

# CL

CHRISTIAN LEADER

November / December 2018

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The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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# Reasons to celebrate

What our family of faith can be thankful for

Thanksgiving is a day of homecoming, writes Katie Funk Wiebe in an article from the CL archives posted online ([www.christianleadermag.com](http://www.christianleadermag.com)) as part of the focus in this issue on the upcoming holidays. Thanksgiving should be a day when we gather as families and celebrate what defines and identifies us, Wiebe says. "Those who come together at Thanksgiving indicate that they cherish and hold in trust a shared family pilgrimage," she says. "For a short time, the whole family is focused in one direction. The members acknowledge they co-own certain experiences and are joint stewards of them."

In the print magazine Thanksgiving article "Thank a lot," Jeremy Matlock invites us to make it a regular practice to thank God for everything. "Be in continual dialogue with God, thanking him for everything you can think of, no matter how small," writes Matlock.

As we anticipate the upcoming Thanksgiving season, I typically reflect on the things I can be thankful for as an individual or in terms of my husband and children and our extended families. But what if I also thought about all the things we can be thankful for as Mennonite Brethren, about thanksgiving in terms of our spiritual family. So, here's a list of the things we can be thankful for as U.S. Mennonite Brethren. We can be thankful for:

- a faith family heritage that emphasizes Jesus, community and reconciliation;
- a mission agency, Multiply which was formed following the merger of MB Mission and C2C Network, that is focusing on discipleship and church planting locally, nationally and globally;
- being part of the incredible global family known as ICOMB, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren;
- our colleges and seminary that strive to teach students how to think rather than what to think as these young men and women prepare to serve and work in our ever-changing world; and
- congregations made up of people who have seen the difference God has made in their own lives and are on mission to make a difference in their communities.

And there are certainly other ministries that are the outcome of our shared family pilgrimage that can be added to the list.

Thinking about all that we as U.S. Mennonite Brethren have to be thankful for deepens our Advent celebration. Valerie Rempel reminds us in her article "Eyes to see" that with the arrival of the Messiah, God's kingdom broke into our world. And that breakthrough continues today. God is still at work in our world and we are part of his work crew locally, nationally and globally. And that is good reason to celebrate this holiday season. ■



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## Support USMB on Giving Tuesday

Individuals and churches will have opportunity to support USMB learning and training initiatives on Giving Tuesday, a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday. This year, Giving Tuesday is Nov. 27, 2018.

"USMB supplies a wide-range of resources to help churches maximize their God-given potential," says USMB national director Don Morris. "The donations given to USMB on Giving Tuesday will be used to enrich learning and training experiences for our local MB pastors and churches. That means being better at disciple-making, evangelism and leadership development—reaching more people with the good news.

"USMB also directly subsidizes four MB church plants, reaching people in areas where the gospel has been relatively absent," Morris continues. "That's huge. All funds given on Giving Tuesday go directly to ministry, not to overhead."

In the four years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed more than \$132,000, including \$14,565 gifted to USMB last year.

"We've had wonderful response from givers for past Giving Tuesday campaigns," Morris says. "It's made a tremendous difference for USMB to be able to continue providing meaningful leadership education, training and networking. We are extremely grateful for past contributions and seek God for his provision through his people this year."

For more information on USMB's Giving Tuesday campaign, visit [www.usmb.org/GivingTuesday](http://www.usmb.org/GivingTuesday). USMB invites donors to use the hashtag #MoreTogether.

Beginning in 2012, the Giving Tuesday movement raised more than \$300 million in online gifts last year, fueled primarily through social media and collaboration. As many as 2.5 million gifts were received from people in more than 150 countries on Giving Tuesday.

"As we look forward to Giving Tuesday Nov. 27, please know that the financial need for USMB is significant,

as are the ministries that will be fueled by donations," Morris says. "It makes a difference in the lives of people—it has eternal impact." —USMB

## YouthCon 2019 built for today's youth

Nearly 1,000 Mennonite Brethren high school students and youth workers will gather April 3-7, 2019, for YouthCon 2019, a once-every-four-years event. This occasion for community worship, learning and networking with peers is an important life event for many who attend.

The 2019 convention will take place where YouthCon first began in 1975—Glorieta, N.M. While the convention is revisiting a past location, the content will be built for youth of 2019. YouthCon is being built for longevity and consistency, including a new name to go with a new way of thinking about USMB youth ministry.

After Named 2015, the convention planning team prayed about and evaluated the convention, and God gave them a three-part new vision. First, the team, now known as USMB Youth, decided the urban setting was no longer valuable enough to justify the rising cost of the event. The value of serving is still a crucial element of YouthCon, but rather than having teenagers serve during the convention the team developed Project:Serve where teenagers can serve in their local communities.

The second part of the vision was developing a youth worker network to build connection between conventions. Third, the planning team determined one of the weaknesses of an urban setting was the lack of space for natural community. Not having meals together or an open gathering space was hurting one of the core values of USMB Youth—bringing churches together. With a stronger desire for community and no need for an urban service project, a camp setting was chosen for the 2019 convention.



LEAD One, one-day leadership seminars, are one way USMB resources local church leaders. A series of LEAD One seminars in spring 2018, like this one in Fresno, Calif., focused on the shared mission of church planting and was hosted by USMB and MB Mission. LEAD One seminars are one of the activities that will be funded by Giving Tuesday donations.

Glorieta Camps in New Mexico was selected for its location, price and recreational benefits. Hosting YouthCon at Glorieta means everything is included in an all-in-one package with programming, housing, food for all four days and enough options to fill up multiple “fun days.”

The final change was renaming the event. The title National Youth Convention didn’t bring about much excitement, and the city and year were emphasized in previous conventions. The event was changed to YouthCon, which gives it a permanent title and help with continuity.

There will be no shortage of things to keep attendees busy in between general sessions and labs, and the opportunity to connect with youth from completely different places and walks of life is rich. The camp’s history as a Baptist retreat center is a perfect setting for spending time with God. Whether worshipping in community at a general session in the 3,000-seat chapel or a solitary, early morning walk in the prayer garden, the location is perfect for reconnecting and listening to God’s call.

Registration for the four-day convention opened Oct. 31 and can be completed online at [www.usmbyouth.com/youthcon](http://www.usmbyouth.com/youthcon). Youth workers can also find promotional, fundraising and historical resources on the website. —*YouthCon*

## Ascent Base Camp coming to Kansas

Ascent Base Camp will be held Saturday, Jan. 12, 2019, at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Base Camp, a joint event between USMB, the Southern District Conference and Multiply (previously C2C and MB Mission), is a one-day immersion in the vision, values, tools and training required for the church planting venture. Attendees will learn from seasoned church planters and receive input from church planting strategists to help discern if this is a “climb” he or she should attempt.

“Ascent is a grassroots type of event designed to be helpful to anyone

considering the call to plant a church or vocational ministry,” says U.S. church planting mobilizer Chris Douglas. “We talk about the gospel, the call, the competencies, partnership and next steps of planting. Students, interns, pastors, those working in the marketplace (and) anyone who is exploring God’s call on their lives is welcome.”

The event targets senior leaders who bring younger leaders with whom they are working; young leaders who may not yet know how God has gifted and called them; those, including students, considering a call to ministry, regardless of the specific field or path; people who sense God may be calling them specifically to plant a church; anyone who is curious about the calling and challenges of church planting; and anyone who loves their city and wants to see more gospel outposts established.

The early bird registration rate is \$20 per person. One week before the event, the cost will increase to \$25. For more information or to register, visit: [www.ascentbasecamp.com](http://www.ascentbasecamp.com). —*USMB/Multiply*

## LEAD cohorts to be offered in early 2019

Fall LEAD Cohorts are in full swing, providing online meeting places for Mennonite Brethren pastors, leaders and anyone interested in learning more about a specific topic. Thirty-nine people are participating in seven cohorts led by MB pastors and leaders, with topics including challenges in ministry, the Enneagram personality assessment, youth ministry and several topics related to discipleship.

LEAD Cohorts are free to all participants, with the only cost being books or other materials as recommended by the cohort leader. LEAD Cohorts typically last three months and meet online every two weeks for about an hour.

The next round of LEAD Cohorts will begin in early 2019. For more information, visit [www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts](http://www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts) or contact Lori Taylor at [lori@usmb.org](mailto:lori@usmb.org). —*USMB*

## FPU reports record-high enrollment

Fall enrollment numbers have once again reached a record high at Fresno Pacific University (FPU), the Mennonite Brethren institution in Fresno, Calif. According to September estimates, FPU has 4,212 students studying at the main campus in southeast Fresno, one of the regional campuses in Merced, North Fresno, Visalia, Bakersfield or online.

“The recruitment goals for traditional undergraduates, bachelor’s degree completion and graduate students have each been exceeded,” says President Joseph Jones. “It is exciting to feel the energy that this population brings to FPU. Thanks to everyone who contributed to our success.”

Enrollment numbers exceeded 4,000 students for the first time in fall 2017 at 4,029 students. The biggest change from 2017-18 was in bachelor’s degree completion programs, which grew to 1,808 students from 1,578, an increase of 230 students.

Enrollment also increased in students seeking master’s degrees and credentials and the incoming freshman class. It is down slightly in traditional undergraduate students. Enrollment at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary remained the same at 170. —*FPU*

## MDS looking for donations, volunteers

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is accepting donations for both Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael. The agency has set up a fund for 2018 Hurricane Recovery which could be applied to either storm as needed and reports that donors have been generous with online and mail-in donations.

Donations help MDS clean up, repair and rebuild homes in the hurricane-affected areas, covering costs of tools, equipment and vehicles and supporting volunteers with food, accommodations and transportation to the work site. To donate, visit [www.mds.mennonite.net](http://www.mds.mennonite.net).



# 5 minutes with...

Hurricane Michael, a Category 4 storm that made landfall in the Florida panhandle Oct. 10, is the third most powerful storm ever on record to hit the U.S. As of Oct. 12, 13 people were killed and that number was expected to grow as search-and-rescue crews were still going door to door. As of press time Oct. 12, an MDS assessment team was on standby, ready to send volunteers.

Meanwhile, early response volunteers were in Lumberton, NC, mucking out homes and cleaning up from Hurricane Florence. MDS is staging its response from Chestnut Street United Methodist Church in Lumberton and continues to meet with local officials, FEMA and NVOAD partners to determine where MDS should respond. Early response team volunteers are doing clean up, muck out, chainsaw work and temporary repairs to homes flooded by rain associated with the hurricane.

As new communities become accessible, MDS will branch out its response. MDS has volunteer teams on standby ready to respond and has prepared equipment and supplies, including extra fuel, generators, communication devices, portable office kits and fully stocked tool trailers.

