on the edge of town.

This new piece of land afforded Gospel Fellowship expanded space and room to grow. Because the acreage is located on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, the church had to complete a lengthy process with the Environmental Protection Agency. During this time, a church member visiting Malta, Mont., discovered Maranatha Custom Churches, a contractor out of Jamestown, N.D.

Signs of progress

After settling on Maranatha as the contractor, the congregation began to see the first signs of progress, with dirt being moved in November 2016. The exterior of the building was fully enclosed in the fall of 2017, allowing work inside to continue through the winter. As of mid-March 2018, the plumbing was finished and the church was waiting on the electrician to conclude his work.

Bogar says that men from the church have done quite a bit of the interior work, such as adding drywall. He is praying for completion of the building sometime in fall 2018 but says it all depends on the contractors.

Additionally, finances are “starting to become an issue,” according to Bogar.

The church applied for and received a \$500,000 grant from the John C. Lasko Foundation Trust, which offers grants exclusively for church worship spaces or sanctuaries.

Even with the grant and an insurance payment of over \$950,000, Bogar estimates the church will need an additional \$500,000 to cover the total cost of the rebuild, including the purchase of things such as furnishings, a sound system and appliances.

“It’s been quite a bit more expensive than we had ever hoped for with the engineering costs and getting the land

ready even before we poured the foundation,” he says. “We’ve been able to pay the bills up until now. We are seeing the end of our financial means without God’s help, and I believe God will help.”

Anxious for completion

Since the fire, the Gospel Fellowship congregation has been meeting for services with another Wolf Point congregation. Bible Community Church is a small congregation, just a few families, with no pastor at the time that members of Gospel Fellowship began meeting with them.

“We’re very thankful for it,” says Bogar of the arrangement. “It’s been a real blessing.”

Sunday morning attendance has remained consistent at around 80.

Bogar says that in addition to the church members, many in the community are anxious for the new build-

ing to be completed.

The city of Wolf Point has a large Native American population, and Bogar says there is a sense of a cultural divide within the community. He sees part of the church’s mission as being a place where anyone in the community can find Christ.

“There has to be a place for people who want to find salvation, find life,” says Bogar.

In the past, the church’s programs for children have been especially well-received.

“I think there’s a lot of opportunity here in the community, and we really do need prayer to get in the building and start some programs, because we’ve kind of been on hold,” he says.

Walking in obedience

Back in October 2014, about a month before the fire, Bogar had announced that he would retire sometime before the coming summer. He has been the pastor at Gospel Fellowship for over 25 years and felt that the church could benefit from a younger pastor.

After the fire, church members asked Bogar to stay to help lead them through the coming period of decision-making and rebuilding. A search committee had been formed, but eventually dissolved, and Bogar has done much of the searching for new pastoral candidates, with help from Central District Conference (CDC) minister Rick Eshbaugh.

While he never expected to still be the pastor in 2018, Bogar says “you just seek to walk in obedience, serve how you can serve.”

Bogar is thankful for God’s provision and the support of fellow CDC churches. As he has said to his congregation over the past three and half years, the old building may be gone, but the church—God’s people—is doing just fine.

—Jessica Allen

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Minnesota church plant now gathers on Sundays

Church planters thankful for USMB support

Christian and Erica Kohs are passionate about God's work through the local church and have spent the last decade serving in pastoral ministry in a variety of capacities, ranging from church planting to missionary work, and in diverse settings, from southern Minnesota to the Pacific Northwest.

The Kohs are currently leading Redemption Church, a new church plant in Owatonna, Minn., that joined the USMB Central District Conference (CDC) in November 2017. Redemption began as a Bible study in the Kohs' home and transitioned April 8 to meeting Sunday morning in the basement of the home of Kohs' neighbors, who are involved in the fledgling church's leadership team.

"Christian is passionate about seeing people meet Jesus, teaching the Bible, connecting within the community and seeing people encounter the radical love and grace of God in Jesus," says Don Morris, USMB national director.

Describing his call to plant a new church in Owatonna, population 25,599, Kohs says, "After nearly a decade of ministry, including a previous church plant, I found myself in a season of simple vocational work. It was through this time that God took my heart and truly prepared me for a lifetime of pastoral ministry. As we began gathering a group in our basement to study the Bible together, people started meeting Jesus and learning to truly love one another as the Bible speaks about. Jesus



Erica and Christian Kohs, pictured with their sons, began holding a Bible study in their home that has grown into Redemption Church. *Photo credit: Redemption Church*

knocked on the door of our hearts and told us to plant a church here in this city that we had fallen in love with."

