

CHRISTIAN LEADER

September / October 2019

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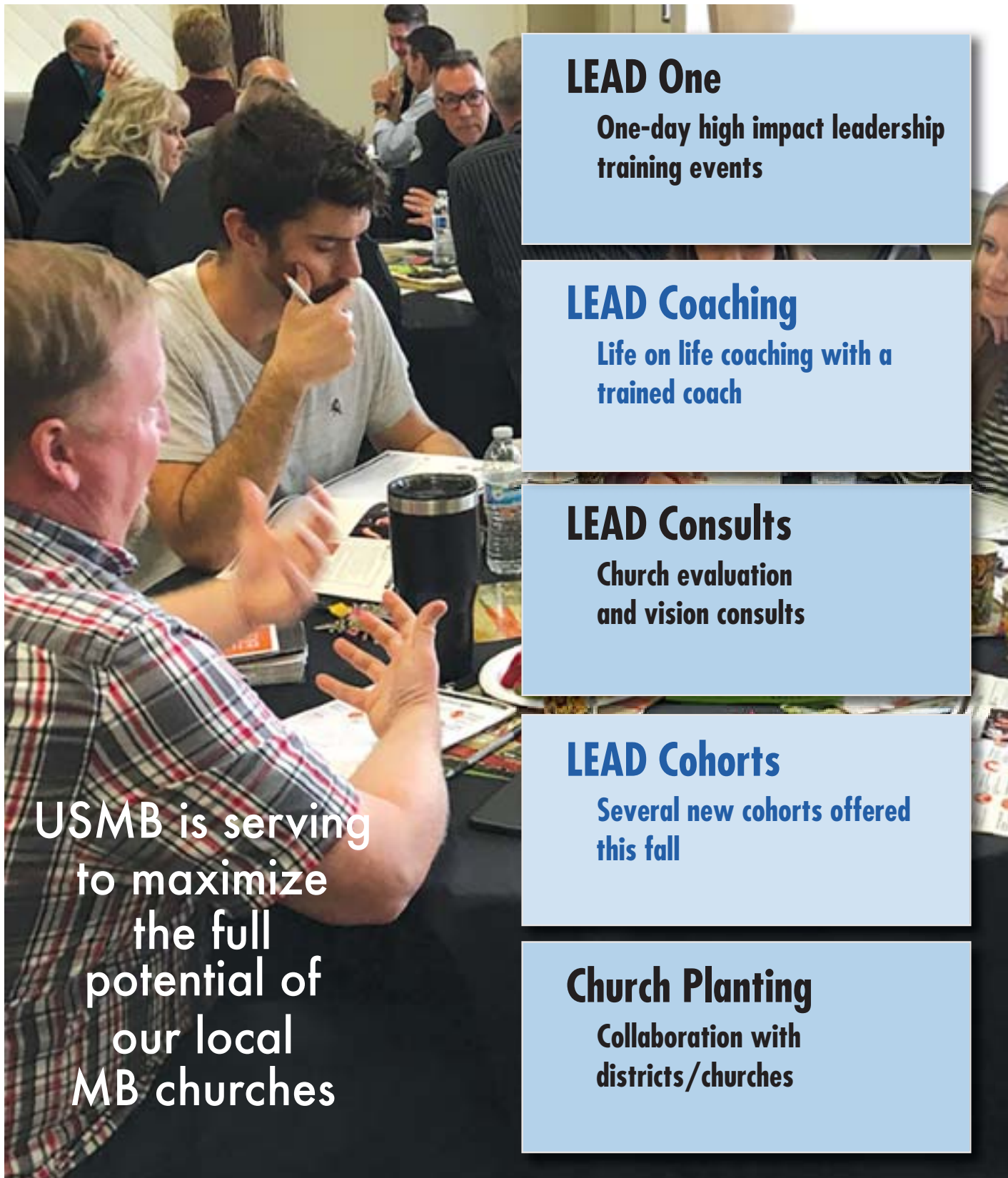


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When it's time to vote

Rethinking politics in a polarized culture

As we anticipate the 2020 election, U.S. Mennonite Brethren must rethink our approach to politics. American political culture is fiercely polarized. We hear the U.S. president speak in racially charged tones and refer to people who disagree with him as his enemies, and we begin to look at each other in the same way. In our spheres of influence as individuals and churches, what can we Mennonite Brethren do to change this ethos?

We can begin by acknowledging the challenge involved in taking a different approach. USMB congregations include both Democrats and Republicans, and unless we actively resist it, divisiveness will take root, ruining relationships within the church and destroying our witness among those who look to us to model God's love and grace. Our neighborhoods, schools, businesses and community organizations need to see Christians loving their neighbors as themselves and exemplifying the wonderful truth that all human beings are created in God's image and likeness—not tossing verbal grenades or avoiding one another when there are differences.

It's been helpful for me to recognize that political affiliations are powerful and that avoiding these labels is challenging. In an interview with Ed Stetzer about his book *Love Over Fear: Facing Monsters, Befriending Enemies and Healing Our Polarized World*, pastor and author Dan White Jr., says, "If you are a Conservative and you move toward Progressives with affection, you will be labeled as one who compromises on moral issues. If you are a Progressive and you move toward Conservatives with warm hospitality rather than warring hostility you will be labeled complicit with injustice.... Our identity is so rooted in political affiliations that we fear being viewed as compromising or complicit. The 'us vs. them' way of self-identifying is so intense and even subconscious that it controls us more than our primary identity in the words, works and ways of Jesus."

Our goal then is to root politics in the teachings and person of Jesus and to evaluate the character of political leaders, public policy issues and our vote against Scripture and who we know Jesus to be. When we do this, a longstanding dilemma arises: How do we bring our faith convictions to bear in politics when the candidates or the parties don't fully align with what we know Jesus and the Bible to teach? We cannot use our loyalty to a political party to override biblical truth and teaching. Our first loyalty is to the way of Jesus; all other loyalties are secondary.

Too often we excuse harmful policies and bad character so that our preferred political party stays in power. We can't continue to do this. When we name the failures and weaknesses of parties and candidates and talk together as followers of Jesus, we can be a positive force working against partisan divides. ▀



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LEAD One series focuses on “Gospel Fluency”

LEAD One Gospel Fluency workshops will be held in four locations this fall and early winter with the first event scheduled for Sept. 5 at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church.

The workshop will be a one-day, high impact leadership-training event for church leaders.

According to the Gospel Fluency website, gospel fluency is the ability to understand how Jesus impacts everyday life and clearly communicate those gospel truths to others. Ben Connelly, co-author of *Gospel Fluency Handbook*, *Saturate Field Guide* and *A Field Guide for Everyday Mission* will be the primary presenter.



Sessions include: The Gospel’s Power and Purpose, The Gospel in Me, The Gospel in Community and The Gospel in the World. There will be time for table discussion and a question and answer session.

“This is useful, powerful stuff, and I believe it’s what many pastors and leaders have been craving—a way of injecting new life and excitement about Jesus into their church family,” says USMB national director Don Morris.

LEAD One Gospel Fluency workshops will also be held in Sioux Falls, S.D., Nov. 14, 2019; in Lenoir, N.C., Jan. 25, 2020; and in Fresno, Calif., Feb. 13, 2020.

Register online at www.usmb.org/lead-one-events/. For more information, contact Lori Taylor at Lori@usmb.org. —USMB

Multiply initiates new strategies

Multiply, the MB global mission agency that facilitates church planting, announced June 13, 2019, that a “significant gap between expenses and revenue for North American church planting” was prompting two shifts in its mission strategy: releasing the multidenominational aspect of its North American church planting work (formerly known as C2C Network) and restructuring its short-term mission training programs with a “renewed focus on serving the mission and discipleship strategies of local churches, both in North America and globally.”

Since making the announcement, the agency has taken a step back to regroup and discern how it will continue to work with local churches and district, provincial and national conferences to plant new Mennonite Brethren churches in the U.S. and Canada.

“We have functioned more like an organization than like a family, which has eroded trust and relationships,” writes Randy Friesen, Multiply president, in a June 30 update. “We take ownership for the failures of this past season and we ask for your forgiveness. We sincerely desire to enter into a posture of waiting and listening for how we can move forward together in mission. We have been and will continue to take steps to engage our staff, long-term workers, board and churches in this process so we can hear what God is speaking to us in this season.”

When MB Mission merged with C2C two years ago, North America became the mission agency’s eighth region of mission, and Friesen says Multiply will continue its work in

North America and retains three MB church planting resource staff, two in Canada and one, Chris Douglas, who serves in the U.S. Multiply will also continue to serve the U.S. with two regional offices. However, regional staff members will no longer be salaried but will be involved in the relational funding model used by other Multiply workers and staff, Friesen says.

The recent shift in Multiply’s ministry strategy will necessitate changes in how USMB, district conferences and churches work together in church planting. Key USMB leaders, including the USMB national director, Leadership Board chair, MB Foundation president, district ministers, district church planting board chairs and other church planting leaders met Aug. 9, 2019, in Fresno, Calif., to discuss the future of MB church planting in the U.S. The group will meet again in early October. —CL

LEAD Cohorts announced

USMB has announced a fall lineup of 11 LEAD Cohorts beginning in August and September. LEAD Cohorts are free online meeting places for small groups of pastors, leaders or anyone interested in learning about a specific topic. Cohorts meet online via Zoom either weekly or biweekly for 60 to 90 minutes over the course of three months. The only cost is for books or materials.

LEAD Cohorts discussing the following topics are being offered: paradigm shifts for activating the church, associate and family pastor ministry, challenges in ministry, spiritual transformation, gospel priorities for a healthy church, worship, leading youth in prayer, authentic prayer and youth ministry.