Hurricane Florence made landfall in North Carolina Sept. 14 and recorded wind gusts of more than 90 mph, according to CNN. Spewing 3 feet of rainfall in a four-day span, Florence ranks second only to Harvey, which hit Houston, Texas, in August 2017, as the wettest storm in history. The death toll from Florence has reached 51 across three states, including 39 in North Carolina, according to an Oct. 10 Reuters report. — MDS

## MCC responding to tsunami

The earthquake and tsunami that hit Sulawesi island in Indonesia Sept. 28 has killed more than 2,000 people, covered houses in mud and left widespread destruction. Mennonite Central Committee (mcc.org) is accepting donations to support a response carried out by their partners who as of the mid October were on the island to assess needs. MCC asks for prayer for the hundreds of thousands of people who have been impacted by this disaster. —MCC



Defending Champion Kyle Buller, center, competes with James Gillenwater of Wichita in the Kansas State Arm Wrestling Championships at the Kansas State Fair Sept. 9, 2018.

*Photo credit: Jesse Brothers/Hutchinson News.*

## Kyle Buller

The local newspaper touted the diversity of participants at the Kansas State Fair's 30th annual state arm wrestling championship. According to The Hutchinson News (Sept. 11, 2018) competitors included "a Chinese citizen, a paraplegic local favorite and several women." The "paraplegic local favorite" was Zoar

MB Church member Kyle Buller from Inman, pictured here supported by two assistants. Born with spina bifida, Buller has twice taken first place in the featherweight class.

### ***How did you get started in arm wrestling?***

Back in high school I was in a class with one of the strongest kids in school. I challenged him to arm wrestle, and I actually beat him.

### ***What kind of complications are there for you as a paraplegic?***

I have rods in my back and didn't want to twist and damage the rods. But my doctor said as long as I didn't experience any unusual pain I could go for it. I have no feeling or strength in my legs, so I can't wrap my legs around the table like other arm wrestlers can.

### ***How did it go for you at your first state championship match?***

An average arm wrestling match lasts 10 seconds. The guy I went up against the first time wasn't real strong, but he had a lot of endurance and the match ended up lasting five minutes. I took first place that year. When I want to be, I'm good at endurance, too.

### ***How do you train?***

I go to the wellness center and do a lot of free weights. And then I do a lot of bench press, too. I'm up to 300 pounds in bench press.

### ***How does arm wrestling help you deal with your disability?***

Some days I get down on myself about something but when I start training I realize I have to stay focused. Statistics say that most people with a disability like mine will become depressed and addicted to drugs. But you have to realize that life isn't about you—there's a bigger plan at work.

### ***What faith lessons has arm wrestling taught you?***

For years I've had to rely on some other guys to support me while I wrestle. They're guys from the heavyweight class so they are able to hold me up as long as I need them. That is true in my faith, too. We all need somebody's support.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

# Be prepared

Be ready during this holiday season to share the gospel

**T**he Apostle Paul writes to Timothy: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2).

As I write this, it is the end of August. The temperature here in south-west Kansas is around 80 degrees, mild for this time of the year. We are currently experiencing a shift in the seasons, which in this part of the United States can vary on any given day. Not many people are thinking of the holiday season, but now is the time to prepare for some of the most intentional times for ministry on the calendar.

The holiday season brings with it a potential for the unchurched to have opportunities to hear the gospel as they attend special Thanksgiving meals sponsored by a local church, children’s Christmas programs, fall festivals and other such events. It’s a time when the church needs to be on its toes—being intentional about demonstrating the love of Christ and even more importantly, verbally sharing the gospel.

Hopefully the unique opportunities for the church to share the gospel during the holiday season are obvious to a church’s leaders as well as the congregation. What may not be quite as obvious are the amazing opportunities we have for sharing the gospel outside of the four walls of the church.

Think about it. At what other time of year are there many guests in your home or do you find yourself in places where people are gathered? Holiday get-togethers provide an audience that often isn’t gathered at other times of the year. People’s minds are primed for reflection on themes and concepts that open the door for gospel conversations.

For example, at Thanksgiving people’s minds are attuned to what they are

thankful for. Oftentimes conversations, or even special times around the table, provide opportunities for the believer to be able to share that they are thankful for salvation.

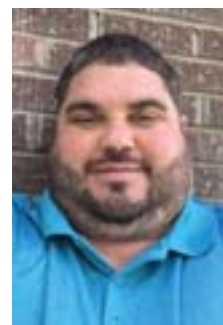
At Christmas, the concept of gifts is ever present. As the theme of gifts is part of many conversations and even central at some Christmas gatherings, doors are open for the believer to share about the great gift of salvation.

Another opportunity to share the gospel, although perhaps only partially, arises from the opportunities of the prayer before a meal. Most guests or family members are open to a prayer at these meals. What better opportunity at the Thanksgiving meal to give thanks to God for salvation or at the Christmas meal for thanking God for sending Jesus as a baby who would later sacrificially give his life on the cross for our sins.

Christmas gatherings may also be a time during which family and friends are more open to listening to the Christmas story as it is read from the Bible.

Pray for opportunities to verbally share the gospel. Here are some ways you can share your faith during the holidays:

- Be intentional about mentioning Jesus in conversations, prayers and during special opportunities to address guests.
- Play Christian music in the background at gatherings.
- Seek opportunities at Thanksgiving to share of your thankfulness for salvation.
- Be intentional at Christmas to share how your life has been impacted by the gift of salvation.
- Behave in ways that represent Christ and his church in a positive way.



Matthew Hamilton is the lead pastor of Valleyview Bible Church in Cimarron, Kan. He and his wife, Michelle, share their home with two dogs and three fish. In his spare time, Hamilton enjoys doing yard work, academic studies and outdoor activities. He has a strong desire to see churches revitalized and the lost reached all over the world.



# God gave me a wakeup call

Construction accident gives new perspective on life

**N**OV. 10, 2016. I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was a beautiful Thursday, about 50 degrees, and Lake Byron was as smooth as glass. The air was still with no wind.

I had come to work just like any other day, part of a construction crew building Byron Bible Camp's new gym. Having set all but 16 rafters the day before, we braced the rafters up for the night, confident to leave and return to finish the next day.

That next morning I asked God to show me his power and protection, but as I busied myself with work, I didn't think much of it. The wakeup call I received from God later that morning as a result of a construction accident gave me a new perspective on life.

The crew and I began our day by setting and bracing the last 16 rafters. When we were comfortable with how things looked, we went down to the ground for our break. Usually when it's warm out and not windy, we'd take our break in the shade of the building project. But that morning, one of my coworkers insisted we take break in the main retreat building.

It was 10 a.m. The 10 of us on the crew sat around a table eating doughnuts and discussing who would go up and start sheeting the roof. At 10:15, a noise like claps of thunder broke our conversation. Moments later, a few guys burst into the room saying the rafters had fallen in. In disbelief, we ran outside to see for ourselves what had happened.

Crumpled rafters littered the gym floor like so many wooden chopsticks. As we surveyed the damage, a somber reality hit. Fifteen minutes before or 15 minutes after, we would have been up on the rafters again.

To this day, no one knows exactly what happened. I don't believe God caused the accident; I believe God, in his sovereignty, allowed Satan to do it. I

know for a fact God was looking out for us that day, and the power and faithfulness of Jesus Christ changed my heart.

There were too many things that took place before the rafters fell for it not to be God. There wasn't a reason for the rafters to fall, and there wasn't a reason for us not to take break inside the gym, but God led us to a different building. We had just been up in the rafters. Why didn't they fall then instead of during break?

I wouldn't have been in the area working on the crew had my girlfriend and I not broken up six months before. But it wasn't until after the accident that I recognized my girlfriend had not been a good influence on me, and I was becoming someone God didn't want me to be. I wasn't living my life for Jesus. I was stuck in my sin, drinking heavily, and Jesus set me free. I realized the breakup was a blessing, and God had a bigger plan in mind for me. He has been showing me what is important in life, what the purpose of life is and how to put my trust in Christ.

I also sensed a calling to ministry. Today, I serve as a counselor at Byron Bible Camp, the very place where God got my attention. The staff has welcomed me with open arms of love, and God provided great friends to me when I needed them most.

God's work is all over the place if we pay attention to it. We grow when we take steps of faith outside of our comfort zone, not letting fear get in the way. I've stepped outside my comfort zone by accepting leadership positions at church, which include teaching an adult Sunday school class, serving as a deacon and doing missions in our community and other countries.

God saved me the day the rafters fell. It's been almost two years since then,



Chet Glanzer is a 22-year-old from Huron, S. D. He attends Bethel Church in Yale, S. D. Glanzer grew up on a family farm, but he is currently self-employed and pursuing his dream of owning his own construction business. When he isn't working construction, he is spending time with his nephews and helping serve at his church and in his community. Glanzer loves getting to know people and making friends. This is his story as told to Janae Rempel.

See TESTIMONY, page 30



# Thank A Lot

By Jeremy Matlock

The importance of giving thanks  
every day for everything

**B**efore that day, I never really understood how important it is to give thanks. I remember it vividly: cross country skiing on the shores of the Gulf of Finland in St. Petersburg. I was at a retreat for training and edification with other international missionaries. The sun glistened off the snow-covered pine branches as we made our way along the beach. I had never skied before, and I was loving this.

When we returned to the lodge, another guy and I said, "That was rad!" (A little hint to the decade this took place). And then an Armenian-American woman said, "Yes, praise Jesus that he created all this that we could ski around in."

It was a nice sentiment. My reaction? Why are you over-spiritualizing this fun event?

The woman's words haunted me as I went to our next meeting. Why didn't I thank God? Ephesians 5:20, about giving thanks to God for everything, came to mind. I remembered as a child hearing that and thinking every time, "How can I give God thanks for everything? What if my dog dies? What if someone in my family gets hurt? How can I thank him for that?" I was always drawn to the "what-ifs" rather than being obedient. There were so many things to be thankful for that I wasn't lifting up to God.

So, as I sat there, I decided to practice giving thanks. I started thanking God for everything—literally everything. Big things and small things. I thanked him that I could be in the room with other missionaries from other countries worshipping him. I thanked God that I had a chair to sit in and the ability to sit and stand.

I went downstairs for lunch and thanked God for the liver (yuck). I thanked him for a fork and knife to use to eat. I looked outside and saw the falling snow and thanked him for that. Then I thanked him that I could be inside in the warmth. Whatever I saw, I thanked God for it.

When I returned back to Rostov where I lived, I walked down the street thanking God for the gloomy faced Russians that passed me—they never seemed happy on the street. And at that moment I began to see people and life differently. I had an unusual peace and an

abnormal joy. My faith grew by leaps and bounds because I saw just how much God has blessed me, and so I knew I could trust him with the tough stuff.