Kohs says the church plant's target group is adults age 19 to 45 and includes couples, singles, widows and divorcees and their families. Summarizing his vision for this new congregation, Kohs says, "Redemption Church exists to be a joy-filled, life-giving place that helps people take their next step toward Jesus, so they can change the way people think about church and live out their new identity as God's sons and daughters."

Kohs says he greatly appreciates the support of the CDC, USMB and C2C. "The financial assistance is a gigantic piece," he says. "But more than that is to simply be part of the family for a long time to come. From texts and emails checking in to the speaking engagements I have been able to do, they have made my family and me feel just like that—part of the

family. My hope and prayer is that as Redemption grows, I can begin to pour back into these men and women who are pouring into me, my family and my church."

On a personal level, Kohs says working with the CDC, USMB and C2C has helped him regain his confidence as a pastor and church planter.

"My coaching through C2C with Scott Thomas and the leadership of my task force has been huge in keeping me accountable and humble as I make the decisions needed to start a new church in a country that has such a consumer mindset," he says.

Kohs asks readers to daily pray with and for this new church.

"There is much spiritual opposition, relational tension, financial strain and physical hardship involved in planting a church. Please join us in prayer to our God who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask, think or imagine (Eph. 3:20)," says Kohs. —USMB

Celebrating the power of teamwork

USMB, partners give LAMB a taste of teamwork

It has been a remarkable start of the year for the LAMB District Conference. As I look back at the first half of 2018, one word stands out: teamwork. The type of teamwork that is Spirit-led because members are willing to lay down personal agendas for increased impact.

Patrick Lencioni says, “Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NLT) reminds us that “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.”

I strongly believe that success is inevitable when teamwork is the desired place to start. The movement forward and continued success of our USMB vision and three core commitments are most visible when the rare sight of teamwork is prayed for, desired and exemplified. God is most glorified and most visible to the world when his people partner together for his one common mission: seek and save the lost.

USMB and its partner ministries have given the LAMB district a taste of the beauty of teamwork. The example of teamwork that has been demonstrated gives us an excellent model to follow. This year at “Edify,” our annual district conference, our USMB national director Don Morris and MB Foundation president Jon Wiebe came together to resource our churches with relevant and practical biblical teaching. The way they complemented each other and collaborated together is why USMB’s future story will be one of greater partnership.

As well, during a LEAD One event held earlier this year, national director Morris partnered with Randy Friesen

and the MB Mission team with this one theme: Stay on mission. Hearing the oneness of the message from our national leaders brought greater clarity to the fact that we cannot enjoy success alone; we have to partner with one another. Walking alongside each other allows us to see the task at hand and work toward that instead of focusing on our differences and the walls we create that decrease teamwork. The visible partnership/teamwork demonstrated by our national leaders should not just be recognized but primarily exemplified. The LAMB district is praying for this spirit of teamwork to overflow in an increased manner among us.

As well, we are grateful for the work that God is doing among the LAMB district churches in reaching out to our communities and saving the lost. In line with one of our three core commitments, we’ve seen an increased desire from some churches that are stepping outside of their comfort zones and being led by faith toward those that are marginalized or different.

Pastor Jesse Hernandez who pastors Iglesia Nueva Vida in Palmview, Texas, is reaching out to over 800 winter Texans every week during the fall and winter seasons at different RV parks in our community.

Pastor Jesse says, “It is amazing to see when someone who has already lived their better part of life finally comes to know Jesus.”