For more information, including cohort leaders, start times and dates, or to register, visit www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts/. —USMB



USMB participants in the 2019 ICOMB Summit—Ed Boschman, Don Morris, Gary Wall, Dina Gonzalez Piña and Xavier Piña—are pictured with Emerson Cardoso, ICOMB chair, second from left, and Rudi Plett, ICOMB executive secretary, third from right. *Photo by ICOMB*

USMB well-represented at 2019 ICOMB summit

U.S. Mennonite Brethren were well-represented at the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) summit May 29 to June 2, 2019, in Guadalajara, Mexico. Ed Boschman, retired USMB executive director and official USMB representative, was joined by guests Don Morris, USMB national director, Dina Gonzalez Piña, U.S. Mennonite Central Committee national staff, Xavier Piña, Pacific District Conference (PDC) Hispanic Council chair, and Gary Wall, PDC minister.

During the summit, delegates affirmed Wall as the ICOMB U.S. national director, a role he will assume Jan. 1, 2020. In other leadership decisions, Dario Rameriz was elected to the executive committee and Boschman was elected to another two-year term as ICOMB treasurer.

Boschman reports that the delegates had a “robust” discussion about financial realities. ICOMB requests that each national conference donates 2 percent of its overall income, which USMB does. The summit agenda also included time for delegate updates. The summit concluded with foot washing, communion and a time

of prayer. People from the MB churches in Guadalajara joined the delegates Sunday for a joint worship service. —CL

SDC welcomes new churches, installs district youth minister

About 150 people gathered July 26-27, 2019, at Community Bible Church in Olathe, Kan., for the biennial Southern District Conference convention.

Delegates welcomed three new churches into the district pending completion of the vetting process.

The churches are Christ Salvation Church in Kansas City, Mo., whose choir sang Friday night; Agape Evangelical Church in Aurora, Colo., and Iglesia la Senda Antigua in Milan, Mo.

District minister Tim Sullivan led the installation of Russ Claassen as full-time district youth minister. Claassen, who was serving in this capacity part-time, began his new assignment July 1.

In other business, delegates approved budgets for the next two years, including a 2020 budget of \$368,850, a decrease of \$5,000 from the 2019 budget; and a 2021 budget of \$394,075. Delegates also elected personnel and heard commission reports.

Speakers included Don Morris, USMB national director; Chris Douglas, U.S. director of Multiply; Bruce Jost, vice president of MB Foundation; and Wendell Loewen, professor of biblical studies at Tabor College.

Delegates heard from agency representatives of Multiply, MB Foundation, Tabor College and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. The CBC worship team, led by worship pastor Russ Friesen, provided music. The event also included prayer and fellowship.

Optional activities included a Mission Southside tour with whom CBC partners to minister to underprivileged neighborhoods and a Kansas City Royals baseball game.



SDC delegates gather around Pastor Muhizi Serukiza of Christ Salvation Church, Kansas City, Mo., for a time of prayer for three churches that are joining the district.

Photo by Janae Rempel

5 minutes with...

The convention was preceded July 25-26 by a pastors' gathering with Randy Gariss, director of the Life and Ministry Preparation Center at Ozark Christian College in Joplin, Mo., and his wife, Julie, as guest speakers. —CL

Rempel appointed dean of FPBS



Valerie Rempel began serving July 1, 2019, as dean of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and vice president of Fresno Pacific University. Rempel is also an associate professor,

holding the J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology. She joined the seminary faculty in 1996 and has a doctoral degree from Vanderbilt University, master's degrees from both Vanderbilt and MB Biblical Seminary (FPBS) and a bachelor's degree from Tabor College. Rempel reports to President Joseph Jones and as dean of FPBS and vice president, is a member of the President's Cabinet. —FPU

MWC Peace Sunday

U.S. Mennonite Brethren congregations are invited to observe Peace Sunday Sept. 22, 2019, together with the global Anabaptist church family. Worship and resource materials prepared by Mennonite World Conference are available to congregations. The theme is "A peace that surpasses all understanding...."

The MWC 2006 Peace Commission chose the Sunday nearest to the International Day of Peace, established by the United Nations in 1981 as Sept. 21, as a Peace Sunday to be observed by MWC member churches.

To download Peace Sunday resources, visit <https://mwc-cmm.org/article/peace-sunday>. —MWC



Emily Railsback

This summer Emily Railsback trekked from Chicago to her small, rural hometown of Hillsboro, Kan., with a film crew in tow. Still a member of Parkview MB Church in Hillsboro, Railsback is a filmmaker and teaches film at Columbia College in Chicago. With a grant from Chicago Filmmakers to produce a short film, she began production on *Fear Not*, a film addressing the issue of gun violence.

What is the story about?

Fear Not is about a pacifist Mennonite teacher who is forced to carry a gun in school after her husband helps pass a statewide mandate. Her faith is awakened when a foreign pastor moves to town preaching active non-violence.

What made your hometown a good setting for the film?

I love Hillsboro, and there is really no better place to show the authentic look of a Mennonite small town. The community made it a blast to film here—we filmed the climactic fight between the husband and wife at the local demolition derby and Hillsboro's police chief played himself in an active shooter training scene.

Where might we see some MB influence?

In the church scene, the sermon was derived from a Tabor Bible class lecture by Del Gray. The scene's opening comes from my childhood memory of Paul Epp directing *Wonderful Grace of Jesus* with gusto. Paul played the part, and when I directed him to look down at the hymnal I had him hold, he responded, "But I don't need to." I clearly cast the right person for that role and probably shouldn't have even had him hold a hymnal!

Why is gun violence a topic you wanted to tackle?

When I type into my search engine "How many shootings were in Chicago" it automatically fills in "this weekend." There have been 250 mass shootings in the U.S. this year. A dozen plus friends of mine have been mugged at gun point. It is absolutely ridiculous that we sit by and do nothing.

What difference can this film make?

One of the biggest problems is the growing divide between urban and rural communities. In my Chicago neighborhood during summer the sound of gun shots and fireworks are interchangeable. In rural communities people hunt for their food. We have different needs. I hope to create a discussion about gun violence reaching across those divides.

How does your faith find expression in filmmaking?

For me the most magnetic part about Jesus' life is his storytelling ability to engage people on social issues. He hung out with prostitutes, he loved immigrants and above all he told us to love, not fear. My film is all about fear, and it's a story to engage people with differences.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Pointing students to Jesus

Getting the most out of small groups

Right after YouthCon 2019, the USMB national youth conference, we facilitated a two-week online cohort designed to help youth leaders make the most of small groups. Here is a review of the main topics we discussed in the online sessions.

Jesus is in the circle. As leaders, we want to be listening to the Spirit at the same time we're listening to the student. In the end, we're trying to point a student to Jesus, not to ourselves. Sara Jo says, "We are one Holy Spirit breath away from a God encounter that can heal our souls every time we pick up that holy Word of God."

Depth of relationship influences depth of discussion. People will share if there is safety and trust. Spend enough time with students that the relationships can grow over time. This will necessarily mean spending time with them outside of formal ministry times.

Silence is okay. As the leader, if you're doing all the talking, you're missing it. Sometimes we talk because the silence feels awkward to us. It's not about us. At some point in silence, it's okay to ask what's in their mind or heart that hasn't come out yet. To ask: "What's working its way out?"

Listen. Really listen. Ask open questions. Start with "what" and "how" questions. Questions that begin with "why" tend to feel accusatory or judging. Questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" tend to shut down discussion. When people feel listened to and understood, we can more easily move onto deeper questions like, "What are you hearing Jesus say to you about that?" If we assume we understand and go right to "fixing" people by prescribing verses, we may be well-meaning and technically correct, but the person's heart will be closed and in the end no growth will happen.

Get to application. Questions that move people to consider application are helpful: "If you were to apply what you have learned tonight, what's something specific that you could do or practice this week to live that out?" These also become excellent follow-up questions next time you meet. "So, how did it go with (the application) that you felt prompted about last week?" This can become a healthy accountability method—helping students be accountable to the things that they said they felt prompted by the Spirit to do or do differently.

Discovery versus download. This is a big one in our current methods of discipleship.

Roy Moran in *Spent Matches* says, "People have a high degree of commitment to their own conclusions and a low degree of commitment to conclusions given to them by others." So that means that a small group leader sharing knowledge isn't effective in affecting change in people's lives. As we're talking about the Bible and people ask questions, we need to learn to ask questions that point them back to the text to determine their own conclusions. Moran also says, "If the teacher is doing all the work, very little life change is happening. But when the student is doing most of the work, something significant is in process." So, we start where the learner is and let them drive the direction and pace of the discovery.

Smaller groups are the best setting for spiritual transformation. We owe it to Jesus and the people he gives us to grow in our leadership of smaller groups. If you'd like to discuss any of these in greater details, we would be happy to chat. You can contact us at SaraJoWaldron@gmail.com and StephenHumber@gmail.com. ■



Sara Jo and Lee Waldron are the program directors for Southern District Conference (SDC) Senior High Camp. Sara Jo has been serving on the SDC Youth Commission since 2014 and was a youth pastor in the SDC for seven years. She has begun an online master of divinity program through Fuller Theological Seminary.



Stephen and Mary K. Humber live in Denver, Colo., where he serves as regional mobilizer for Multiply. When he's not joyfully serving with his team, he's probably standing in a stream somewhere trying to catch trout.

When the secret is out

God is faithful even as we live with our choices

I like to say, “Your biggest secret is your biggest problem.”

For me, that secret was two-fold. Consumed with work and performance, I spiraled into alcoholism and pornography. But once my secret was out and I sought treatment, I began a journey to spiritual and emotional health, learning that relationships are more important than accomplishments.