That was a transformative lesson. It was interesting that as time went on I started to see how much the topic of thanksgiving permeates Scripture. It's everywhere! I encourage you to read Romans 1:18-32. It says how depraved mankind became when God gave them over to their sinfulness. All sorts of sin increased, and in verse 21 we see that this happened because they "did not honor God or give him thanks." Wow!

You see, when we thank God we are humbling ourselves. We are saying that we acknowledge that it doesn't come from us, but from him. And we know from James 4:6 that God gives grace (empowerment) to the humble, but opposes the proud, as he did in the Romans 1 passage.

Well, years went by and I became a high school teacher at a private Christian school. One evening I went to bed tense with stress. I thought that a good night's rest would take care of it. But I woke up in the morning still tense. I thought a nice warm shower would do the trick. Nope. Nothing helped, and I realized I couldn't go to school and minister to kids in this state.

So, I knelt down with my Bible. The verse in Philippians 4 about being anxious for nothing came to mind, so I turned there. As I re-read the passage (4:4-7), I noticed that we are called to pray with thanksgiving. There it was again! So, I repeated the experiment I did back in Russia and began thanking God for every little thing. And then I prayed, "God, I can't go to school like this. Lift my burden." And I physically felt the anxiety go away. I felt lighter. The peace of God which surpasses all understanding came over me, and I was ready to minister.

My encouragement to you is to try this thanksgiving experiment. For a week, just focus on giving thanks. Be in continual dialogue with God, thanking him for everything you can think of, no matter how small. I'd love to hear your testimony after you do it. Please email me at [jmatlockhmbc@gmail.com](mailto:jmatlockhmbc@gmail.com).

*Jeremy Matlock is pastor of adult discipleship and assimilation at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church.*

# DO we have EYES to SEE?

## Advent is a season of waiting and longing

**T**here is very little in my DNA that inclines me toward patience. I frequently choose the self-check service at stores because even if I'm slow, at least I'm doing something other than waiting. When my family sees me ducking and weaving around other pedestrians, they tease me that I walk like I drive. They don't mean it as a compliment. If patience is a virtue, well, I'm not very virtuous.

Yet here we are in Advent, a season that is all about patience and waiting.

We're waiting for Christmas—presents under the tree, family gathered around the table, maybe a trip to see parents or grandchildren depending on which end of the spectrum you're on.

We're waiting to taste that special something that only gets made or purchased at Christmas. We're waiting to listen to that favorite piece of holiday music or sing the favorite carols.

We're waiting, of course, for the Christ child to appear and waiting, hoping for hearts to be renewed in this season of peace and goodwill.

### A history of waiting

Waiting has been the frequent occupation of God's people.

Abraham and Sarah waited for the son God had promised them. They got impatient, too, and took matters into their own hands to find a surrogate who gave birth to Ishmael.

Jacob worked for his father-in-law an extra seven years so he could marry Rachel, the wife of his heart, after he was tricked into marrying Leah.

The Israelites waited for liberation from Egypt and then, by their own folly, wandered around the desert an extra 40 years, waiting for God to allow them into the Promised Land.

Mostly, however, God's people waited for the Messiah, for the one who would crush their enemies and restore peace and prosperity. We hear it in the words of Isaiah 35:3-4: "Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you'" (RSV).

Generations later, John the Baptist inherited that prophetic mantle and picked up the chorus for a new generation of God's people who felt swallowed up by the vast Roman Empire.

In Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist is heard echoing that fiery theme when he describes the Messiah as one who is coming with winnowing fork in hand. It is a farming metaphor that speaks to the task of separating the valuable grain from the worthless husks. In Matthew 3, John announces that the one who is coming "will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (RSV).



By Valerie Rempel



### Waiting for the fire

The rest of Matthew's gospel is, however, remarkably free of fire. If Jesus is truly the Messiah, where is the judgment being rained down on a faithless people? Where is the chaff being burned away? As Katie Hines-Shah observes in her sermon help for this text, Jesus is not quite what John expected. "There's more feasting, less fasting," she writes, "less condemnation, more grace."

What's a prophet to do? From his prison cell, hearing secondhand accounts of Jesus and his disciples, it is no wonder that John sent his own disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" In other words, "We're looking for the fire, Jesus."

Our own experience of waiting during Advent is, I think, complicated by that same longing. Secretly, don't you want to say, "Make things right, Jesus!" Rain down a little fire on those who oppress the poor, who wreak havoc through terror, who claim to seek peace through violence and warfare and who threaten our comforts or oppose our convictions, be they political or religious. We're tired of waiting, our hearts are fearful, our knees are feeble and our hands weak.

We should know by now that Jesus doesn't do the expected. "More feasting, less fasting,—less condemnation, more grace."

### Seeing in the fog

Jesus's response to the disciples of John the Baptist is kind. Rather than pointing to acts of judgment he says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 'The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them'" (RSV).

What Jesus doesn't say is implied. Even now Isaiah's prophecy is coming to pass, and the liberating work of the Messiah is being done. The kingdom of God is breaking thru. Do you have eyes to see it?

I once stayed at an airport hotel where my room had a view of the nearby airport and runways. It was foggy, and as I worked at the desk I would glance up to see the airport buildings and the hills in the background, go back to work and then glance over again to see it all hidden with just the runway barely discernible. The airport kept appearing and disappearing. I knew it was there, but sometimes it was dim and very hard to see.

The kingdom of God breaking into our world is, of course, more than buildings appearing and disappearing in the fog. But surely it remains as difficult for us, as it seems to have been for John and his disciples, to see and participate in this other reality that is still breaking into our world.

John the Baptist wasn't sure he recognized the signs. Preoccupied, perhaps, with a taste for fire and vengeance (and who can blame him, he was in prison!), surely he can be forgiven for missing the significance of the healings that are recorded in the Gospels and the way Jesus

was bringing to life the picture of Zion that Isaiah had painted so many years before.

Isaiah's prophecy was coming to pass before his very eyes. The waiting was over. The Messiah had come, and a new reality was taking shape.

That's what we celebrate at Christmas.

It's our confession that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that the kingdom of God has broken into our world. But here is the other confession. While we affirm the "already" of the kingdom announced by Jesus, we recognize that it is "not yet" completely realized.

This season of Advent is layered with another longing as it marks our own period of waiting, our own impatience.

When will the Messiah return? When will the kingdom of God, that time and place of peace and prosperity, be fully realized? When will our deaf hear and our lame leap like deer? Where is the good news being offered to the poor?

And, if there is a side of vengeance to be directed at our enemies, well, we'd take that, too.

Perhaps in our longing for the fully realized kingdom, we miss what is already here and offered to us. Like John the Baptist, we may have trouble recognizing the signs.

### More about the grace

Isaiah's vision of Zion spoke to God's liberating work and reign and Jesus demonstrated what that might be. In his commentary, Warren Carter reminds us that Jesus, "performs God's will, embraces the marginalized, challenges the elite's power and self-interest, and creates new social roles for some. He is God's anointed."

As followers of Jesus, aren't we called to do the same? Surely Jesus is still willing to heal blindness, especially when our blindness keeps us from seeing and welcoming the marginalized around us.

Surely Jesus is still eager to open the ears of the deaf so that we hear new music, new patterns of speech and the accents of those whom God is also about the business of saving.

Surely Jesus wants to heal those of us crippled by old habits and attachments that keep us from living fully and generously as a redeemed people.

Surely Jesus is still offering to save us, releasing us from our fears so that both individually and corporately we may give witness to the saving power of our almighty God.

This is what we should be impatient for—not so much the judgment but the healing. Thankfully, it IS less about the condemnation and more about the grace.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. This Christmas, may we truly see your kingdom. Amen.

*Valerie Rempel, a member of Willow Avenue Mennonite Church in Fresno, Calif., is the interim vice president of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. She is also an associate professor and the J.B. Toews chair of history and theology.*

# What CHILD is THIS?

**This is the question we  
celebrate at Christmas**

**T**he traditional Christmas carol asks, “What child is this who laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping?” That’s the real question as we celebrate Christmas. While there are many who have offered opinions on this child’s identity, perhaps the best answer is contained in the angelic announcement to the shepherds: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

What child is this? He is the Savior. He is the Christ. He is the Lord.

## **He is the Savior**

*“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you....”*

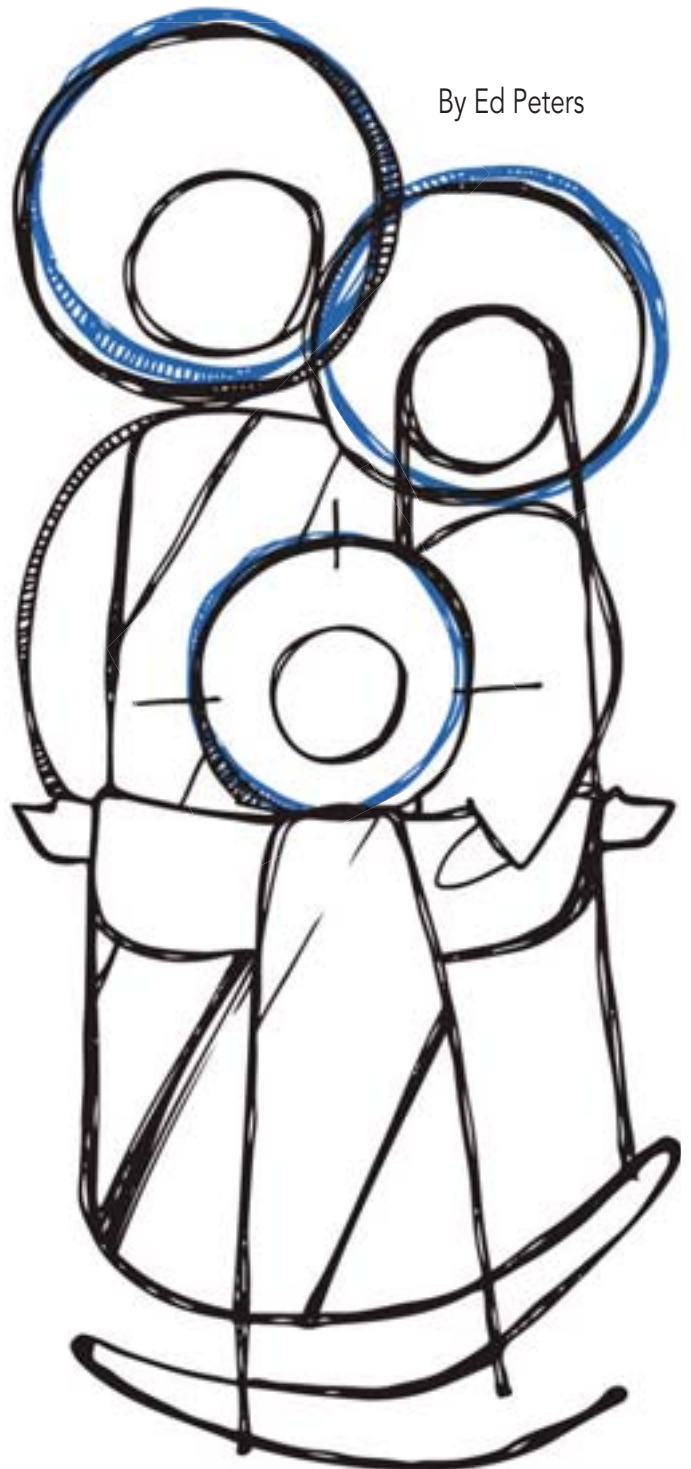
The word “savior” implies that we need to be rescued from some threatening condition. There’s a sense of urgency and desperation attached to the word. We need a savior.