These evangelism efforts have led many to make first-time decisions for Christ, and a number of them are being encouraged to be baptized. God is moving among the LAMB churches, and we ask that you join with us in prayer to see many more come to know Jesus. ▀



Aaron Hernandez is the Latin America District Conference (LAMB) district minister. He and his wife, Alejandra, and their children live in La Grulla, Texas. Hernandez is also pastor of Grace Point @ Grulla and a daughter congregation, Grace Point @ McAllen.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/ MEMBERSHIP

Six people were baptized April 8 at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**

Cory Bathhauer, Christian Bathhauer, Emily Clark, Joel Reimer and Preston Pauls were baptized April 1 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church.**

Michael Acosta, Lisa Borquez, Emmanuella Iwebor and Dwight Hackett were received as members March 25 at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Ericka Schellenberg, Arriana Rinka, Caylee Newell, William Newell, Karl Whitmore, Bill Loewen, Christopher Klaver, Maddie Wallentine, Natalie Harrison and Eric Heyen were baptized March 11 at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.** Vergil Esau, Kay Esau, Austin Boyd, Erin Enns, Todd Nickel and Kayla Nickel were received as members.

Six people were baptized Feb. 25 at **Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.**

Ireland Colligan, Brad Rigby, Kaytlin Eudaily, Brandon Baker and Ani Pibbs were baptized Feb. 11 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus.**

Danny Cook, Erin Cook and Dustin Pfeifer were baptized Feb. 4 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.** Eriana Holle was baptized Dec. 3.

Ethan Hoage, Amelia Riley, Kayleigh Cochran, Josh Leeper and Alba Leeper were baptized Jan. 28 at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

WORKERS

Connie Nicholson was commissioned March 11 as associate pastor of children and family ministries at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.**

Hannah "Shiny" Injamuri will serve as summer ministry intern at **College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.,** June 3 to Aug. 12.

Gary Crandall began serving as interim pastor at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church** Feb. 18.

DEATHS

Dirks, Betty (Kornelsen), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, May 14, 1931—Dec. 29, 2017. Parents: George and Sara (Harms) Kornelsen. Spouse: Ernie Dirks. Children: Norman; Roger; Sheryl Jones, deceased; nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Cummings, William (Bill) Eugene, Visalia, Calif., member of Neighborhood Church, Visalia, March 22, 1937—Jan. 22, 2018. Parents: Allie and Lottie Cummings. Spouse: Mary Jane (Lepp) Cummings. Children: Craig, Brent and Michelle Bergman; 10 grandchildren.

Hamm, Virgil Lynn, Hays, Kan., of North Oak Community Church, Hays, July 23, 1936—Dec. 23, 2017. Spouse: Allura (Steely) Hamm. Children: Brenda Epperson, Julia Kuntz, Nikki Hamm; three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Handel, Lawrence Eugene, Hermiston, Ore., member of Shafter (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 11, 1945—Jan. 17, 2018. Parents: Eugene and Orena Handel. Spouse: Kathy (Bergman) Handel. Children: Kim Heinke, Tami Foss, Freddie; two grandchildren.

Hayward, John C., Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 14, 1920—Feb. 22, 2018. Parents: Earl and Rosabelle (Hagelshaw) Hayward. Spouse: Josephine (Myre) Hayward, deceased. Children: John C. Jr.; Joy Hofer; Mark, deceased; Ruth Traylor; James; 12 grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren.

Heinrichs, Alvina Ruth, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Dec. 17, 1927—Feb. 19, 2018. Parents: Jacob and Helen (Rempel) Barkman. Spouse: Herb Heinrichs, deceased. Children: Lavonne Kroeker, Eileen Messenger, Warren, Carol Taylor; 13 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

Hofer, Alma Martha, Bridgewater, S.D., member of Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, Nov. 24, 1931—Jan. 29, 2018. Parents: Jacob J. and Maggie (Mendel) Hofer. Spouse: Dellis Hofer, deceased. Children: Michael, deceased, Marilyn.

Kleinsasser, Harold J., Reedley, Calif., member of Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church, Jan. 20, 1921—Oct. 25, 2017. Parents: John A. and Katherina (Glanzer) Kleinsasser. Spouse: Elfrieda Jost Kleinsasser, deceased. Children: Beverly McDannald, Phyllis Higdon; four

Grace Community Church participates in "Blessing of the Bikes"



For the past nine years, Grace Community Church in Sanger, Calif., has participated in Blessing of the Bikes. During the annual event, motorcycle clubs meet together for a short ride, followed by breakfast and a blessing.

According to GCC pastor Paul Canaday, the church helps with setup and serving. Canaday has been involved with the event for three years. This year, he and GCC elder David Phillips participated in blessing the bikes and praying for riders.

More than 100 bikers came together for the Feb. 24 event.