I am a “lifer” in Fairview, Okla., having been born here, lived here and attended Fairview MB Church since birth. I realized my need for salvation at a Larry Jones evangelistic tent meeting at age 13. A child of the ‘60s and ‘70s, I married early and had two children by age 20. I finally settled down and started acting like a father around age 24. I began attending church regularly, recognizing that my boys needed a stable example. This was my path through the first 25 years of married life.

In the late 1990s, after my children were off to college, my wife and I enrolled in two years of training to do biblical counseling for emotional, relational, marriage and other life issues. After training, we became involved in counseling in the Fairview area. In that time frame, I also accepted a time-consuming oil field opportunity.

Distance drifted into our marriage, and I was consumed with work and performance. What started out as light social drinking grew into an issue and became more addictive and a real problem. I was living a lie. Communication in my marriage relationship grew more distant until it was broken. Separation and divorce followed. I felt helpless, ashamed, guilty and very angry at where I found myself, all along not reaching out for help as I spiraled further into alcoholism and pornography. Inside I knew I needed help, and in August 2007, my children became aware of how severe my problem with alcohol was and urged me to seek treatment. I couldn’t say no because I knew they

were right, but I didn’t want to be humiliated by my failure.

The day I entered treatment I was set free from the alcohol because the secret was out. I came home from treatment and have been alcohol free for 12 years. This does not mean life is free of struggle or worry. When you give up ground in your life to sin, there can be and is instant forgiveness in Christ, but the path to spiritual and emotional health can take the same amount of time to recover as it did to develop. I quit drinking instantly, but working through the emotional and relational costs that were created by my choices is an ongoing process.

In early 2008, some mutual friends decided that I should meet Brenda. Neither of us was seriously looking for a relationship at the time. We were married in May 2008, and our families graciously accepted one another. God was so faithful to bring me a wonderful wife after the path I had been on.

In 2013, I started serving on the Board of Directors for Transformation Living Center (TLC), a 13-month in-house biblical recovery program for men with addictive behaviors. I now serve as chair and teach one day a week at the TLC facility.

I find that I can still be very selfish and look for instant results and get very impatient with people who don’t change instantly. Working with men at TLC reminds me to slow down and offer grace when I remember how slow I can often be to yield to God. I still struggle with being driven, but taking time for ministry helps put the brakes on how much time I spend working. I continue to learn that relationships are more important than accomplishments.

Slow down, don’t keep secrets, press into a disciplined relationship with God and admit your faults quickly. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”



Jay Bartel is a native of Fairview, Okla., and has spent his entire life there with the exception of a few months away during college. He and his wife, Brenda, have been married 11 years and have six children between them and 11 grandchildren. Bartel spent 21 years working in manufacturing, with the last 17 years in engineering. He studied counseling for two or three years, then spent 11 years in oilfield services. Bartel is retired and has served on various community boards and church positions at Fairview MB Church. He supports Brenda in her board activity at the Fairview Fellowship Home.



Sowers, seeds and sermons

Do you hear, understand and apply what your pastor teaches Sunday mornings?

Since leaving pastoral ministry a little over a year ago and moving to the opposite side of the pulpit, I have listened to many more Sunday morning sermons in a congregational setting than in the past. These sermons have been delivered to large and small congregations, in English and Spanish, on the West and East Coasts and in different denominational settings. All the messages were Bible-centered. Except for perhaps one, each struck a positive chord within my understanding of the gospel and I was able to take something of God's will for my life into the coming week.

And, every speaker was diligent in preparing himself to teach. I imagine that many hours of heart preparation and study went into each Sunday teaching event. This prompts some questions. Do we listeners—including myself—prepare our hearts with similar diligence? How well do we really listen? Are our minds elsewhere? Do we really seek to understand the message? Is there any meaningful reflection afterward? Are we serious about putting into practice these messages?

Jesus may have had these same questions when he taught the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-23, Luke 8:4-15). He had just appointed 12 disciples for more extensive learning and ministry (Luke 6:12-13). And immediately after, he taught the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:17-49, Matt. 5-7), a summary of his most important and distinctive teachings, like the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer.

Perhaps with a view to ensure the Sermon on the Mount and all his succeeding teachings would take root in his followers' hearts and be lived out, Jesus felt they needed to be taught the importance of hearing, understanding and applying his teachings (Matt. 13:23). They could not live purposely without these three disciplines. And neither can we.

A needed corrective

More than ever before in recent American evangelical history is the call to hear, understand and apply God's Word to our lives so needed. With our culture becoming increasingly more entertainment and pleasure-based, we are also becoming more consumer-minded. Such a mindset has not left the church unscathed. The challenge to listen actively to the Word, reflect on the Word for greater understanding and ultimately obey the Word is becoming ever more difficult. The Parable of the Sower provides a needed corrective for us today.

Perhaps you are saying, "But isn't the parable of the sower for unbelievers? Wasn't Jesus talking about different types of unbelievers and their respective responses to the gospel message?" Until recent years I have interpreted this parable primarily this way.

While I would not disregard this traditional interpretation completely, I believe Jesus had in mind the 12 disciples as well as the greater assembly of followers and we disciples today when delivering this and the following parables. "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted," he says in Matthew 13:11. His words were not kind to those that had remained worldly-minded and had refused to learn from him. This is a word of caution for us today to remain vigilant and on course.

What do we mean by hearing, understanding and applying the Word of God?


Hearing the Word refers to perceiving it audibly, a challenge in itself given the countless voices vying for our attention by way of a screen and/or an earpiece. It also means to consider and pay attention to what is said. The mind is engaged as one listens attentively. Taking notes and filling in the outline during the message is one way to heighten our listening and comprehension skills.

Understanding the Word is about mentally comprehending what has been heard. Meditation and reflection, two spiritual disciplines requiring silence and solitude, help the message take root. The message begins to become a part of us. It is here where the seed of the Word begins to germinate.

We reflect on the spoken word for two reasons. First, to corroborate the truthfulness of what was taught. The Bereans did this with Paul's sermon (Acts 17:10-12). Meeting in small groups afterward to discuss the sermon gives opportunity for greater clarification and comprehension.

A second reason for reflection has to do with application. "How and when will I apply what I have heard and understood?" is a needed question for consideration in order to flesh out the Word.

And lastly, we are to **apply the Word**. Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount by teaching the importance of putting into practice what he had just taught (Matt. 7:21-27). Satan will do everything possible to discourage responsible hearing and understanding of the Word, but I believe he works double-time to ensure we don't apply the Word. When God's children dutifully hear and understand the Word, Satan is



sad, But Satan finds new joy when we do nothing more.

Hearing, understanding and practicing the Word are to be continuous activities in the disciple's life, given these verbs are in the present tense. Jesus states that the good soil characterizes those believers that are *continually* seeking to hear and comprehend the Word, at the same time *continually* producing and bringing forth fruit in life (Matt. 13:23). The latter happens when they *continually* put the Word into practice.

It's all about our hearts

The key to effective hearing, understanding and applying the Word is a heart for God. Three times in our text Jesus refers to the heart. For us to hear, understand and apply his Word continuously and properly, our hearts need the right focus.

Christian clinical psychologist Larry Crabb says the heart symbolizes "the basic direction a person chooses for himself.... From a biblical perspective, there really are only two possible directions which one may choose: live for self or live for God." Oftentimes the line between the two gets fuzzy. Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9).

Solomon tells us in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." If we believers are not diligent in keeping our hearts centered on our Master in all areas of our lives, spiritual sluggishness can easily set in. This happened to the once believing Israelites to whom Isaiah refers: "For the heart of this people has become dull" (Matt. 13:14-15). And with dullness of heart slowly comes dullness in hearing, understanding and applying the Word.

In conclusion, this parable provides three signs of spiritual dullness and reminds us that we need a heart change.

The hard soil (v. 19) refers to those who audibly hear God's voice but don't actively listen to God's voice. Truth enters one ear and goes out the other. Neither do they have a mindset to do the hard work of understanding the Word and applying it later.

The rocky soil (vv. 20-21) speaks of the person guided more by their emotions than their minds. They have difficulty spending quality time with God in stillness and

seclusion, a space where growth in understanding best happens. They typically are the first ones to fold when under serious spiritual attack.

The thorny soil (v. 22) refers to the believer that has a divided heart. Like the other two, he hears God's voice, but the message is muffled due to competing voices. "The weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it" (*The Message*).

But for those believers convicted of their spiritual folly, there is hope. Our Abba is so merciful! "Heart surgery" that allows God back onto the throne of their life is necessary. And when this happens, God graciously proclaims, "And I shall heal them" (Matt. 13:15). A healing that is physical, mental and emotional in scope. A healing he provides for his obedient children today.

This article focuses on hearing, understanding and applying the truths taught in a Sunday morning sermon, but God has other divine delivery systems. The Spirit of God also reveals truth through Bible reading, conversational prayer, another person (in my case, most often through my spouse!), dreams, visions, etc.

Regardless of how our Master chooses to reveal truth and guidance, if what he teaches is properly understood and applied, believers are promised to "have an abundance" (Matt. 13:12)—an abundance of peace, joy, inner fulfillment and purpose in their God-journey. And life can't get any better than that—just like God planned it!

Lynn Kauffman and his wife, Mary, live in Sanger, Calif. He works as a part-time chaplain at a major medical center and behavioral facility in Fresno, Calif. They served as Menonite Brethren missionaries in Spain for 20 years and as a pastoral couple in several USMB congregations in the Fresno area.

Consider and pay attention to what is said.