In our day there is a growing reluctance to use words like “saved” or “lost.” To some it sounds condescending or judgmental. Instead, people talk about Jesus coming to bring us “fulfillment” in life. The materialistic society we live in often leaves people feeling empty, so we invite them to Jesus: “He can be your fulfillment.” Or relationships leave us disappointed, and so we invite people to come to Jesus: “In him you will find acceptance and fulfillment.”

Other people prefer to speak of how Jesus can rescue us from addictions—alcohol, lusts or other desires that cause our lives to be out of control.

Scripture, however, suggests that the universal problem confronting people is not unfilled living or unbreakable

By Ed Peters



“ Young or old, fulfilled or frustrated, moral or immoral—we all have the same problem. We have all broken the law of God and need rescuing. ”

habits. It's the problem of sin. Not everyone feels unfulfilled or struggles with addictions, but everyone has sinned and falls short of the glory of God.

Young or old, fulfilled or frustrated, moral or immoral—we all have the same problem. We have all broken the law of God and need rescuing. This sin, the Bible teaches, separate us from God, and the consequence of sin is death, both spiritual and physical, ultimately leading to condemnation and hell.

But the good news of great joy that the angels proclaim is of one who can rescue us from the problem of sin and restore us into right relationship with God the Father and one another. That's why the angel tells Joseph, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

For many of us this is old news, but it is still good news! Where would you be today if Jesus hadn't come to rescue you from sin? For many, this rescue brings new meaning and purpose, freedom over addictions that blind them. But their primary need was to be rescued from sin. This Christmas take time to remember that you have been rescued—a Savior has come into the world.

### He is the Christ

*"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ...."*

Anticipation—it makes this time of year so special. We anticipate holidays, days off from school or work, time with friends or family and discovering what awaits us under the Christmas tree. Likewise, the title "Christ" is a word containing much anticipation.

Many people think of "Christ" as Jesus' last name. But it isn't a name—it's who Jesus is. "Christ" is a title from the Old Testament. It literally means "Anointed One." To be anointed means to be chosen and given authority.

But more specifically, the title "Anointed One" (in Greek, *Christos* or Christ) refers to the king from the lineage of David. Later, as Judah went into exile and no longer had a king in Jerusalem, the prophets spoke of a new Anointed One. One who would restore God's kingdom and sit on David's throne.

Unfortunately, people would have to wait. Each generation hoped and prayed and anticipated that perhaps they would welcome this Anointed One—the Christ. If your children think they have to wait long for Christmas Day, remember the people of Israel waited over 500 years until the Anointed One finally arrived!

In Luke 1:32-33, the angel Gabriel tells Mary, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Christ is the title for this king who will reign forever and ever. He is the eternal King—the King of Kings.

How casually we use the title "Christ" today. In a fit of anger or frustration people invoke it, but the term isn't to be spoken thoughtlessly or irreverently. When we say Christ, we speak about God's King who comes to save his people—the Anointed One, chosen by God. A king who comes in humility, wrapped in strips of cloth and placed in a feed trough for his cradle. Certainly, he was a king unlike any other.

### He is the Lord

*"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."*

There are two basic ways the New Testament uses the term "Lord," in Greek, *kurios*. It could be used as a term of honor for someone who is esteemed or in a place of leadership and authority. In Britain, people of high standing are still called "my lord" or "my lady." In the New Testament, the term "lord" is sometimes used in this way as an expression of respect for a leader or teacher.

But this same word, *kurios*, is also used to indicate the person of God. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Hebrew name for the Covenant God, Yahweh, was translated as *Kurios*. It is the context that determines which way we are to understand the word.

Without a doubt, when Jesus is called "Lord" in the New Testament, the intention is to identify him as God. Jesus is not merely "lord;" he is Lord, capital L.

When the angels announce that a Savior is born who is Christ the Lord, they are indicating that this savior is God himself living among us.

Everything implied in the Hebrew name Yahweh is also true of Jesus. God has come in the flesh as a baby in Bethlehem. We hear this belief proclaimed so often at this time of year, we often fail to grasp how utterly astonishing it really is!

### Glory to God

After declaring what child this is, the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest." The shepherds say, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." When they find Mary, Joseph and the Savior, they too "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told" (Luke 2:20).

This Christmas, may you have the peace that comes from knowing the Savior. May you experience the belonging of being a part of the kingdom of God's Anointed One. May you go forth, glorifying God for the child who is the Lord.

*Ed Peters is pastor of Island Gospel Fellowship, Burns Lake, British Columbia. This article first appeared in The Messenger, a publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.*



## Heritage's "big field" home to Halloween fun

Everyone is welcome to church's fall festival

**I**t's Halloween night. The aroma of funnel cakes hangs in the air as costume-clad children and their families explore the carnival-like atmosphere at the "big field" on Heritage Bible Church's campus, playing games and eating candy.

One child takes a turn in a game booth, using a water gun to extinguish the light from a tier of candles. Another drags a pillowcase full of candy behind him—too heavy to carry.

It's all part of "Fallelujah," Heritage Bible Church's alternative Halloween event that provides a safe and welcoming environment for children and families and allows church people to welcome and share the love of Jesus with everyone who walks through the gate.

"We're known to be a really open, friendly congregation, so we just take that out of Sunday church and put it in a party carnival atmosphere," says JR Ross, who leads the Fallelujah planning committee. "We're welcoming everyone that comes in.

"We've got music playing; we're giving away raffle prizes; we've got game booths and inflatables," Ross adds. "So, the kids just come and have a great time."

### Fallelujah began indoors

The term "Fallelujah" was coined in 2013, but Heritage Bible Church (HBC) has provided alternative Halloween events such as Trunk or Treat or simple carnivals in Bakersfield, Calif., since 1990.

Targeted toward elementary and junior high age children, the outreach began as an indoor fall festival in the gymnasium with the purpose of reach-



A child receives a candy bar prize at a past Fallelujah event hosted by Heritage Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif. The alternative Halloween carnival-like event provides a safe and welcoming environment for families and allows the church to share the love of Jesus.

*Photo credit: HBC*

ing families of the children attending Heritage Christian Schools (HCS), which is attached to the church.

"Many of those families are unchurched people," Ross says. "Their children are getting the gospel and the Word at school, but the families don't have any place of worship to go to and oftentimes don't even have a faith."

Over the years, the event has grown and expanded as the outreach blossomed into the church's neighborhood. Today, Fallelujah is a large, outdoor event.

"We have popups that have sides, and we make it just like a carnival to where there's backdrops and very colorful, inviting decorations," Ross says.

In 2017, 335 people attended Fallelujah, a number Ross says was lower than average. As many as 900 people have attended in past years. Speaking prior to the 2018 event, Ross says she anticipated 750 attendees this year.

In addition to Ross, the 2018 planning team included Jayme Gooding, Jim Aiken, Jerry Koop, Chad Dixon and Marissa Navarette. The event also involved between 25 and 30 volunteers,

not including setup and teardown. High school kids from HBC served as volunteers.

### Lots of candy and games

This year, the Oct. 31 event included five game booths, a gospel booth in which participants made bracelets and heard the plan of salvation, bounce houses and a giant slingshot where kids tossed wet sponges at targets. The planning team limited the number of game booths—in past years, the event has included as many as 12—but added new activities, including a 68-foot-long inflatable obstacle course, an inflatable soccer ball dart target, gunny sack races and a basketball shooting game.

Game booths included "Dino Dig," where children could dig for dinosaur bones and eggs buried in a pool filled with corn; a "Fishing Game," where kids used fishing poles to "catch" prizes; the "Candle Shootout," in which kids extinguished the light from a tier of candles using water guns; and "Boat Races," in which kids propelled small boats down two water-filled troughs by blowing air through a straw.

## body life

“Every element has candy to give out, so they get lots and lots of candy,” Ross says. “All the candy is donated. Our church and the school step up tremendously.”

In the past, HBC has had as many as 12 five-gallon tubs full of candy to give away.

Attendees can also purchase food. One family from HCS makes carnival food for events across Bakersfield. At Fallelujah, their menu includes funnel cakes, corn dogs, kettle corn and snow cones, and the family donates 20 percent of proceeds to the church’s Fallelujah fund. This year, another school family had a baked potato booth to raise money for the school.

HBC advertised the event at church and HCS and put flyers in local businesses.

### More than a carnival

Fallelujah is more than a carnival; it’s a way to welcome people and show them the love of Jesus, Ross says.

Greeters welcome people at the front gate with love and attention and extend a parting word when attendees leave.

“Some people just want to come in, do their thing and get out, and that’s fine,” Ross says. “But some of them want some interaction, and they need to see the love of Jesus. Our goal at this event is to be the hands and feet of Christ and showing it in a fun atmosphere. We want to love on everybody while we’re having a great time.”

HBC’s evangelism commission is active during the event, interacting with people, learning their needs and building relationships. The church provides a welcome booth for those seeking more

information. Anyone who fills out a card is entered in a drawing for a gift card, which happens every 30 minutes.

Everyone is accepted at Fallelujah, providing a witness to the community.

“Especially when a costume isn’t quite appropriate, maybe a little scary, they’re so appreciative that we’re not judging them and turning them away,” Ross says. “One night, one mother said, ‘Thank you so much for accepting us. Thank you for doing this. My kids don’t have any safe place to go.’ That really hit me hard like, ‘Okay, this is why we do this.’ We’re hoping that they see the light of Jesus and that they want to be part of it.”

Fallelujah’s impact goes beyond fun and bellies full of candy.