"They meet up at the Screamin' Demons clubhouse in Sanger and then go on a short ride led by Sam Estes, former pastor of Grace Community Church in Sanger," Canaday says. "The ride ends at Sanger High School where a hot pancake and ham breakfast is waiting for them."

After breakfast, club chaplains and local pastors gather for instruction and receive stickers saying they have been blessed. Following a short message, the chaplains and pastors bless the bikes and pray for riders.

"This ministry brings people out who wouldn't otherwise be open to the Word or prayer," Canaday says. "Members from Grace, like L.A. who is the club president of her club of women riders, use this opportunity to minister to friends."

grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Leppke, Allen Dale, Fresno, Calif., member of Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., Aug. 3, 1942—Jan. 25, 2018. Parents: Isaac and Sarah (Peters) Leppke. Spouse: Sharon Mercer, deceased. Children: David, Dawn Wood, Dale; 10 grandchildren.

Matzke, Mary Lou (Shaver), Ellis, Kan., member of North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., Sept. 28, 1948—Dec. 25, 2017. Parents: Rex and Patsy (Gustafson) Shaver. Spouse: Richard. Children: Blake, Wendy Geschwentner; three grandchildren.

Neufeld, LaVerne D., Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, Sept. 14, 1928—Jan. 28, 2018. Parents: Nick and Kathryn Neufeld. Spouse: Meribeth Thiessen. Children: Stan, Kris Friesen, Kay Houghton; six grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

Nikkel, Malinda (Penner), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Jan. 28, 1927—Feb. 15, 2018. Parents: David J. and Mary (Wiens) Penner. Spouse: Irvin Nikkel, deceased.

Penner, Martha (Eitzen), Albuquerque, N.M., former member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church and Wasco (Calif.) MB Church, June 11, 1931—Jan. 10, 2018. Parents: Abraham "A.C." and Laura C. (Campbell) Eitzen. Spouse: Dan C. Penner, deceased. Children: Steven, Douglas; four grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

Ratzlaff, Edwin D., Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, April 23, 1923—March 15, 2018. Parents: Jacob B. and Gertrude (Doerksen) Ratzlaff. Spouse: Esther (Jost) Ratzlaff, deceased; Marjorie (Warkentin) Isaak-Ratzlaff. Children: Larry, deceased; Janice Landseadal; Loren, deceased; Tony Isaak, Jerry Isaak; 11 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren.

Regier, Jack, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, July 4, 1931—Jan. 16, 2018.

Parents: Herman and Esther (Pankratz) Regier. Spouse: Evelyn Funk. Children: Rex, Cheri Shrum, Gene; five grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Rockett, Priscilla (Goertzen), Riverside, Calif., member of Bakersfield MB Church, now Heritage Bible Church, Nov. 3, 1949—Jan. 6, 2018. Parents: Albert and Rosella (Richert) Goertzen. Spouse: Steve Rockett. Children: Mari Cocok-Boyke, Vanessa Baker; five grandchildren.

Rusch, Dorothy May (Wahl), Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Feb. 6, 1923—March 11, 2018. Parents: Otto and Lea Wahl. Spouse: Glen Rusch, deceased. Children: Cathy Corzine; Sandra, deceased; four grandchildren; six great-grandchildren.

Smith, Constance Yvette, Lenoir, N.C., wife of NCD pastor Larry Smith, June 3, 1953—Feb. 20, 2018. Parents: Walter and Ruth (Ferguson) Foster. Spouse: Larry L. Smith. Children: Felicia Andrews, Constance Smith Horne, Larry Jr.

Thomas, Betty Jane (Schroeder), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, Aug. 3, 1939—Feb. 17, 2018. Parents: Menno and Kathryn (Dyck) Schroeder. Spouse: James C. Thomas. Children: Karla Reimer, Rusty, Kelly; eight grandchildren.

Toews, Phyllis, Reedley, Calif., member of Bethany MB Church, Fresno, Calif., Dec. 20, 1932—Jan. 25, 2018. Parents: Loren and Opal (Knaak) Forrest. Spouse: Don Toews, deceased. Children: Bruce, Bob, Jerry; six grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Walter, DeWayne P., Yale, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., Feb. 10, 1933—Feb. 13, 2018. Parents: Paul and Susie (Walter) Walter. Spouse: Carol Stahl. Children: Vonnie Boline, Rod, Robin Boldt, Paula Walter, Jill Rome; seven grandchildren; five great-grandchildren.