The key to effective hearing, understanding and applying the Word is a heart for God

The very Words

A conversation
about why and
how Scripture is
read in worship
services

Lynn: Public Bible reading in worship has strong biblical support. When Moses gave the Torah to Israel, he commanded the people to read it aloud every seven years to learn to love the Lord (Deut. 31:10-13). When Israel returned from exile, Ezra had the book read aloud in assembly with commentary so that all could understand. Though people wept in repentance, the Levites declared a day of rejoicing and feasting (Neh. 8). Jesus introduced his first synagogue sermon by reading Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:16-30). Yet, despite biblical precedent and strong commitment among Mennonite Brethren to be a biblical people, public Scripture reading is not prominent in our worship gatherings. Why is that?

Brian: Public reading of Scripture can be a very positive experience, but as you referenced with Ezra's commentary, what matters is what the text *means*. Peter, in referring to the apostle Paul's letters, writes: "There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16, NRSV).

Nearly every cult and heresy has begun with an individual interpreting the Bible on their own. Obviously, this is not a deficiency of the Bible but evidence of the human propensity to twist our interpretations to make the Bible say what we want it to say. I think this is even more likely in 2019, where in an increasingly post-Christian culture, most people have very little understanding of orthodox theology, themes and classical interpretations of texts. Therefore, the public reading of Scripture can be a good thing—but without careful interpretation, it may not always produce the results we expect.

Lynn: These are excellent reminders, Brian. Reading the Bible has been hazardous to people's lives—and their faith. This reinforces the importance of reading the Bible in community. We have much to learn about public Scripture reading from those who read it as an act of worship. Often Bible-reading churches follow the lectionary, a Bible reading plan shared by Lutherans, Presbyterians and Methodists. I attend a church that weekly reads an Old Testament text, a psalm in response, a New Testament passage (usually an epis-

tle) and a Gospel reading (often the preaching text). We work carefully to avoid making Bible reading drone endlessly and a chance to daydream or take a mind break.

Brian: Yes, there is much to commend to this tradition. We need more churches that value hearing from the Word of God! And yes, Lynn, reading (and even more *discussing*) the scriptural text within community can produce a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit.

All of us are limited, embodied beings. We see all of life, including the Scriptures, based on our experiences and current context. Yet, when we hear how others interpret the Bible based on their experiences and contexts, there is the potential for us to see God in a new light. This was clearly the experience of the early Jewish Christians when the word of God began to be received by the Gentiles (Acts 10).

But I am still a little unsure about some practices of the public reading of Scripture. As we become increasingly biblically illiterate, I am a little concerned that if an "unbeliever or an outsider" (1 Cor. 14) is present in worship, that they will simply be confused.

In my opinion, if more than one text is read during worship (or in a sermon) it tends to often confuse most worshippers. We are not much of an oral culture anymore, and we certainly are not a text-based culture but an image-based one. I fear that it is increasingly difficult for contemporary people to easily follow along during the readings of multiple texts—let alone understand them.

Lynn: Again, you underline how essential good reading is for understanding. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God!" (Rom. 10:17). Effective public Scripture reading begins with love for the Bible. As Mennonites, we declare that the Bible is our authority because we know that in these words, we find eternal life. We believe that we meet Jesus the Living Word within the pages of the Written Word as interpreted by the Preached Word (designations suggested by theologian Karl Barth). We love Scripture because it tells the story of how God's people have experienced God saving, loving and speaking through the years.

of God

By Lynn Jost
and
Brian Ross

We express our love for the Bible by deeply engaging the text in preparation for reading. We show respect for our audience by reading the assigned text slowly, repeatedly, in several versions until we hear God's Word ourselves. Familiar words of Jesus and from Paul's letters often address us warmly immediately. Other texts may sound less "friendly," especially when they speak with judgment. We must live with the text, allowing it to penetrate our lives if we are to read in the power of the Spirit.

Brian: Yes, I would certainly affirm a love of Scripture. It is inspired and God-breathed and certainly was instrumental in the Holy Spirit personally drawing me to saving faith in Jesus. And yes, I also affirm the "Preached Word," leading us to the "Living Word," through engagement with the "Written Word." But this also gets to my slight concern about simply publicly reading the Bible. I am not sure without prayerful and careful explanation and illustration of these texts, that necessarily, people will find the Living Word. As Jesus himself says: "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40).

Lynn: We are agreed on that point! To help people who are "biblically illiterate," we encourage readers to introduce the Scripture briefly. Three sentences that "position" hearers to receive the text as God's Word can help open their minds to the Bible. Sometimes referring to the biblical context helps hearers find meaning. Sometimes listening for key themes commands attention.

For people to hear well, we who read must honor the text. Practical pointers can make the difference between careless and care-filled reading. Repeated rehearsal is a good starting point. The reader should read clearly, slowly and with sufficient volume that worshipers seated in the first rows could hear without amplification. Read for meaning, giving attention to the phrasing of the text. Be so familiar with the passage that you are not "surprised" by an additional phrase after you have paused for a breath or a full stop.

Although important in public speaking, making eye con-

tact and using gestures during public Bible reading can become a distraction. The best reading does not call attention to itself with exaggerated expression or dramatic pauses. Letting the text speak is the goal. The key is to honor the text.

Congregational worship should be dynamic, reflecting the resurrection life that we celebrate each Sunday. Routines can be our friends, helping us with a sense of belonging. When we read the Gospel text each week at our church, we carry the pulpit Bible to the center of the sanctuary. All stand for the reading of the Gospel. We honor the text by carrying the Bible to the communion table. When routines become ruts, they lose vitality. In our congregation we include drama at times. Recently, our youth group "interrupted" the Bible reading by standing to shout out the words of the crowd before Pilate. On Easter Sunday the youth took on the roles of Jesus and those who visited the tomb to proclaim the biblical text.

Brian: These are some helpful tips and suggestions, Lynn. I affirm most of them. I think that I would personally encourage a "slightly" dramatic reading of the text. Passion, excitement and movement are often valued within our contemporary culture. Now of course, there is a line that can be crossed where a reading goes from being interesting to coming across as overly sentimental and inauthentic. But I would encourage a reader to give it enough energy that it would be difficult to accuse the reader of boring them. I do not think that we will always be successful with this, the Apostle Paul even bored someone to death (Acts 20:9) but it should be our goal. These are not merely human words that we are reading after all—but the very words of God.

Lynn: One last thought from MB elder J. B. Toews: "The Bible, like a lion, needs no defense." Let it roar!

Lynn Jost and Brian Ross are colleagues at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Fresno, Calif. Jost is professor and program director for Old Testament and the director of the Center for Anabaptist Studies. Ross is assistant professor and program director for Christian Ministry and the Master of Divinity & Ministry Leadership and Culture program.

Hope to *see you* again— and why that might happen

Qualities in a
church that
make you want
to come back

Do you remember the least favorite of essays you had to write every new school year? “How I spent my summer vacation” or something similar? Were our teachers really that interested in us? Maybe, but probably not. They needed to discover just how much language skill we’d lost over that glorious season of freedom, assessing how hard they’d have to work to get it back.

This is that essay, only birthed from a sabbatical, not summer vacation. Our church grants a two-month paid leave to full-time pastoral staff after five years of service. For me, it was a time to read, visit churches, meet other pastors, rest and travel. I visited five countries, attended 15 worship services, eight conference sessions, 10 pastoral interviews and four church staff meetings.

And just what did I gain from this? I learned that no two churches are alike. I observed that growing churches are the ones empowering 20-somethings to do more than serve—they are entrusting them with significant leadership. I saw that congregational size has little to do with meaningful worship engagement and Holy Spirit presence. I witnessed the global flow of what’s happening in praise and worship. And I discovered that it’s possible to live out of a carry-on suitcase for five weeks.

In the churches I visited, Jesus is central, the Bible is

believed and taught faithfully, they are led by good pastors and attended by God’s holy people. All are what we’d call “good churches.” Every visit was meaningful, yet some churches stood out as truly magnetic, stirring a desire to return. Naturally, every congregation welcomes guests with some version of “We hope to see you again,” which is part of good hospitality. But in my visits, I noted five qualities of churches that made me want to return and three habits to fuel those qualities.

First, these attractive churches all had an **outdoor presence**. There was life outside—people greeting out on the sidewalk or in the parking lot. High quality, clear and obvious signage was well-placed. One church had people holding placards with slogans such as, “We’re glad you’re here” and “We have a place for you.” At least one had music playing. This created **anticipation**, a sense that something good was about to happen inside this unfamiliar building. An outdoor presence is great hospitality.

The attracting churches also had an **energized personal welcome**. In addition to scheduled door greeters, it came from the platform and congregation members too. It seemed like they were genuinely glad to have me there, making eye contact and asking my name. And it didn’t end when I sat down. Being included in conversations after the service is where the real impact happened.

(The exit matters more than the entrance.) A lively welcome can seem forced, but in my experience, this approach created **authenticity**. It didn't need to be overly enthusiastic, just personal and energized.

Third, these "come back" churches offered a **quality presentation**. The worship teams were noticeably prepared, the preaching was on point, the room temperature, the sound and seating were comfortable, kids well cared-for, directions for children's ministry clear and print material done with excellence. In an established church, we sometimes fall into what I call the "good-enoughs." We feel like family, so we put in minimal program effort, or we overlook dilapidated facilities, or no one bothers to replace a burned-out lightbulb. And then we say, "It's good enough." But instead, a thoughtful, quality presentation of program and facilities creates an engaging **atmosphere**.

“

A lively welcome can seem forced,
but in my experience,
this approach created *authenticity*.
It didn't need to be overly enthusiastic,
just personal and energized.