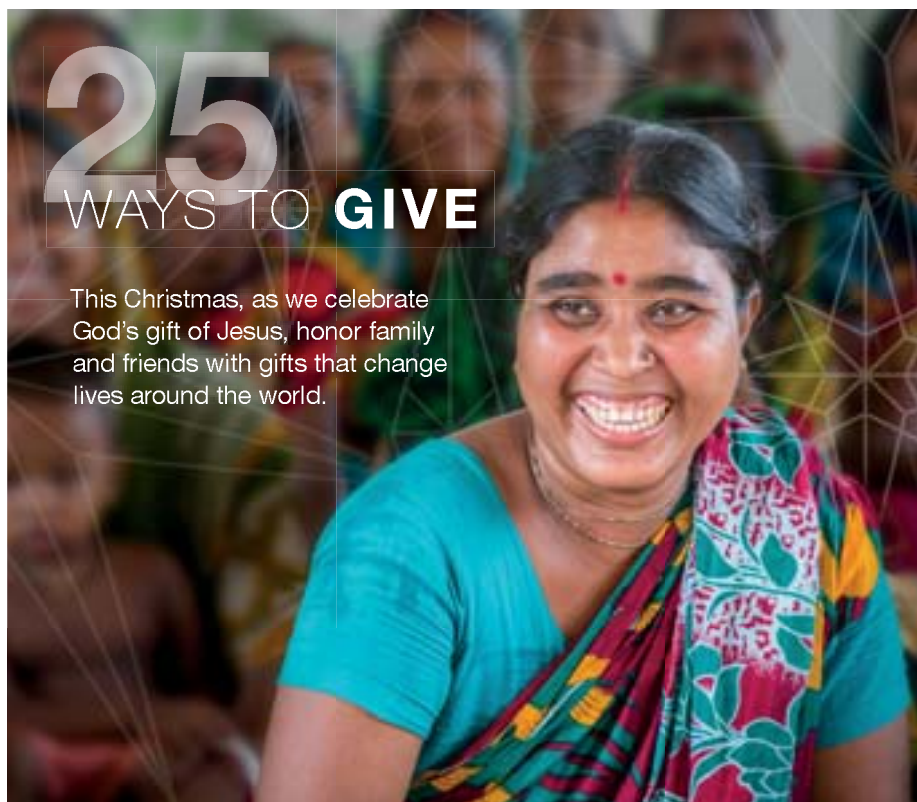
Last year while decorating for Fallelujah, Ross says she was visiting with a woman who had recently started attending HBC. In the course of the conversation, the woman said she had come to a Fallelujah event two years prior—her child attended HCS—and because of the connections she made at Fallelujah, she started coming to church.

“This night is happening with or without us,” Ross says. “(We) might as well make it into a positive, godly thing versus the negative connotation that it could have.” —*Janae Rempel*

### Walking toward Christ from a bad place

Rudi Plett describes his winding path to ICOMB leadership

**R**udi Plett, of Asuncion, Paraguay, was installed in June as the new executive director of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). In an interview with freelance writer Kathy Heinrichs Wiest, Plett shares the story of his wayward youth and how God has led and equipped him for leadership in the global Mennonite Brethren family.



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**Where does the ICOMB executive director work from now?**

I could do this role from anywhere, but we are remaining in Asuncion where we can stay at the same church and go on with our normal family life. We have five children ages 9 to 22. Our preliminary solution has been for me to set up at home in my wife Ruth's office. She is a psychologist volunteering in leadership in the Haggai Institute in Paraguay.

**As a Paraguayan of German heritage, you have a culturally diverse background.**

Sometimes people ask me if I'm a Latin or more Caucasian. I tell them neither—I'm culturally mestizo [mixed]. To live in different cultures is normal for me. I grew up in a Spanish neighborhood, went to German-speaking school

and my parents were church planters planting Spanish-speaking churches. There were Korean shops around us. And we met a lot of indigenous people when we went to visit my uncles on their farms in the Chaco. I had to learn later what it means to live in one cultural setting.

**How did you come to follow Christ?**

I came to Christ after a time in drug and occultism in my youth. I had come to despise my Mennonite people because of injustice I saw. But at age 18 I was sick, depressed, suicidal. That's when I met God. November 14 some friends and I were doing magic mushrooms [a hallucinogenic drug] and asking for the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Enemy showed himself very strongly. I screamed to God with all my heart and

his presence brought peace. The experience pushed us all forward to decide if we would be with God or stay vulnerable to the Enemy.

**Where did God lead you from there?**

I had a lot of damage in my soul and needed guidance in moving toward a healthier way to think and feel and live. But instead of enrolling in a rehabilitation center (which, in retrospect, I should have done) God provided six months of discipleship with a local Spanish pastor and then sent me for a year with [the mission agency] Operation Mobilization. The first four months I was on the ship Doulos with 350 people representing 35 to 40 countries. Then I was eight months with an evangelism team in Austria. When I went back to Paraguay my journey in the multicultural setting was quite strong.

**Did you consider becoming a long-term missionary?**

After my conversion, God clearly called me to preach his name. I told God, "You can send me wherever you want to, but please don't send me to the Mennonites." I would read Bible texts where God says, "Go to your people," and they would feel like they were for me, but I would say, "No, no, no!"

God had to go to a very dramatic way to convince me: A friend in church told me, "I know a guy who had a dream of you; he described you and I knew it was you." The guy came to the butcher shop I was working at and recognized me from his dream. He told me that God wanted me to go back to my people. Even though I was being discipled and was about to be baptized in the Spanish church, after that I was baptized in the German church.\*

Later, after theological school in Germany, we were looking into going as missionaries to Romania, but God again clearly called me back to Paraguay where we served the German-speaking Concordia Mennonite Brethren Church for 16 years.



Rudi Plett, pictured here at the 2017 ICOMB consultation on mission and prayer in Thailand, began serving July 17, 2018 as the ICOMB executive director. *Photo credit: ICOMB*

## What do these experiences bring to your role with ICOMB?

God is a reality, and he works today often beyond our human understanding. There have been months and years if someone had seen what I was thinking, they would doubt that I was a Christian. We were mixing drugs and yoga with Christian faith. But I know that even if you start from a bad place you can walk toward Christ. It's easier for me to see that a person can be following Christ even if some parts of his life still need big change.

It helps me to have a realistic view of the church. I have seen injustice and churches fighting with each other. I, teachers and other leaders have made mistakes that had serious consequences. And sometimes relationships will not be the same. But it is still Jesus' body and he will go on leading it. I hope I can en-

courage others to trust that God is at work, even if we see sin, pain, injustice, disbelief and no easy way out of it.

## How did you get your start with ICOMB?

In 2008 our conference leader could not go to the ICOMB meeting. I wasn't in an official position to do this, but the leaders thought I should go and represent the conference.

This coming together of people excited me—conferences sharing what they have with others who have a need. Like when a lady in Paraguay wanted to teach English in Japan. At an ICOMB meeting the Paraguay leader learned that the church in Japan was looking for English teachers. This story has shown me there is great potential that I am still exploring.

## How can ICOMB better facilitate this sharing?

ICOMB has historically called together the presidents and leaders of national conferences, but this only brings the perspective of one person from each country. In order to create a stronger exchange, we need to bring more leaders together. We are creating opportunities for conferences from the same region to meet and build partnerships. In Latin America we have already seen amazing change in just one year.

## What other signs of success will you be looking for?

Each church in its culture will have some differences, but we need to draw a clear picture of what a healthy conference looks like no matter what its cultural context. Sometimes you can have a good healthy missional church because one leader has been leading well, but we want to see whole conferences that are healthy and having an impact on all their churches. This can happen as conferences are connected and accountable to each other. Through ICOMB we will help make those connections that lead to a healthy global family.

*This article is jointly published by Christian Leader and MB Herald, the publication of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches. Kathy Heinrichs Wiest is a freelance writer living in Kingsburg, Calif., and attends Kingsburg MB Church.*

*\*Editor's note: The Mennonite church in Paraguay has two separate conferences, one formed primarily from the German-speaking Mennonites who arrived via Ukraine after the world wars and one formed primarily from subsequent missionary efforts among local people in the country. The two conferences work together now, partnering together in Instituto Bíblico Asunción (a Bible college) and Radio Obedeíra (an evangelistic radio station).*



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## Women in vocational ministry focus of January conference

Study conference open to all U.S. Mennonite Brethren

If you call a local Mennonite Brethren congregation your church home, you are invited to bring your Bible and an open mind to the U.S. Board of Faith and Life (BFL) study conference Jan. 14-16, 2019, regarding women in vocational ministry.

The objective of the study conference is to study God's Word, listen collectively to the Holy Spirit regarding the issue and be faithful to the promise of additional study and conversation made decades ago by delegates to the national convention, says U.S. BFL chair Tim Sullivan.

"Our goal is to see if we can find more consensus on this issue," Sullivan says. "As Anabaptists, we study God's Word in community—and that's the intent of this study conference. We think this topic is sufficiently significant that people will be willing to come talk together."

"We want people to come with an openness to hear from God's Word differently than they have before," Sullivan says, "and we think our speakers can get us there."

In selecting resource speakers, Sullivan says the U.S. BFL was looking for people who have strong biblical arguments for their position, have published on their position and who U.S. Mennonite Brethren are reading and regard as a resource.

James R. Beck, editor of the book *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, will provide an overview of the issues Tuesday morning. Dan Doriani, professor of theology at Covenant Seminary, will speak on the complementarian view and Craig Keener, professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, will present the egalitarian perspective. That evening, Michelle Lee-Barnewall, associate professor of biblical and theological

studies at the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University and author of *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Gender Debate*, will offer a third perspective.

Three Mennonite Brethren are also on the program. The opening session late Monday afternoon will offer a historical overview of Mennonite Brethren and women in pastoral ministry presented by Valerie Rempel, interim vice president of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. The topic of the second session will be how the New Testament church dealt with controversy and will be presented by Larry Martens, former president of MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Tuesday afternoon, Doug Heidebrecht, director of Global Training at MB Biblical Seminary in Canada, will explore how Mennonite Brethren in other countries, specifically

Canada, are addressing the issue.

The plenary addresses will typically be followed by a question and answer time with the speaker as well as table conversations with guided questions.

The final two sessions Wednesday morning are devoted to a review of the USMB credentialing policy and applications and will provide participants with a chance to offer counsel to the U.S. BFL.

The study conference will take place at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Phoenix-Tempe in Tempe, Ariz. The registration fee of \$149 includes all meals and materials. Information including the study conference schedule and speaker profiles, instructions for registering and details on making hotel reservations are available at [www.usmb.org/2019-study-conference](http://www.usmb.org/2019-study-conference). Registration will close Jan. 9, 2019.—Connie Faber



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## Take the next step

YouthCon 2019 will challenge teens to go deeper

**M**ennonite Brethren high school students from across the United States will gather April 3-7, 2019, at Glorieta Camps near Santa Fe, N.M., for YouthCon 2019, the national USMB youth convention that happens once every four years.

How does a team plan programming for such a gathering?

According to Neil Bontrager, co-director with Kyle Goings, you recognize that each student comes to the event at a different place in his or her faith journey and you strive to make sure YouthCon 2019 is a time when each student is invited to take the next step.

Bontrager says programming is in place to encourage spiritual growth through sessions and speakers, participation in labs, learning in community and having fun in a camp setting.

“Knowing that (we’ve) got kids there that may be all along the spectrum of commitment to their faith, we want to

provide opportunities for a student, no matter where they are, to take a step deeper,” Bontrager says.