Wichert, Anna Dorothy, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Oct. 26, 1923—Jan. 31, 2018. Parents: Henry A. and Maggie (Wiens) Wedel. Spouse: Marion J. Wichert, deceased. Children: Pearl Wassenaar, Earl, Dorothy Nightingale, Gaylen, LaVern, Shirley Wichert, Gary, Faye Wichert; 21 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren.

Wiest, Irene, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, April 13, 1924—Jan. 16, 2018. Parents: Paul and Rachel (Kleinsasser) Hofer. Spouse: Arthur Wiest, deceased. Children: Keith, Judy Berger; two grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

DISCIPLESHP

Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., offered the "Family ID" four-session curriculum April 8 through May 6, designed to equip parents to nurture and disciple children with intentionality.

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., hosted a guided prayer walk, "Journey to the Cross," March 30.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a three-week class in March for fourth- and fifth-grade students and their parents titled, "The Case for the Bible." Topics included "The Bible is true," "The case for a Creator" and "What we believe."

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif., began the ALPHA Course Feb. 13 with dinner, a video and table discussion in a series of interactive sessions that introduce the Christian faith. The church held prayer training workshops March 2-3.

Remembering the legacy of H.H. Dick

Henry H. Dick, Mennonite Brethren seminary president, district minister, college administrator, pastor and church planter, died Monday, Feb. 5, 2018, at the age of 95. He was born in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, on June 1, 1922, to Henry and Marie (Unger) Dick, migrating with them to Canada in 1924.

Dick committed himself to a lifetime of ministry spanning 62 years.

"Henry was a legendary spiritual leader among us, possessing ministry gifts and a pastoral presence that blessed thousands," says Pacific District Conference district minister Gary Wall. "Henry had what today we call 'gravitas.' He had a powerful presence, not intimidating or threatening, but it was clear that Henry was confident in his leadership and it was obvious that he walked closely with Jesus."

Over the course of his ministry, Dick held a number of denominational administrative positions, served various conference ministries, planted and pastored churches in Canada and California and was active in the broader Mennonite and evangelical communities.

Dick and his wife, Erica, were honored at the November 2001 PDC convention for their work as district minister couple. During his time as district minister, Dick saw the PDC grow from 77 congregations and 7,377 members in 1989 to 101 churches and 16,326 members in 2001.

Dick is survived by his wife, Erica; three children, Janet and Art Enns, Judy and Ron Brown and Jim and Benti Dueck; six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

An expanded life sketch may be found at: www.christianleader-mag.com/a-pastor-first/.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., and First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., hosted the "Work as Worship" simulcast retreat Feb. 23, which helped people connect their faith to their work.

FELLOWSHIP

Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif., held its spring Live the Mission banquet April 20 with a catered dinner, testimonies from people in different parts of the world and encouraging stories.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted its second annual "S'more Visalia" event April 15 with free s'mores, family friendly fun and live music.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted an Easter Egg-stravaganza March 30 with games, crafts, snacks, bounce houses and an egg hunt.

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church women's ministry hosted a "pass the purse" event including food and games. People brought a gently-used purse to trade with friends.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a two-day, "Mission Possible" conference Feb. 24-25 with four sessions during which church missionaries spoke.

WORSHIP

Kingsburg (Calif.) MB Church, held an evening of worship in the church courtyard March 11 with a fire pit and s'mores.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted "Easter for Visalia" March 31 and April 1 with two

Saturday services in addition to the typical three on Sunday. The event involved more than 320 volunteers and thousands of guests.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., partnered with MCC to host an Immigration Forum March 2. MCC representatives shared about the immigration relief options available.

As part of the "Live, Give & Go" campaign at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.,** people packed 590 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, packaged and delivered 475 turkey dinners, donated \$3,902 to various ministries through the Giving Tree, and gave away 100 percent of one Sunday morning offering totaling \$109,477.26, the largest single morning offering the church has received.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., gave away 11,000 pounds of food during its neighborhood market in January.

A team of 30 people at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.,** made 150 sack lunches for the homeless shelter during a Jan. 28 "Brown Bag Lunch Event." Women's Ministries held a Bunco night, and participants brought toiletries, paper goods and nonperishable food to donate to the Ronald McDonald House.