”

I consistently witnessed **contextual preaching**. By this, I mean there was always effective **application** in the message. Not every sermon was particularly relevant to me, but I could tell the messages were connecting with the local congregation. Some preachers spoke topically, while a couple were technically exegetical. But in each place, faithful biblical teaching connected their particular setting with life application. As a guest, I didn't mind hearing preaching illustrations specific to that church's own context because it obviously related for them. And should I return and settle in, that context would become mine as well.

Finally, churches that made me want to return created the opportunity for a **meaningful response**. These worship services were not a show nor a single-direction download from the platform to the consumer. Each service led congregants to respond in a way that urged us to say, "Yes, Lord, I'm available to you and to your calling." Whether an opportunity to respond for salvation or to pray with someone on the spot or commit to a clear take-away for the week or accept a place to physically serve, these churches were teaching that for me to follow Jesus requires my **availability** to him.

Incidentally, not only were these churches attractive to me, they were clearly drawing others. These churches are growing, and that in itself generates more attraction.

Of course, one could push back and say, "There's no five-point secret to church growth." I agree. But capable leaders pay attention to people and to practices that help people feel loved and welcomed. Their love for people pushes these leaders to direct them to sound biblical teaching and discipleship.

Even so, while these five qualities were apparent, I don't believe they were deliberate. Rather, I believe these are inspired practices. I say that because of three fueling habits present in these "come-back" churches.

Prayer: In each place, I saw a faithful practice of prayer. Prayer was happening in and around the service in fervent ways. Prayer gatherings before the service, individual prayer offered during the service, posted prayer meetings through the week and even congregants spontaneously praying with one another in the lobby between services, all said, "Prayer is a priority here."

Presence: In each of these churches, there was a hunger, a pursuit, a welcoming of Holy Spirit presence in worship, in Word, in service and in fellowship. One church even embedded it into their core values statements, with posters stating, "His presence is our passion." These churches wanted the powerful presence of Jesus—not a social gathering. God honors our pursuit and desire of him, for he says, "If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Praise: In each place, the congregation participated enthusiastically in corporate praise and worship music. There wasn't a "sit in the back with arms folded" section—you could actually hear the people singing. They raised their hands. They clapped. Some danced or bowed down. Even in a breadth of styles, from simple acoustic accompaniment to full-stage band, these churches were given to praise.

The layering of praise, presence and prayer then fueled the five qualities of Outdoor Presence (Anticipation), Energized Personal Welcome (Authenticity), Quality Presentation (Atmosphere), Contextual Preaching (Application) and Meaningful Response (Availability).

This is not a formula for church growth. This is not a system for effectiveness. This is not a doctrine for Anabaptists or Charismatics or Neo-reformers. These are habits borne out of a desire to make disciples of all people. A church that chooses to respond obediently to the call of Christ will make adjustments and even wholesale changes to lead those apart from God into a saving relationship with Jesus.

These visits have led me to begin assessing our own "come-back" effectiveness as a church. We want, "We hope to see you again!" to become "It's great to have you back!"

Brian Wiebe has been the lead pastor at Bethany Church in Fresno, Calif., since 2013, and chairs the Board of Home Mission for the Pacific District Conference. He says a church that loves its pastors makes sabbatical a must.

MISSION WITNESS LIFE

By Ed Boschman

Peter's counsel for effectively living as a follower of Christ

There is little chance that anyone who has chosen to be in a faith-follow relationship with Jesus would not “vote for” living as a faithful evangelist on the kingdom mission to which our Lord commissioned his disciples. Corporately and individually, in addition to “caring for the found” the church is responsible to “seek the lost.”

The Apostle Peter has some salient counsel for the scattered believers he addresses in his first letter. He writes to those Christians, who were facing much opposition and suffering as a result of their having chosen Jesus as Lord, giving them a summary plan to help them live effectively on mission. Let's explore those verses, from 1 Peter 3:8-11.

His first encouragement is to “live in harmony with one another.” He clarifies that means that they live lovingly, sympathetically, compassionately and humbly.

Then he advises them to choose blessing rather than retaliation. To return evil for evil or insult for insult is not the way of Jesus.

Peter goes on to exhort them to be “eager to do good.” Sometimes, he adds, they might suffer for doing what is right, but even then, there is no need for fear.

He infers that these attitudes and actions will be identifiable and visible to anyone with whom these Christians are in relationship.

As a summary admonition, Peter says “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” Right living is grounded in being heart-right with God. When Jesus is Lord, church members are loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength and neighbor as self.

Then Peter makes clear his missional purpose in these paragraphs. In their everyday lives, believers will be in relationships with people who do not know the hope of a rela-

tionship with Jesus as Savior and Lord. When those pre-Christians notice the way of life of the disciple(s), they will ask questions. And when they do, at that very moment, an opportunity for telling the good news is born. Evangelism takes wings. Witness becomes a relational reality.

This is the point Peter has been aiming at. When believers live with integrity and honor among people who do not know Jesus, evangelism is in play. The only caution he clarifies is that the message is delivered gently, respectfully and with a clear conscience.

These inspired words of advice were right

for the first century church and they are right for today's church. When Christ really is Lord in the lives of today's believers and those believers take the time to develop authentic relationships with pre-believers, questions will be raised and witness will have opportunity.

One more thing. A little later in his letter, in 1 Peter 5:3 Peter reminds church elders

that they are to be “examples to the flock.” If we could ask Peter about how that connects with what he had already written about evangelistic opportunity and responsibility, he may well say, “If the elders/shepherds/pastors don't live exemplary faith and witness lives, there is little chance the others in the church family will do so.” And I would add, even if they would “vote for” it.

Ed Boschman, retired U.S. Conference executive director, is the USMB representative to the International Community of Mennonite Brethren. This essay was originally written for the ICOMB newsletter that is sent to national conference leaders.



“Tithing” people

Shoulder taps, mentorships lead to ministry

The paths to ministry are as numerous as the people who pursue them. But for four Mennonite Brethren leaders—USMB national director Don Morris, Southern District Conference minister Tim Sullivan, Central District Conference minister Rick Eshbaugh and MB Foundation planned giving advisor Garvie Schmidt—that path went through the Ulysses MB Church, now New Life Church, in southwest Kansas.

These individuals, as well as Morris’ wife, Janna, and Sullivan’s wife, Donna, graduated from Ulysses High School in a two-year span in the mid 1970’s, but each found their way to UMBC—and subsequently, to ministry—at different times.

Yet the spiritual climate of UMBC in the 1980’s contributed to each one’s call to ministry and involved investing in the lives of young people through mentoring, providing opportunities to develop gifts and sending people with financial support.

Mentoring toward ministry

Shortly after Sullivan began attending UMBC in 1979, Jules Glanzer, who was pastor at the time and who currently serves as president at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kan., invited Sullivan to a weekly morning Bible study with Ulysses football coach Max Hiebert.

“It was an opportunity to deepen my knowledge of Scripture and rub shoulders with two men that I respected a great deal,” Sullivan says. “At the time, I didn’t know that the intention of those meetings was to mentor and disciple us toward vocational ministry.”



Jules Glanzer, left, former pastor of Ulysses MB Church, was one of the individuals who mentored Don Morris, Garvie Schmidt, Tim Sullivan and Rick Eshbaugh in their journeys to pastoral ministry. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

Glanzer describes the morning meetings. “Every Friday morning, we got together,” he says. “You could call it a Bible study, a men’s group, an accountability group. We didn’t call it any of that. We’d have donuts and coffee, and we’d sit and talk and share.”

Also influential was Sunday school teacher, Ted Goertzen, says Sullivan, who, with his wife, Donna, moved back to Ulysses in 1979 after graduating from Seward County Community College in Liberal, Kan., and spending a few years working in Liberal.

The Sullivans served as youth sponsors, and at the National Youth Conference at Estes in 1983, both Tim and Donna sensed a call to vocational ministry, Sullivan says.

Sullivan completed his bachelor’s degree at Tabor College, then attended MB Biblical Seminary (MBBS) in Fresno, Calif. In 1990, he accepted a

call to pastoral ministry at Parkview MB Church in Hillsboro, then transitioned to the Southern District minister role in 2004.

“We were the recipients of a great deal of investment of time, prayer, money and intentional discipleship and of much love (at UMBC),” Sullivan says. “We had a good model of what a church family looks like.”

The value of encouragement

Morris, too, acknowledges the people who came alongside him as key in helping him realize his calling. He also remembers Hiebert, who passed away in May 2019, as a mentor and encourager.

“(Max) met with me for early breakfasts, Bible studies and prayer times,” Morris says. “His belief in me was very instrumental in my hearing God’s calling.”

After graduating from Kansas State University, Morris and his wife, Janna, returned to Ulysses and began attending UMBC in 1978.

The couple served in a variety of capacities, including as youth sponsors and deacons. Morris also served on the MB-governed hospital board, as a Sunday school and Bible study teacher and church moderator.

As Morris studied the Bible, he sensed a call to full-time ministry but wrestled with it because he did not wish to leave the farm. Two UMBC pastors, including Glanzer (pastor from 1978-1982) and Byron Neufeld (1982-1988) aided in de-

termining God's call, Morris says.

Thinking he would pursue work as a family counselor, Morris enrolled at MBBS in 1988, but after two weeks changed his degree path to pastoral and family ministry. After graduation, Morris served in pastoral ministry at Pine Acres MB Church in Weatherford, Okla., for 13 years, then served as Mission USA director for 12 years before accepting a call to serve as national director.

"All along, the experience at Ulysses MB has helped me see the high value of churches supporting people when they are called to ministry," he says. "It has encouraged me to remember to shoul-

der-tap young leaders, that what you and others say in encouragement may be the impetus they need to move forward with ministry."