A typical day at YouthCon will feature breakfast, personal devotional time and a general session followed by youth group breakout sessions. Afternoons will be open for recreation and free time. Evenings will include a general session and a late-night activity. Hosts for the event are Sara Jo Waldron, Scot Pierce and Hallie Bontrager. Ryan and Bri Wallace from Wichita, Kan., will serve as worship leaders.

### Speakers chosen for their expertise

Six sessions will highlight the event: one Wednesday, two Thursday, one Friday and two Saturday.

According to Bontrager, sessions will begin with a wide overview of faith and will gradually narrow in scope, covering the basics of faith, from what it means to be a follower of Jesus to being a fully-committed Christian.

The leadership team decided the focus of each session, then hand-selected individuals to speak on those topics in accordance with their areas of expertise and gifting. Having a handful of speakers will bring variety, Bontrager says,

but programming will follow an overarching narrative.

“We’ve come up with this lineup of speakers that are gifted and really called, I think, ... to speak on the subjects that they’re speaking about,” he says. “We’re hoping that what we’ve done here is (to) put speakers in spots where they’re giving their best talk. We feel like the bar is raised.”

**Ryan McCullough**, leader of OneTimeBlind, a Detroit-based ministry that creates art to help modern-day Jesus followers think deeply and talk openly about God, will set the stage for understanding faith by giving a narrative overview of the kingdom, encouraging listeners to view their history as God’s story and themselves as active participants—actors with a few pages of the script—in that story.

**Kat Smith**, also with OneTimeBlind, will speak about God’s love and students’ place as God’s children and will lead an invitation to know Jesus.

**Bill Hogg**, national missiologist for the Multiply (previously C2C and MB Mission), will call students to experience Jesus daily, showing what it looks like after a person has made a commitment to follow Jesus.



Youth spend time in worship at Named 2015 in Denver. Intentional planning for YouthCon 2019, to be held April 3-7, 2019, at Glorieta Camps near Santa Fe, N.M., is intended to encourage spiritual growth through sessions and speakers, participation in labs, learning in community and having fun in a camp setting, says event co-director Neil Bontrager. *Photo credit: Vance Frick*

**Tam Hodge**, a Los Angeles-based author and speaker, will speak twice, sharing her personal testimony of growing up in an abusive home, addressing feelings of unworthiness and showing how God can use imperfect people.

**Randy Friesen**, president of Multiply (previously C2C and MB Mission), will speak about ministry and mission.

"Hopefully we're all moving toward a more committed place," Bontrager says. "We want to reject the notion that the highest commitment to faith is a pastor, a worship leader or a missionary.... You can be extremely committed to your faith and work in a secular workplace. It's a matter of the heart, and it's a matter of a focus."

Labs ranging in topic from leading worship to handling money to sharing your faith will replace the general session Friday morning. Labs will feature interactive elements for smaller groups of students, and information will be presented with a hands-on approach. Lab leaders are still to be confirmed.

"We know that five-senses learning is way more effective and certainly way more fun than lecture style," Bontrager says. "So as we are creating these lab experiences, we're trying to find people that will lead them that understand five senses kind of experiences."

#### New features include camp setting

A variety of new features are planned for YouthCon 2019, including a return to a camp setting designed specifically for large groups of students. In recent history, YouthCon has taken place in urban centers with the intent to provide opportunities to serve the urban poor as part of the event. Reality, however, did not always match the ideal, Bontrager says.

"What we found in Denver was that we had quite a few students raking leaves for the city parks, and that was the service project," he says. "Sitting back and looking at that, we thought, 'We've missed the mark a little bit on that, so let's rettool.'"

Project:Serve, which encourages students to create local service campaigns funded by USMB Youth grants, has re-

placed the service project element at YouthCon; however, the topic of service will be addressed, Bontrager says.

Additionally, the schedule for YouthCon 2019 has been adjusted to allow a travel day at the conclusion of the event. Programming will start with a Wednesday night session, as opposed to starting on Thursday, and ends with a late-night event on Saturday. Youth groups will spend Saturday night on the property, but there will be no events on Sunday, allowing ample return travel time.

#### About Glorieta Camps

The 2,400-acre campus of Glorieta Camps is located 15 miles from Santa Fe, N.M., in a dry steppe climate with chilly winters and hot summers. The altitude at Glorieta Pass is 7,500 feet.

The camp can house more than 2,000 overnight guests in a variety of room accommodations. While capacities of each room vary, the average room can house between four to six students. Students can choose a roommate and request groups, Bontrager says.

The camp offers a variety of places to gather and relax. Many lodges have communal areas, and the camp also features coffee shops, hammocks, courtyards, a prayer garden, scenic overlooks, trails and waterfront areas.

Meals are included in the cost of registration, and camp kitchen staff will work to cater to dietary restrictions, Bontrager says.

Free-time afternoon recreation activities abound, with more than 35 options around the camp, including basketball

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## body life

courts, foam pits, gaga ball, blacklight dodgeball courts, nets, ropes and zip-lines and cycling, among other things, Bontrager says.

"We have the run of the camp," he says. "There are more activities to do than what we have people to do them."

### Teams in place

Teams dedicated to areas such as medical, registration, housing, programming, and pastoral care are in place, Bontrager says.

The following individuals, with Bontrager and Goings, comprise the event leadership team: Jeral Gross (accounting/finances), Christy Goentzel (registration/housing), Amy Doane (marketing/PR communications), Stephen Humber (pastoral), Byron Funk (programming), Tammy

Ratzlaff (hospitality), Terry Ens (recreation/LateNite) and Brady Bergman (medical).

The pastoral team, led by Stephen Humber, mission mobilizer with MB Mission, has covered the event in prayer the past year and a half. The team will be on site to lead prayer groups and the morning devotional as well as provide a pastoral presence for anyone in need, ranging from students to youth leaders.

Registration for YouthCon is \$395 per person and includes everything but transportation to Glorieta. To register, or for more information, visit: [www.usm-byouth.com/youthcon](http://www.usm-byouth.com/youthcon).

Download the USMB Youth app to stay up-to-date on YouthCon news and announcements. The app will include a session guide, information for navigating YouthCon and a way to communicate

and coordinate activities while in Glorieta, Bontrager says.

The leadership team has been purposeful in its planning, recognizing the responsibility of organizing a once-every-four-years event.

"This is valuable time, so to make the most of the opportunities in a spiritual sense, in a discipleship sense, is a responsibility we take very seriously, even though it's couched in fun," Bontrager says. "It certainly will be (fun)—that environment is certainly part of any youth ministry event that does its job well, but also we don't want just to be light and fluffy. We want to have lots of depth. We want to have lots of impact, and I really do think that this is going to be an event that has that to it." —*Janae Rempel*

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## New Utah church plant to launch in 2019

Growth will only come with new believers

**P**hil and Melissa Wiebe are planting a new Mennonite Brethren church in Stansbury Park, Utah. A core group has begun meeting, and they plan to launch in early 2019.

"We have just short of 50 people that are interested in making Lakeview Church their home," says Wiebe in an email. "We've been networking and meeting with people since May and had two meet-and-greet gatherings at a local park this summer. Through that networking we had 50 people show up at our Vision Dessert on August 26.

"At that gathering, we shared our heart for Stansbury Park and Tooele County, as well as how we intend to reach the community for Christ," Wiebe says. "It is from this vision that we have seen people, Christian and disenfranchised LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), express a desire to be a part of Lakeview Church."

Wiebe reports that two small groups were launched in September and both are full, with 14 people in each group. Due to growing interest in the church, Wiebe started a third group in October. In October, the church plant also began monthly services for the core team at a local golf course clubhouse. The group has located a meeting place that will be available in January or February 2019. Once that building is available, they will launch public services.

Tooele County is only 0.84 percent Christian and ministry in this very "gospel-empty region" is difficult, says Wiebe.

"There isn't a single Christian church in Stansbury Park, a growing city of over 15,000, and on top of that, of the few Christians that live here, many have

been deeply hurt as they've watched four previous church plants fail," says Wiebe. "Melissa and I have really enjoyed getting to know our community. We frequently engage with our nonbelieving neighbors and are quite excited to eventually invite them to church."

Wiebe appreciates the support this new church plant is receiving from various MB ministries.

"I have been blessed by coaching from nearby South Mountain Community Church as they help me work on my preaching and ability to communicate the gospel," he says. "The Pacific District Conference has gone to bat for us by helping us secure a building for our new church as, unfortunately, people in this culture don't really go to churches that meet in schools or theaters. Gary Wall, PDC district minister, came to town and left saying that he believed in what we're doing and has been cheering us on ever since.

"I've also enjoyed being coached by Chris Douglas from C2C as well as support from Mark Burch, C2C North American director. They've given me

lots of resources and direction. USMB has been supportive as well through paying for our church planter assessment and through ongoing relationship. Don Morris, USMB national director, was one of the first people I called when dreaming about this plant, and he's been a fantastic mentor to me over the years. Whenever I call or email Donna Sullivan, I get a response right away, and she is always helpful. Let me put it this way, it has been incredible to be back in the MB family. The support and encouragement is awesome!"

Wiebe invites the USMB family to pray for this new outreach in Utah.

"This church will not make it if we are only reaching Christians; there just aren't that many out here," he says. "This church will only grow from new growth, people who are meeting the real Jesus for the first time. That excites us! Our work with our launch team is to help them find that excitement too. Pray for our marriage, our family, the Christians we are inviting to own the mission with us and for the people who have yet to meet our Savior." —USMB



Fifty people attended the Lakeview Church Vision Dessert in late August. Lakeview Church will launch in early 2019 as a new USMB church plant in Utah. *Photo credit: Lakeview Church*

## Avoiding the dividing lines

Do our divisions sadden God?

When Jesus prayed that his followers would be one, as he and the Father are one, I wonder if he could see more than 2,000 years into the future to the time and place where we live now. I believe his Father could and did. I believe God knew what our day and age would be like. I believe he could see the rancor and bitterness and angry division among people in our nation—and here I'm talking about the church, not our political system or social structures.

I wonder if God is sad, perhaps even righteously angry about how we draw lines between one another over issues that are less about the gospel and more about making sure we think enough the same about the gospel before we're willing to recognize the spirit of Jesus in one another.

I haven't been Mennonite Brethren all my life. I came to it from a pretty varied theological background. One of the things that is attractive to me is the idea that Mennonite Brethren believe that we learn more theological truth by imitating Jesus than we do by trying to understand a system of doctrines drawn from Paul's correction of those who were doing a poor job of imitation within the New Testament church. Jesus is the center of our theology; the epistles are the clarifying corrective.