GLOBALLY

Churches sent kits to Mennonite Central Committee. **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.,** sent 50 health kits, and **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** sent 56 school kits.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., helped bring awareness and raise support to provide basic food needs to struggling families by gathering for a simple meal on World Dinner Day, Feb. 27. Support raised went to MCC.

Junior high students at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.,** went without food for 30 hours Feb. 23-24. Student sponsorships benefitted World Vision hunger relief.

Reverend Earl Yount Sr. remembered

Earl James Yount Sr., a leader and pastor in the North Carolina District Conference of MB Churches (NCDC), died Jan. 29, 2018, at the age of 90.

Yount was a bivocational USMB pastor, working fulltime for the Caldwell County school system as a home and school coordinator, an expanded form of a truant officer, while also pastoring.

Yount served as moderator of the NCDC from 1972 to 1976 and again from 1986 to 2002, for a total of 20 years. He also served on the NCDC Leadership Team, Board of Faith and Life and the Tabor College Board of Directors.

NCDC minister Terry Hunt remembers Yount as a moderator who prayed for NCDC pastors and congregations. "He was a true servant of the Lord, who loved working for the Lord and his churches," Hunt says. "He loved his churches and put in many hard, long hours in meetings, solving problems and making sure each church had a pastor."

Yount was born Jan. 26, 1928, to Marshall Yount Sr. and Cornelian Shade Yount in Lenoir, N.C. He was married to Ola Marie Young for 50 years, and the couple had three children: son Earl Yount Jr., and daughters Kathy and Cynthia.

An expanded life sketch may be found at: www.christianleadermag.com/earl-yount-remembered-nc-leader-pastor/.

Ministry of Howard White Face spanned radio, preaching

Howard White Face, pastor of Lakota Gospel MB Church in Porcupine, S.D., died Feb. 10, 2018, at the age of 73. He was born Sept. 9, 1944, to Hobert and Effie (Big Owl) White Face.

White Face's ministry spanned both radio programming and pastoral preaching. For almost 25 years, White Face, with his wife, Rose, recorded a radio program in the Lakota language that reached five states. White Face began his pastoral ministry at Lakota Gospel MB Church in 2005, where he also led worship and played steel guitar. An arson fire destroyed the 1952 church building in June 2004, and throughout his ministry, White Face faced opposi-

tion from the community as ongoing vandalism of the new church building required bars on all windows and doors.

White Face was a bivocational pastor, working with Oglala Sioux Lakota Housing from 1980 to 2018. He continued to work, record the radio program and preach until his hospitalization in January 2018.

White Face is survived by his children: Greeley, Betty L., Diggo, Delunda M. Running Hawk, Dio, Cathy Two Crow and Angel; stepson, Billy Gourd; 25 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Rose predeceased him in 2016. A daughter, Cathleen, is also deceased.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Job Openings

Youth Pastor: Garden Valley MB Church, Garden City, Kan., is seeking applicants for a full-time youth pastor with a passion for the spiritual development of youth as disciples of Christ. To apply, please send resume to gvchurch@gmail.com.

Education Job Openings

Faculty: Fresno Pacific University is seeking clinical faculty and program director for School Counseling in the School of Education and a director of teacher education, Merced Campus, in the School of Education. Complete job descriptions and requirements can be viewed at www.fresno.edu/careers.

Director: The director of the Fresno Pacific University annual fund and grant development is a fundraiser representing FPU to constituents and potential donors. The director is responsible for developing and coordinating all aspects of the annual fundraising campaign, for grant development activities and to coordinate these activities with the director of major gifts and corporate relations. To apply visit www.fresno.edu/careers

Director: The director of planned gifts is responsible for designing and implementing all planned giving components of Fresno Pacific University's development program. The director will lead with identifying, cultivating and soliciting of planned giving prospects. To apply visit www.fresno.edu/careers

Ministry Job Openings

Regional Director: The MB Foundation West Coast regional director will engage and serve the current constituency, develop new prospects and carry the vision for stewardship to the Pacific District Conference. Resumes may be sent to Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation, PO Box 220, Hillsboro, KS 67063 or jwiebe@mbfoundation.com. A full job description is available at www.mbfoundation.com/employment.