Developing gifts

Morris, Sullivan, Eshbaugh and Schmidt all mention the recognizing and affirming of gifts that was part of UMBC.

Garvie Schmidt, the only one of the four who grew up at UMBC, left Ulysses to attend Tabor College, graduated with a bachelor's degree, married his wife, Diane, then spent two years in the U.S. Conference Christian Service program in Eugene, Ore., before attending MBBS.

"My call into full-time ministry was a gradual process," Schmidt says. "You could say gradual steps of obedience and trust. There were various people in the church that encouraged this spirit of exploration."

Youth leaders such as Ted and Ellie Goertzen, Dareld and Debbie Karber and Roger Schultz had an impact, among others, he says, adding that he was given opportunities to be involved at UMBC, including leadership responsibilities in MBY, counseling at camps, chairing the Christian Endeavor programs, teaching vacation Bible school, preaching and serving as interim pastor in the summer of 1982.

"The opportunities I had as a youth to test my gifts and leadership abilities helped me gain confidence as a young person," Schmidt says. "Knowing that I had a host of church family and prayer warriors praying for me and encouraging me helped me be accountable to steward God's call in my life."

Following his graduation from MBBS in 1983, Schmidt served in pastoral roles at MB churches in Fairview, Okla., Henderson, Neb., and Enid, Okla., for 28 years before accepting his current role as a planned giving advisor at MB Foundation in Hillsboro, Kan., in 2011.

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Sending and supporting

Sending out was also a key part of life in Ulysses. The church was generous with its support of missions and paid the tuition for those who wished to attend seminary.

For Rick Eshbaugh, this was surprising, considering he was a relatively new transplant without a Mennonite last name.

Having grown up in Ulysses, Eshbaugh became a Christian in high school as a result of Bible studies and the influence of teacher Max Hiebert.

After pursuing a youth ministry degree at Sterling (Kan.) College, Eshbaugh served as a youth pastor in Rock Island, Ill. But he became disillusioned as a result of church politics, and when his father's health began to deteriorate from Parkinson's disease, he and his wife, Esther, moved back to Ulysses in 1980. Unsure of a future in ministry, the Eshbaughs came to UMBC.

"When we attended, they had a very vibrant young families ministry," Eshbaugh says. "There was a Sunday school class.... It was a good place for us as a young couple."

Glanzer met with Eshbaugh for conversations over coffee. He and Ted Goertzen, who served in various church leadership roles, presented Eshbaugh with the idea of attending seminary, and Eshbaugh agreed.

"We were kind of surprised when they offered to pay our tuition," Eshbaugh says. "I was thinking that I'd be happy if they did anything, but I was very surprised that they adopted us. It was a key period for me because I think I was running from God."

When Eshbaugh went to MBBS in 1982, the church paid his tuition, just as it had or would do for a number of others.

The sending mentality was part of the DNA at Ulysses, Glanzer says, which was evident at the church's annual

harvest mission festival and winter Bible conference.

"During the harvest mission festival, they always had these humongous offerings—\$10,000 to \$15,000 offerings all going to missions," Glanzer says. "There was this heart of giving themselves away. One year, I said, 'Why don't we tithe our people?' ... The whole church had a day of prayer and fasting for people to be called out and go into ministry."

Since his graduation from seminary in 1985, Eshbaugh has been active in ministry, all but five years of which have included pastoral ministry in Enid, Okla., Topeka, Kan., Birch Bay, Wash., Eugene, Ore., and Harvey, N.D., where he took on the role of part-time district minister six years ago. He became the full-time Central District Minister two and a half years ago.

Replicating the impact

The ripple effect from Ulysses has been far-reaching, and Morris, Sullivan, Eshbaugh and Schmidt reflect on ways churches can foster and encourage young leaders in their own congregations.

Churches can replicate what UMBC did by encouraging youth to lean into their potential for vocational ministry, Sullivan says.

"They can duplicate the process of shoulder-tapping and calling out individuals into a deeper walk with Jesus and greater commitment to the local church," he says. "They can make spiritual development of young leaders a priority and an intentional ministry."

Eshbaugh, too, highlights the need for intentionality in equipping the next generation.

"There was the sense that they were praying for it, they were resourcing for it, they were looking for it, they were tapping shoulders, they were actively involved," he says. "I think in some churches, it's more accidental maybe."

Schmidt speaks about the importance of encouragement.

"We as a church body must continue to walk with our youth," Schmidt says. "Encourage them, build relationships with them, value them and their contribution, be their cheerleaders, give them opportunities to grow (and) be gracious to them as they find their way and yes, even make mistakes."

Then, as Morris says, once youth are equipped, the church need not be afraid to let go.

"The Ulysses church didn't try to dissuade us from leaving," he says. "Several young leaders left during that time and the church could have tried to hold onto us, but instead freed us to be sent out and then helped us along the way." — *Janae Rempel*

If you feed them, they will come

Gonzalez finds Guatemalan pastors hungry for training

When Manny Gonzalez went to Guatemala in April to offer Bible training, local pastors walked as many as seven hours from remote villages to attend.

"I see how easily many of us can come up with an excuse not to attend a church service," says Gonzalez, who attends Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D. "In Guatemala there are Christians who will travel a dangerous road to learn more about God and become better leaders."

For Gonzalez and others, the trip to Guatemala provided opportunity to train and equip local pastors, preach, share testimonies and minister to children. As a result, ministry is being strengthened, both in Guatemala and among the Guatemalan population in Huron.

A need for training

Gonzalez, who teaches Sunday school and serves with Bethesda's AWANA ministry, coordinated the April 8-21 trip as a result of his interaction with a Guatemalan church in Huron.

Four years ago, Gonzalez, who has been part of Bethesda since 2009, began teaching and preaching at Principe De Paz, a Huron church comprised primarily of indigenous Mayan people from the Ixchiguán, Guatemala, area. Here, he learned of the need for pastoral training in Guatemala.

"Pastor Francisco Lopez commented how local pastors have no opportunity to receive formal theological training or at-

tend seminary," Gonzalez says. "I began to pray and ask God how we could help pastors in that area."

With pastoral training on his heart, Gonzalez, who earned his bachelor's degree in Christian Ministry from Liberty University Online in December 2017 and was accepted into Liberty's seminary program in January 2018, began planning a trip to Guatemala.

The trip

Gonzalez invited his Liberty professor, Daniel Steffen, to accompany him for a week of training, then welcomed Bethesda participants Anthony Lind, who serves as youth pastor, and

Justin Connerley, for a second week focusing on sharing testimonies and kids' ministry.

During their first week in Guatemala April 8-14, Gonzalez and Steffen conducted biblical training in Ixchiguán, teaching basic biblical interpretation to the 50 pastors gathered from as many as 10 denominations. Steffen, who also serves as adjunct professor in New Testament and Theological Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, speaks fluent Spanish and taught New Testament in Guatemala City for seven years.

"It was real interactive," Gonzalez says of the training. "We started at 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. (At) the end of the week we helped them develop a sermon."

Gonzalez spent evenings reviewing materials with pastors and visiting villages. He and Steffen also took turns preaching in villages.

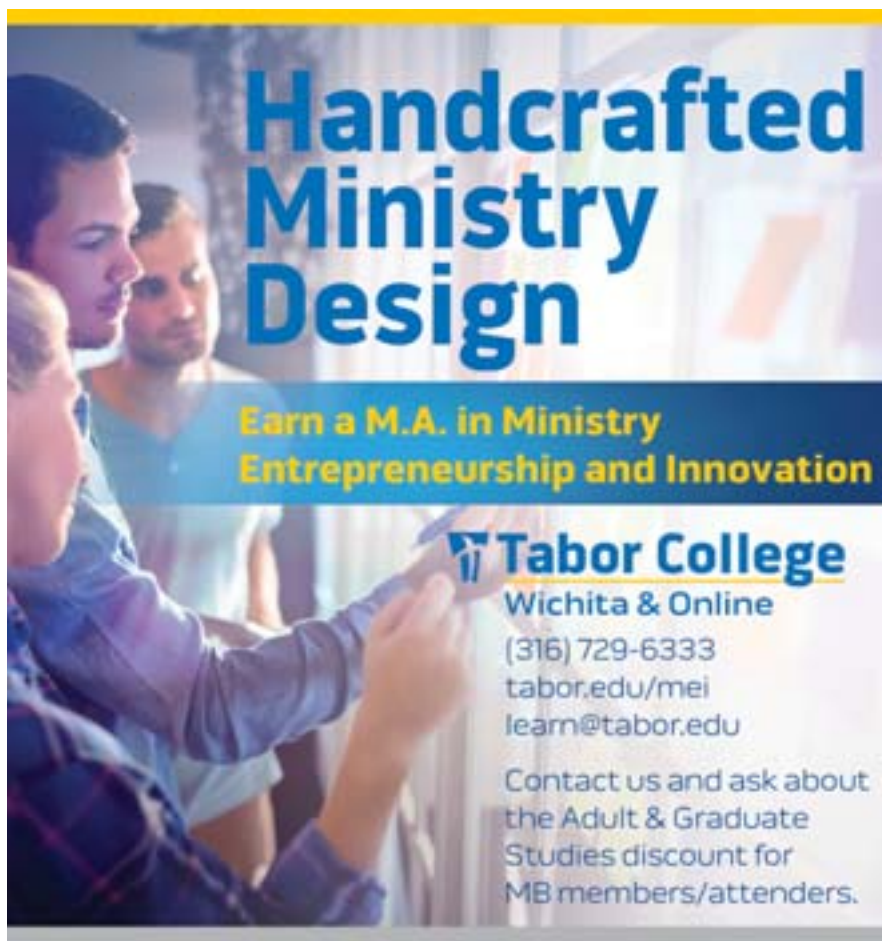
"One day it took us over four hours to cover 20 miles in that region to visit the village of two pastors that were walking seven hours to the training," Gonzalez says.