Not all of us come to God's Word in this way. Many of us, myself in-

cluded at times, want God's Word to all fit together in a complete and harmonized system of thought, where there aren't any ambiguities and uncertainty isn't a word we use in church. I wish there wasn't any mystery to God. I wish I understood God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit without having any question unanswered or situation uncovered by a bedrock theological truth. However, I suspect that the very reason Jesus prayed for unity that night was because God is more mystery than we even know and definitely more than we can handle.

My greatest fear for us is that we will continue to slide down the path toward greater division and increasingly forsake the core of the gospel for partisan theological perspectives. I fear that we will forsake the Jesus way and instead increasingly embrace the way of our divided nation and world. So, I pray.

I pray that my own heart won't be drawn toward division. I pray that I'll live and think and dream within the core of Jesus' heart and mind. I pray that our churches will be more focused on living the way of Jesus than deciphering the way that Scripture fits together. I pray that pastors will be good examples and the members of their church good imitators of Jesus. I pray that we will survive this season in our world, our nation and our communities. I pray. It may be all I can do anymore. ▀



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

## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/ MEMBERSHIP

Hanna Kelley, Nathan Mast, Alice Jordan, Michael Austin, Matthew Austin and Heidi Gossen were baptized Sept. 23 at **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**

Bill Bradley, Patci Bradley, Nick Biren, Julie Biren, Brad Nielsen, Erick Rouanzoin, Jen Rouanzoin, Lili Brown and Devin Brown were received as members at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Mindy Cupello, Kimberly Ntwambe, Brin Coley, Isabella Shields, Jen Worthen, MaryAnne Hanley, Sam Adamson, Lily Lemus, Ameris Saucedo, Paul Brintley, Seb Yswadi, Miles McAfee, Valerie Bond, Johanna Nord, Jessalyn Speight, Randy Secrist, Allison Miller and Mercedes Beers were baptized Aug. 26 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus.**

Brave Nzaramba and Rose Nzaramba were received as members Aug. 26 at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.**

Amos Buller, Aliyah Conner, Joshua Conner, Alexa Cooley, Stanna Flinn, Allie Goertzen, Deb Miller, Esther Neher, Debbie Timken and Heidi Schlautman were baptized Aug. 26 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**

Claud Chanley, Jeremiah DuPont, Mykayla DuPont, Zeke Hernandez and Lila Nunez were baptized Aug. 26 at **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.** Harrison Ratzlaff was baptized Sept. 9.

Mark Isaac, Laurie Isaac and Emily Isaac were received as members Aug. 12 at **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church.**

Cale McCabe was baptized and received as a member Aug. 12 at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church.** Trenton Matney was also baptized.

Macy Cavazos, Cade Grettein, Elisabeth Williams and Nathan Williams were baptized Aug. 12 at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Kim Sandberg, Chris Sandberg, Tom Mattax, Samuel Pierce, Delilah Pierce, Chad Fraser and Brady Stanford were baptized Aug. 12 at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus.**

Brandon Burket, Justin Connerley, Hilary Jensen, Aaron Pilcher and Trisha Tompkins were baptized July 29 at **Bethesda MB Church, Huron, S.D.**

Logan Long, Jalynn McAlister, Kinzie McAlister, Dylan Moser and Beau Russell were baptized July 15 at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church.**

Daniel Moss and Candace Moss were received as members July 1 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church.** Ralph Klein was received as a member in August.

### WORKERS

Gary George began serving as facilities manager at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.**

Sam and Jamie Tichenor began serving as worship and care pastor and director of family ministries at **Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.,** in October.

Mike Klaassen has concluded his ministry as facilities and communications director at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.**

Peter Heim has concluded his ministry as pastor at **Garden Park Church, Denver, Colo.**

### DEATHS

**Arhart, Judy (Summers),** Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda MB Church, Huron, S.D., April 19, 1942—July 22, 2018. Parents: Lloyd and Lois (Grossnickel) Summers. Spouse: LaVerne Arhart, deceased. Children: Elli Kleinsasser, Vicky Schneider, Andrew, Jonathan; 13 grandchildren.

**Benton, Lois Eileen,** Wichita, Kan., former member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., Oct. 16, 1940—Sept. 9, 2018. Parents: Arthur and Margaret Dyck. Spouse: Ron Benton. Children: Randall, Robert; six grandchildren.

**Forbes, Darlene,** Orland, Calif., member of Country Bible Church, Orland, Dec. 23, 1934—Aug. 1, 2018. Parents: Henry & Amelia Kayser. Spouse: Marvin Forbes. Children: Brent, Scott, Kelly Smock, Wade; many grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

**Hofer, Ben F.,** Huron, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., Aug. 16, 1926—May 2, 2018. Parents: Josua and Anna Hofer. Spouse: Elsie Waldner, deceased; Agnes Glanzer Waldner. Children: Lowell, Darla Loewen, Rachel Winter. Stepchildren: Darlo Waldner, Galen Waldner, Chad Waldner, Loretha Weber; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren.

## Corn MB to celebrate 125 years

**C**orn (Okla.) MB Church will celebrate its 125th anniversary Nov. 10-11, 2018. The anniversary celebration will begin Saturday with a meal and program that includes remarks from former pastor Ken Gardner and Corn Mayor Barbara Nurnburg, a children's feature, church history and a missionary report. Sunday former pastors Ron Claassen and Will Fadenrecht will bring messages, while Carl Warkentin, son of former pastor J.K. Warkentin, will lead singing. The service will also include special music and a video, followed by a meal.

In March 1893, 11 Kansas Mennonite families from near Buhler moved to the Corn—originally Korn—area. These families started the church on Nov. 9, 1893. The congregation built a sod meeting house in 1894. New structures were built in 1897, 1918 (remodeled in 1927) and 1949. The current structure was built in 1982 and dedicated April 17, 1983.

Tim Sandy, the church's current pastor, came to Corn MB in July 2006. Sandy notes the congregation's appreciation of heritage, both culturally and spiritually. "Many have claimed to be 'people of the book,' but I found here at Corn MB Church this really means something," he says. "This identity with God's Word is a testimony to the faith passed down from generation to generation here in the Corn community."



The parking lot was full of cars during the 1939 General Conference held in Corn. *Photo credit: Corn MB Church*



# church news

**Isaac, Cyndi**, Dinuba, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, July 22, 1954—Aug. 25, 2018. Parents: Robert and DeLoris Vogt. Spouse: Stan R. Isaac. Children: Katie Pauley, Jordan, Kellen; one grandchild.

**Migdat, Vernell Marie**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, May 18, 1914—Sept. 13, 2018. Parents: Abraham and Katherine (Penner) Guenther. Spouse: Frank Migdat, deceased. Children: Barbara Stevens, Delores Kinkeade (deceased); one grandchild.

**Pauls, Lillian E.**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 25, 1927—Aug. 15, 2018. Parents: Henry and Agnes (Ediger) Gaede. Spouse: Samuel J. Pauls, deceased. Children: Steve, Tim, Nathan, Joe; seven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

**Schneider, Victor**, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda MB Church, Huron, Oct. 21, 1922—Aug. 5, 2018. Parents: Otto and Eugenia (Kraft) Schneider. Spouse: Ida V. Neuarth, deceased. Children: Lynn, Ardyce Hill, Rick; eight grandchildren; 18 great-grandchildren.

**Smith, John**, Dinuba, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, Oct. 5, 1937—Aug. 22, 2018. Parents: George and Alta (Shelton) Smith. Spouse: Marian (Classen) Smith. Children: Mark, Tim, Nancy (deceased); six grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren.

**Thiessen, Myrtle**, Dinuba, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, July 3, 1929—Aug. 2, 2018. Parents: Fred and Susie Lutke. Spouse: George Thiessen. Children: Greg, Marlin (deceased), Jeanette Pacheco; five grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

## REACHING IN DISCIPLESHIP

**Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo.**, hosted a worship night Oct. 5 with new worship pastor Sam Tichenor and previous leader Daesha Cummings.

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted social psychologist, public theologian, author and professor Christena Cleveland Sept. 24 as part of the Fresno Pacific University Believers Church lecture series.

**Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted a seminar Sept. 22 to help people better understand Islam and equip attendees to share their faith with Muslims.

## FELLOWSHIP

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a Father/Daughter Pirate Adventure Oct. 19 with food, a treasure hunt and a pirate necklace craft.

**Enid (Okla.) MB Church** welcomed guest speaker Vernon Janzen, former president of Tabor College, Oct. 14. Janzen recited the Sermon on the Mount and the church's praise team added That afternoon, the church hosted a Bible trivia championship, a single-elimination tournament for people to test their Bible knowledge.

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** hosted Chef Ray Duey Sept. 28 to demonstrate the art of fruit and vegetable carving.

A Mennonites on Bikes motorcycle run began at Enid (Okla.) MB Church and traveled to **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, for a worship service Sept. 23. A donation of \$25 per bike was collected and given to the Oklahoma Mennonite Disaster Service.

The Haiti Deaf Ministry at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, had a golf tournament Sept. 22.

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, held a movie night on the lawn Sept. 21 with a bounce house, food truck and snow cone stand.

**Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, held its fifth annual old-fashioned Sunday school picnic Sept. 16 with supper and lawn games.

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a community prayer night Sept. 12 with prayer for people and the community as well as testimony, song and reflection.

## Remembering: Gary Castleberry

**G**ary R. Castleberry, pastor of Post Oak MB Church in Indiahomia, Okla., died Sept. 13, 2018, at age 75. Castleberry served as pastor of Post Oak for about three and a half years.

"Pastor Gary Castleberry served the Post Oak MB Church at a time when they were needing pastoral leadership, and Gary and Earleen were looking for a place to continue their call to ministry," says SDC district minister Tim Sullivan. "Gary and Earleen were well loved by the church and community."

Castleberry pastored several Oklahoma churches over the course of his 35-year ministry. He was born June 1, 1943, in Oakland, Calif., to Melvin and De La (Thompson) Castleberry. He suffered a heart attack Sept. 9 and died following heart surgery.

Castleberry is survived by his wife, Earleen; three daughters, Tammy Wilson and husband, Danny; Christy Castleberry; and Nicole Hannabass; son Jeff Castleberry and wife, Cassie; nine grandchildren; and four honorary grandchildren.



## Shafter MB to celebrate centennial

**S**hafter (Calif.) MB Church will celebrate its 100th anniversary Nov. 18, 2018. The centennial celebration will include a documentary video of church history and a celebration service with keynote speaker Clint Arnold. Lunch will be served in the fellowship hall, followed by an afternoon service with a mission emphasis. A pie social will follow. Both services will feature special music with a number of former pastors participating.

Mennonites first came to Shafter in 1909. Drawn to good soil in the area, many eventually bought land for

farming. A small group of believers began meeting in homes, officially organizing the Shafter MB Church on Dec. 29, 1918, with P.P. Rempel as first pastor.