Planned Giving Advisor: MB Foundation is seeking a servant professional to assist our constituency in the Pacific District Conference with planned giving solutions such as will planning and lifetime gift plans. Send resumes to Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation, PO Box 220, Hillsboro, KS 67063 or jwiebe@mbfoundation.com. A full job description is available at www.mbfoundation.com/employment.

Celebration

Corn (Okla.) MB Church is planning a celebration on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of its founding. The celebration will be Sunday, November 11, 2018, at the church. Everyone is welcome to attend this gathering.

From **SHAGLA** on page 9

I still struggle occasionally as a result of my past. Jesus doesn't promise to take all our troubles away, but he does promise to be with us, comforting us, through them all.

I've been clean more than five years now, and I live a life of unexplainable peace and joy that can only come from Christ. Breaking free from the bondage of addiction was like coming out of a bad dream, from darkness into light. Jesus made beauty from the ashes of my past. It's miraculous how far he's brought me. **D**

A SPECIALIZED RETIREMENT PLAN OFFERING FOR MB CHURCHES!

MB Foundation partners with GuideStone Financial Resources to offer a specialized retirement plan option to church staff within the Mennonite Brethren family. With assets over \$6.7 million, this retirement program has become the program of choice of MB churches.

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from the national director

Celebration in Salt Lake City

National Convention will highlight USMB diversity

As we approach the summer months, I encourage each of you to make plans to join us this July in Salt Lake City, Utah, for the biennial National Pastors' Conference, July 24-26, and National Convention, July 26-28. The theme is "Celebrating our Diversity and Unity," with a focus on what this means for us as we strive to make a real difference for Jesus in our communities, nation and the world. You can register online at www.usmb.org/2018-national-convention.

Accommodations for both events will be provided at The University Guest House and Conference Center on the campus of the University of Utah on the east side of the Salt Lake Valley. The Guest House is a nice hotel-type venue in a quiet area of the campus with many trees, a small creek, lots of history and numerous amenities. I think you'll enjoy it.

On Friday evening, we'll meet at the South Mountain Community Church (SMCC) Draper campus. This will be a special night highlighting the story and ministry of SMCC.

Meeting at convention is something Mennonite Brethren have done for decades. It's a unique time for gathering together to share stories, hear updates, listen to quality speakers, take part in inspiring worship, do a little business, renew old friendships and create new ones. This is something that we do together to build strong bonds and relationships.

As we meet in Utah, I believe it will be a wonderful time of recognizing the diverse cultures and ethnicities that make up USMB. On any given Sunday morning, as many as a dozen different languages are spoken among our 200-plus churches across the U.S. There is a richness about that that we need to celebrate.

The seven different speakers we have lined up to present at the National Pastors' Conference and National Convention express the variety of cultures that compose USMB. I've invited a couple of the speakers to use both their natural language and English as they speak. There will be younger and older speakers. I've asked them all to use stories of how God has been faithful to them and also to share from their perspective how we can faithfully be used by God to passionately spread the Good News to more people.

We have intentionally worked at keeping the cost down for those attending. Even so, we realize that it is indeed an investment to pay for the registration, accommodations and to make the journey to attend. I think it's worth the outlay! Plus, Salt Lake City is a great place to be in July.

Most churches will send their pastors, but I sincerely hope that many others will attend as well, that we continue to gather in this collective way in order to build one another up and uphold relationships. There is a trend in America to forego meeting together, especially at denominational gatherings. I think this creates isolation, vacuums and disinterest for what churches in one location sense about churches in other locations. We need one another, and we need to simply be together at times.

So, I'm asking for us to consider this gathering a priority. Pastors and ministry leaders, please encourage your flock to attend. *Come* to Salt Lake City prepared to intermingle with others. *Come* prepared to help make our MB family even better. *Come* prepared to worship with those who make up this marvelous larger family of believers—as we join God in fulfilling his vision for us. *Come* inspired to learn how we might have increasing impact: together!■



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.



smcc

COME ON A TOUR
with us!

Come join us July 26 for a ministry tour of Salt Lake City, UT.

Hosted by MB Foundation, the tour will be in conjunction with the USMB national convention.

Participants will better understand the Mormon culture, the ministry of South Mountain Community Church and the role of MB Foundation and our national family in this ministry.

for more information
VISIT WWW.MBFFOUNDATION.COM/TOUR



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