After Steffen's departure, Lind and Connerley arrived for a week of sharing testimonies, preaching and conducting kids' outreach events April 15-21.

Connerley shared his testimony in a jail, where more than 60 inmates gave their lives to Christ, Gonzalez says. The last Sunday, Gonzalez and the team extended an invitation to 30 churches for a kids' event including games and testimony-sharing.

About 200 people came to Christ during the two-week period, Gonzalez says.

Before leaving Guatemala, Gonzalez left a collection of theological books, commentaries and other resources for the pastors who attended the training, as well as a monetary offering for the local pastor delegation that aided in planning the trip.



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Primitive living conditions

In Guatemala, Gonzalez and others observed primitive living conditions while visiting villages surrounded by volcanoes in the high region of the country.

“Where we were at is the highest point in Central America for altitude,” Gonzalez says. “All the Mayans are up there. When the Spaniards started wiping out the Mayans, they sought refuge up in the mountains, and the Spaniards never chased them up there because it was so treacherous. That’s how they survived.”

Nestled between two volcanoes, one village Gonzalez and Steffen visited required miles of hiking to reach. With no running water or electricity and one latrine for the village, poor hygiene has contributed to a high mortality rate, especially among children. This village sent its only pastor to the training.

Malnutrition causes stunted growth—Gonzalez says children typically are two years older than they appear.

“We encountered kids that haven’t eaten in three days,” he says. “Most people can’t afford meat, so they’re just stunted.... There was an 8-year-old that was smaller than my 6-year-old and a 3-year-old that’s smaller than Anthony’s 2-year-old. Their dad was begging us to take them both with us back to the United States because he couldn’t afford to feed them.”

With limited access to medical care—many clinics do not have doctors—sickness and infections can be fatal, and a case of pink eye can cause blindness.

In the villages, women primarily attend church, as men are either working in the fields or at home drinking, Gonzalez says. Some parents seek employment in the United States to support their family, leaving their children to be raised by grandparents.

“All those people are trying to leave to get a better life condition because it’s so



This photo, taken around midnight, shows a typical night for Manny Gonzalez (pictured facing the camera at left) and Daniel Steffen, during the first week of training. Each night, Gonzalez and Steffen reviewed material with local pastors.

Photo by Manny Gonzalez

hard to live up there,” Gonzalez says. “...They migrate, and they end up in Huron.”

Immigrants bring diversity

The city of Huron attracts workers from Guatemala and elsewhere as a result of two nearby processing plants.

“Huron is the most diverse community in South Dakota per capita,” Gonzalez says, adding the city contains four Guatemalan churches, one Puerto Rican church, at least two Karen churches and a Buddhist temple.

Gonzalez volunteers among the Guatemalan population in Huron and speaks on a Spanish radio station, encouraging parents to send their children to school—by age 12, most kids are expected to work.

“I was on a radio station here in Spanish, talking to them and motivating them to send their kids to school, let them finish school because then those kids will

have a better future,” he says. “That’s what is happening now. All these kids are coming in, they’re attending high school or elementary, they’re getting their degrees, they’re fluent in Spanish and in English and they’re getting a better way of life.”

Plans for future trips

Gonzalez hopes to return to Guatemala in two years as part of a long-term commitment to pastors, saying he plans to create a vision for future trips then meet with Bethesda’s missions committee for possible church sponsorship.

He plans to invite other churches to participate, including other Mennonite Brethren churches and Spanish-speaking churches in Huron, and would like to take medical care providers next time.

“If I can take at least a few medical guys or gals and at least can teach them



Connerley, Lind and Gonzalez visited this village that sent its pastor to the training. "Since all these pastors traveled long distances to get there, we felt obligated to go to their villages because they all invited us to go to their villages," Gonzalez says. "So in a given day, we were traveling hours just visiting either two or four villages per day." The pastor, on crutches at left, had an accident as a child, Gonzalez says. Because of lack of medical care, his leg is deformed because no one knew how to set the bone. The church currently meets at the pastor's house but owns the land in the background of the photo and would like to build a church there.

Photo by Manny Gonzalez

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hygiene, how to take care of the common parasite or the common fungi that they're encountering. I think that's going to improve the quality of life," he says.

Meanwhile, pastoral training is ongoing in Guatemala, both through the help of one of Steffen's seminary students in Guatemala City and the use of an app, through which pastors send assignments to Gonzalez for review and correction. Pastors working on sermons and needing clarification can send questions to Gonzalez, who responds with a written reply or a phone call.

"In an area that had no training at all, now they're receiving training from other people that have been able to go to seminary and go to school," he says. "Now what we're hoping and praying to see is, in a two-year period when we go back, those pastors in that area have a better knowledge of Scripture, hermeneutics and other topics, and that that would help them grow those churches and reach out to the Maya culture that is so embedded in witchcraft."

Committing for the long-term is important, Gonzalez says.

"We wanted to see that they're going to keep engaged and continue to learn more and not just be satisfied that whatever they know now is enough," he says. "They need to continue training." —

Janae Rempel

Outreach program thriving at Bethany

Moms and children interact, learn at "Mommy and Me"

Every Friday morning during the school year, the first floor of Bethany Church in Fresno, Calif., is filled with mothers and their young children participating in Mommy and Me, the church's "interactive preschool learning group."

Annette Wiebe, pastor of children's outreach at Bethany Church, began the program in 2005 after a new apartment complex was built near the church. The pastor of Bethany at the time had encouraged the staff to brainstorm ideas for outreach opportunities.

Wiebe, formerly a kindergarten teacher in Fresno, decided to use her background in child development to create a program that would focus on creating a comfortable place for mothers to interact and learn with their preschool age children. She wanted the program to be free and outreach-focused, with mothers of children at Bethany Church inviting mothers from outside the church body.

"It's a place for moms to come and interact with their kids and be introduced to Jesus," says Wiebe. "It's about showing God's love, an outpouring of his character."

Each week, moms and their kids check in at the church and gather to begin the morning with prayer and songs. Wiebe bases each week's content on a different story from children's literature, so she then reads aloud the book that will be the focus of the morning's activities.

Everyone then divides into groups to walk through numerous stations, each one with a different activity. Stations include art projects, puzzles that focus on teaching math skills, "cooking" or making snacks and a sharing time that follows a "show and tell" style format. The morning concludes with another gathering time where Wiebe recognizes birthdays and leads the moms and children in a closing prayer.

Wiebe works to incorporate faith and the gospel into each week's curriculum. In addition to prayer, she speaks openly of her faith during the opening and closing sessions.

"I constantly talk about how God is involved in the day's topic," Wiebe says. "For example, if we are talking

about whales, we talk about the Creator. I always find a way to tie the literature to a Bible message."

During the Christmas and Easter seasons, she incorporates books and music focused on Jesus' birth and resurrection, knowing that it may be the first time some children have heard the stories. Wiebe always encourages moms to seek her out if they want more information about Jesus.

Growth and community

Participation in Mommy and Me has grown significantly in the past 14 years.

In the first couple years, Wiebe

estimates around 15 to 20 children attended with their mothers. That number had grown to about 65 to 70 children last year, mostly thanks to word-of-mouth invitations.

Wiebe asks mothers to answer on a questionnaire where they first heard of Mommy and Me, and many say they heard from a friend or even just another mother they ran into at the park.

Wiebe says she has tweaked the program after growth spurts, adding more stations and providing childcare in the nursery for children too young to participate in activities. She tells the story of one mother who was thrilled to have



Annette Wiebe, pastor of children's outreach, interacts with children during a Friday morning session of Mommy and Me at Bethany Church in Fresno. Wiebe organizes each session's activities around a selection of children's literature and speaks regularly of her faith in Jesus as she leads the opening and closing. *Photo by Bethany Church*

time to focus on her middle child at Mommy and Me while her older child was in school and her younger child was in the nursery.

Currently, about 10 women from Bethany Church volunteer each week to help run the activities.

“They’re very committed because they want to build relationships,” Wiebe says.

Looking forward, Wiebe hopes to someday have a setup team that can help prepare the church on Thursday evenings as the program continues to grow.

Moms build community

While Mommy and Me is designed for preschool age children, Wiebe encourages moms with children of other ages to come and participate in whatever activities fit their child’s age and ability.

She sees the program not just as a place for mothers to interact with their children, but also with other mothers.

“Often the moms will bring a lunch for their children and they will stay and play and fellowship with other moms and children on our playground,” Wiebe says. “The moms spend more time getting to know each other in this

way. This continues to build the community.”

That community at Mommy and Me is fairly diverse, both culturally and socioeconomically. Wiebe says they regularly have mothers from the Asian population of Fresno, as well as Spanish speakers. The group also includes mothers of all different levels of educational background.

“They are so supportive and encouraging of one another,” Wiebe says.

She adds that they have even had fathers or grandparents participate if mothers were unable to attend.

Last year, the program “graduated” 20 children from different elementary schools throughout Fresno, demonstrating its reach far beyond the neighborhood of Bethany Church.

Wiebe says that nearly all the mothers and children who attend are not from Bethany, although many now identify Bethany as their church. She says the hope is that after attending Mommy and Me on Fridays, mothers and families will begin attending other kids’ programs on Wednesdays and eventually Sunday services.