The group initially met in a school, then built its first building—known as the Tabernacle—in 1920. With continued growth, a larger building with a full basement was dedicated in December 1937. Over the years, education wings were added and a new fellowship hall was added in 2006. Today, the congregation numbers about 285. Current pastor Pat Coyle began his ministry at Shafter MB in 2001.



**Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, held a worship service and meal in the park Sept. 9.

The children's ministry at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted a "Back to School" fair Aug. 19. The congregation's youth received goody bags full of age-appropriate items, and every child was assigned an anonymous prayer partner.

**Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, held a barbecue and pool party Aug. 26 with baptisms after lunch.

Brandon Fischer visited **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D.**, to share about missionary work in Alaska.

Students in kindergarten through college were invited to bring their backpacks and place them in front of the stage before the Aug. 19 morning service at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** for a blessing during Kickoff Sunday. Lunch was served and free sno cones were provided by the "Sno Fun Truck."

Joel and Cindy Groening visited **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** Aug. 12 to share about their work with Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Philippines.

## WORSHIP

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted New York-based indie worship band The Brilliance in concert Aug. 31.

**Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D.**, sponsored a community-wide worship service with other area churches July 15.

**Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a "Midnight Hymn Sing" July 14 with hymns performed and reimagined in a folk/rock/pop style by a new generation of Mennonites from San Francisco. The reception included hors d'oeuvres and refreshments, followed by the benefit concert.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a Night of Worship June 24. The pre-party included snow cones, popcorn and inflatables, followed by a time of worship.

## CELEBRATIONS

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, held a ribbon cutting ceremony for its new kids' spaces Sept. 22 and followed with a grand opening Sept. 23.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, celebrated its fifth anniversary July 29.

## REACHING OUT

### LOCALLY

People from **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** joined with churches throughout Fresno and Clovis to pray

on street corners for their city following worship services Oct. 7.

People from **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, presented the Mark Drama Oct 7-8 at the Crossroads Hotel/Huron Events Center, telling the story of Jesus for current Jesus followers and those curious about him.

People at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, were invited to donate to those in need by filling Bags of Blessings with food, household items and clothing through the Giving Center, a joint ministry between First MB and Lighthouse Community Church, Wichita, Kan.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, hosted a cookout and drive-in movie night Sept. 22 as an outreach to the community.

**North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, averaged 175 students for vacation Bible school June 4-8. Students raised \$3,000 for an Operation Christmas Child packing party.

**Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** hosted a community concert Aug. 26 with entertainment by local musicians. The free event was sponsored by the Shafter Symphony Orchestra.

## Remembering: Bryant Corpening

**B**ryant Franklin Corpening, Jr., associate pastor of The Life Center in Lenoir, N.C., died Sept. 5, 2018, at age 69. Corpening was called into ministry at Bushtown MB Church, now The Life Center, in 2004.

"Rev. Bryant Franklin Corpening, Jr., was a close friend and by far one of the best associate pastors that I have ever worked with," says Terry Hunt, pastor of The Life Center and North Carolina District Conference district minister. "He was kind to all and would make

everyone feel welcomed and at home. He served faithfully until his home-going."

Corpening was born June 5, 1949, in Caldwell County, N.C., to Bryant Franklin, Sr., and Iretta Kincaid Corpening. He died following heart surgery. He is survived by his wife, Martha P. Corpening; three sons, Marcus F. and wife, Valerie; Brian Jeremy; and Ryan K.; daughter Winter Wells; and eight grandchildren.



## Remembering: Ricardo Pena

**R**icardo R. Pena, Mennonite Brethren church planter, pastor and a leader of the Latin America MB Conference (LAMB), died Dec. 25, 2017, at the age of 93.

"His ever-present smile and enthusiasm in serving meant a lot to our conference," says Rolando Mireles, former moderator of the LAMB Conference. "We praise God for his legacy of service and love for the church he left within our conference, a legacy that will never be forgotten."

Pena was born to Federico and Maria Luisa F. Pena and was one of the first converts in the Los Ebanos (Texas) MB Church. A graduate of Tabor College, he

planted churches in Premont and Garciasville, taught in the Rio Grande Bible Institute and founded La Joya MB Church. He also served Chihuahua MB Church and Mission MB Church. After retiring from 30 years of volunteer ministerial service, he served in churches in Texas and Mexico for eight years.

Pena was preceded in death by his wife, Carmen. He is survived by his children: Carlos and Hirma Pena, Federico and Belen Pena, Dina P. and Jesse Medina, Ricardo J. and Ana Pena, Rebecca P. and Jim Elam and David and Evangelina Pena; 11 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.



### Local Church Openings

**Lead Pastor:** Buhler (Kan.) MB Church, with 175 in attendance, is searching for a new lead pastor with a servant-leader's heart to help us discover renewal and unity around an exciting vision for our community and beyond. We are seeking someone who loves Jesus, our church family and our community. He will also be energetic, an effective communicator of God's Word and have high emotional intelligence, connecting on a personal level with young and old. Check us out at [www.buhlermbchurch.org](http://www.buhlermbchurch.org). Send cover letter and resume to [buhlermbpst@gmail.com](mailto:buhlermbpst@gmail.com). Deadline for application: November 10, 2018.

**Youth Pastor:** Good News Fellowship in Ferndale, Wash., is looking for a youth pastor with a passion to encourage, train, mentor and equip youth (grades 6-12) to become lifelong disciples of Christ. If this ministry opportunity sounds interesting to you, please visit [www.goodnewsfellowship.org](http://www.goodnewsfellowship.org) to see the full job description, profiles of the church and community, and directions on how to apply.

**Associate Pastor:** Worship and Music: North Fresno MB Church is seeking a full-time pastor of worship and music for our contemporary service. The church is located in an urban area of the 500,000+ city of Fresno, Calif., and is very involved in the neighborhood. Responsibilities include pastoral leadership and oversight for our contemporary worship ministry. The qualified candidate would also provide leadership to another area depending on their gifting. The candidate should have a passion for Jesus, the church, the city, and demonstrated ability to lead worship in a contemporary setting. To apply please contact Shawna Stocks, search team chair, at [sdthiessen@att.net](mailto:sdthiessen@att.net). A full job announcement and job description are available at [www.northfresnochurch.org](http://www.northfresnochurch.org).

**Associate Pastor:** Adult Ministry Discipleship Pastor: Birch Bay Bible Community Church is seeking to call a full-time equipping pastor with an evangelism bent. The church is located in the Pacific Northwest, on the Canadian/U.S. border and two minutes from the ocean. Primary responsibilities will be overseeing our LIFE Group ministry, raising up and training group leaders and administering a semester based small group system that "makes disciples who make

disciples." Other responsibilities will be integrating into our community, teaching and some preaching when necessary. If you are interested, send a resume to [searchteam@birchbaybible.com](mailto:searchteam@birchbaybible.com). A more detailed job description is also available upon request.

**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. A full job description is available at [www.gardenvalley-church.com](http://www.gardenvalley-church.com). To apply, please send resume to [gvchurch@gmail.com](mailto:gvchurch@gmail.com).

### Ministry

**VP-Business Development:** MB Foundation has provided a wide range of services to meet its partners' capital needs and charitable objectives for over 120 years ([www.mbfoundation.com](http://www.mbfoundation.com)). To continue to do so and to provide a sustainable revenue base, they seek an individual to serve as VP-Business Development with responsibility for developing and implementing a comprehensive marketing/business development program for the Foundation. The successful candidate will be entrepreneurial and have experience successfully building programs to expand and develop a client base. For more information please go to [http://bit.ly/MB\\_VPBusinessDevelopment\\_OP](http://bit.ly/MB_VPBusinessDevelopment_OP).

**COO/CF0:** For over 120 years, MB Foundation has served as a valued partner in meeting the capital needs and charitable objectives of a broad, diverse client base providing a wide range of services with over \$190 million currently under management. Due to sustained growth, they seek an individual to serve as COO/CF0 with responsibility for providing strategic leadership and direction to all operational, financial and legal management of the Foundation. The successful candidate's background and experience will be evidence of his/her ability to be successful as COO/CF0. For more information, please go to [http://bit.ly/MB\\_COO\\_CFO\\_OP](http://bit.ly/MB_COO_CFO_OP).

### Book

**BOOK:** Shafter (Calif.) MB Church centennial history, *Building on Faithfulness*, available for purchase on Amazon, \$57 plus shipping. Search "smbc centennial"

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### TESTIMONY, from page 9

and I am still in awe of that experience. The only thing I can think is, "Thank you, Jesus, and God is good." My heart is changed, and I seek to be an obedient follower of Jesus. I sometimes fall short, but living in step with Jesus is a priority because he bought me with his blood on the cross. ■

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## When people reject God

Jesus asks us to show compassion for the lost

**I**t happened again just recently. I was reading responses posted to an on-line article pertaining to a natural disaster. A few people wrote that they wanted nothing to do with a God who couldn't or wouldn't prevent such a catastrophe. My gut response was to become angry with that kind of fatalistic thinking. My heart response was that I grieve for people who are ignorant about who God is, his creation and the fall of mankind that brought sin to the world.

It seems as though more and more people in America have developed a cynical attitude toward God and Christianity. As followers of Jesus, what do we do with this? Do we lament, wring our hands and scoff at this willful rejection of God and what we know to be his wonderful outpouring of grace through Jesus? Do we rant right back and throw Scripture at people who don't understand? Do we call them fools? The Bible does: "Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long" (Psalm 74:22).

No, we have learned through the teachings of Jesus that although he was certainly forthright in calling the teachers of the law and the Pharisees fools—"You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?" (Matt. 23:17)—he nevertheless had great compassion for those who were lost—"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

We can become quite scornful toward the multitudes that reject our Savior and by association reject us and what we believe. We can hide out

among ourselves and gravitate into clusters with only those who are like-minded. We can bash naysayers, lash out at intrusions of religious liberty and mock those who are currently headed toward an eternity apart from God and his love. Or we can love. We can allow our hearts to be broken for those who are perishing and seek actions that are at the heart of God: "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (2 Thess. 3:5).

I still have that tendency to want to argue with people who reject my beliefs. I still have that initial emotional, visceral resentment toward people who mock God. Until I catch myself and remember that I (we) are Christ's ambassadors! We are to bring the message of hope and restoration to this generation. What a privilege that is. What a magnificent thing Jesus has called us to—to go and make disciples. Let's remember to keep loving the "unlikelys," those unlikely to want to know God. Who knows, one day—if we don't give up on them first—they just might become followers of Jesus and even better ambassadors of the Gospel than we are since they fully understand the mindset of people who hold onto unbelief.

"Lord, help me to not respond with anger and a desire for verbal combat to people who are antagonistic toward the things of God and even toward me. Help me to love, to allow my heart to be broken for them. Help me to find avenues for being a humble ambassador of the truth to them. Help me to be your messenger of hope to a world that has lost hope." ■



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

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