Wiebe has seen the program bear fruit in the lives of mothers and their children. She loves to see quieter children or children with special needs participating with excitement in sharing time. She also sees many moms coming back year after year. Some have even returned to volunteer after their children have graduated Mommy and Me.

“They like the experience so much that they want to stay involved even after their kids reach school age,” Wiebe says.

Looking forward, Wiebe hopes to someday have a setup team that can help prepare the church on Thursday evenings as the program continues to grow. —*Jessica Vix Allen*

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Building a new bridge

Expanded board can help strengthen relationships

I recently came across an essay written by Juan Martinez back in 1994 for *Direction Journal* regarding the topic of “Ethnicity and Assimilation: The Shape of the Problem.” As I read the essay, I reflected upon our current context as Hispanic congregations in the USMB family of churches. According to Martinez, the ministry by Mennonite Brethren began among Latinos in South Texas in 1937 and in Central California in 1956. The number of churches established in South Texas and Central California were less than 10 in each of the geographic locations until 1984. Over the last 35 years there has been steady growth, and there are now approximately 35 Mennonite Brethren churches that are part of the Hispanic Council in the Pacific District Conference.

I have been part of the Mennonite Brethren family of churches in the Pacific District Conference for approximately 15 years. During this time, the Hispanic Council churches have transitioned from operating merely at the local conference level to now being invited to be present at the USMB Leadership Board meetings to participate in conversations.

The invitation to be present at future USMB Leadership Board meetings is definitely a needed step in the right direction. This is progress. Several years ago, Hispanic Council representatives discussed that Latino churches had no direct bridge of communication to the USMB Conference. At the most recent USMB Leadership Board meeting I was asked questions regarding steps that can be taken to strengthen the relationship between the USMB Conference and the Hispanic churches. Leadership

Board members asked questions and expressed an interest in being more intentional with building positive relationships with Hispanic churches.

It is exciting that a new bridge of communication has been established on the USMB Leadership Board. It was also good to see USMB national director Don Morris at our Hispanic Council annual convention this past May 2019 in Pacoima, Calif. The intentional steps towards cultivating positive relationships between the USMB Conference and Hispanic churches is extremely essential to the health of the denomination.

As we continue the journey, here are some considerations that I would like to pose as we consider Latinos as Mennonite Brethren and what I think needs to be discussed as we look toward the future. To rephrase a statement posed by Dr. Martinez in his 1994 essay: “How Latino Mennonite Brethren will fit into a denomination largely administered by the [dominant culture] is a question that is yet to be clearly answered.” There is still a lot of work that needs to be done.

There needs to be ongoing conversations regarding power dynamics and structures within USMB and local conferences. How do we process beyond just being invited to sit at the table to participate in discussions with no voting power? How do we progress to include more than just one Latino sitting on the different leadership boards to create a more equitable representation of the entire MB family? How can we walk together to embody the true meaning of being one body in Christ with equitable practices in decision making processes? ▀



Xavier Piña
is chair of the Pacific
District Conference
Hispanic Council
and the pastor of
Iglesia La Gran
Comisión in
Hanford, Calif.

A story of God opening doors

Church planting event brings church planter, intern together

Phil's story

I met Caleb Rempel, a senior in high school, in January 2019 at Ascent Base Camp, an event about church planting hosted by Multiply at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church (HMBC). His youth leader, Dustin Jost, answered my plea to take a hungry church planter out to lunch. Caleb was along for the ride, but I thought it unique that a high school student would give up his Saturday to come to such an event.

The conversation was enjoyable, and as Caleb shared about his desire to pursue ministry, he came across as a wise and focused young man pursuing Jesus. I was very impressed by his desire to grow and learn. I shared with Caleb that we would be looking for interns in the summer and encouraged him to pray about it.

In talking with Brian Allen, Caleb's pastor, he shared how incredible a young man Caleb is. This, coupled with a text from Caleb stating his interest, caused us to hire him. He is one of our first interns at Lakeview Church and he did a fantastic job!

The privilege of being a part of his leadership experience is an exciting part of my journey. God has laid on my heart a desire to find future leaders in our MB conference. Having experiences where we as leaders have the opportunities to visit different places, connect with each other's leaders and, most importantly, partner and network are absolutely crucial for this to happen. I am grateful for the experience that allowed me to connect with Hillsboro MB Church and to find Caleb. My hope is that we have given Caleb one more tool for his journey into either full-time pastoring or church planting.

Caleb's story

In January of 2019, I had the privilege to attend Ascent Base Camp at HMBC. I had been looking forward to the day for

months because my pastor, Brian Allen, had been hyping the event for a long time. The toughest part of attending was asking my basketball coach to miss half of practice for it.

The event was everything I had hoped for plus so much more. I met many great people and learned a ton about church planting. I had already felt my calling for church planting/church leadership, and the event gave me a renewed passion for it.

I really enjoyed what Phil Wiebe, lead pastor of Lakeview Church, had to say. I thought he had a great sense of humor, and that is the easiest way to impress me. I quickly found out he was much more than a comedian. He is one of the most driven, ambitious men I have ever met, and ambition is near the top of the list of things I most respect. He had an unstoppable drive to plant Lakeview Church, and it was noticeable that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. I was drawn to that ambition and challenged to give up any doubts that I had about ministry in the future.

Dustin Jost, my mentor and friend, invited me to eat lunch with him and Phil. During that time, I learned a lot about Phil. I learned of his goals, beliefs, passions and several funny stories. As we were leaving, Phil just casually brought up starting an internship program, and I was immediately set on it. I went home and told my mom I was going to Utah for the summer. I had been earnestly praying for opportunities to serve the Lord for months, and meeting Phil was much more than coincidence. There were a lot of amazing things that happened behind the scenes that I had nothing to do with. God opened a door for me that I didn't even know was there. Praise the Lord for the opportunity to help Phil and Lakeview expand the kingdom of God.■



Phil Wiebe and his wife, Melissa, are planting Lakeview Church, a USMB church plant in Stansbury Park, Utah.



Caleb Rempel is a 2019 graduate of Hillsboro (Kan.) High School and will be attending Tabor College, the MB school in Hillsboro, this fall. He plans to study ministry and business, join the choir and play every intramural sport possible.

Possible happens here

FPU celebrates 75th anniversary

This year Fresno Pacific University (FPU) will celebrate its 75th anniversary since its founding in the Central Valley of California. What started as Pacific Bible Institute by the Pacific District Conference has grown to become a Christian multicultural university with campuses in Fresno, Bakersfield, Visalia and Merced, online programs and a biblical seminary. Serving more than 4,200 undergraduate, graduate and seminary students from 40 countries, FPU continues its Christ-centered commitment as an evangelical Anabaptist institution.

The home of the university is strategic, representing the diversity of the world in an area known as the most productive agricultural region in the country. Its diversity is represented by the second largest Hmong population in the country, a significant south Asia, Slavic and Armenia population and a diverse Hispanic population with ties in Mexico, Central and South America. FPU is the only Christian university in the central California region, resting between the Pacific Ocean and Yosemite National Park. Our main and north campuses located in the fifth largest city of California are strategic for extending the influence of the kingdom of God through national and global partnerships.

With 100 areas of study, 22 graduate and seminary programs, 15 NCAA II sports teams and three centers, the university has stewarded quality in its pursuit to extend the influence of the kingdom of God nationally and globally. We purpose to prepare students to bring light and hope into dark spaces, to quench the thirst of those in dry places and to share the life of Christ through their vocations. This preparation as peacemakers, reconcilers, innovators and truth-tellers is central to the evangelical Anabaptist tradition which is central to our core education: an education that prepares students to think broadly, engage courageously and serve with humility.

FPU has become a place where many non-Christian students are drawn because of the reputation of quality, only to discover a new life of wisdom that comes through knowing Christ as Savior. Each semester we hear testimonies of lives changed through student orientation, chapel, learning cohorts and service projects. Our spring convocations provide opportunities for transfer and nontraditional students to share the transformative power of Christ which occurred as a result of their joining our community.

Our stewardship has moved the university's rating in *US News & World Report* from the ranking of 41 to 39 of best master's universities in the West. *The Washington Monthly* rated FPU as one of the "Best Bang for the Buck" in the West. *Money Magazine* recently rated FPU as #11 in the country and #1 among Christian colleges and universities in being among the best places to transfer.

Our uncompromising Christian commitment has open doors in the fields of medicine/health care, business, education, community development, justice and the arts. We have forged partnerships where we have allayed a strike in a school district through the Center for Peacemaking. Our Center for Community Transformation has assisted in launching 43 small businesses in the region, and our Center for Anabaptist Studies is providing professional development for ethnic and interdenominational pastors.

When the Lord planted Fresno Pacific University in the Central Valley 75 years ago, the founders could not imagine what God had in store for this community. We have adopted the phrase among our students that "possible happens here," reminding them that "with God all things are possible." The university has been faithful to the legacy of its founding fathers in extending the influence of the kingdom of God through the lives of our students, staff and faculty. ▀



Joseph Jones
is president of Fresno
Pacific University.
He and his wife,
Yvette, came to FPU
in 2017.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Filecity Kilmer, Erica Romero, Caitlyn Sanders and Bethany Yutzy were baptized and received as members at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** July 14. Beth Richert, Aaron Seal, Cassia Seal, Ray Spencer and Tammy Spencer were also received as members.

Stephanie Meeks, Ryland Kinser, Tyler Phillips, Austin Phillips, Arsenia Day and Huntington Kinser were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus** June 30. Brittney Lewis was baptized June 23.

Ameer Alimayu and Kellyn DuPuis were baptized at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Jazmyn Paxson was baptized and received as a member at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.**, June 23. Ashlynn Senecal was baptized and received as a member June 9.

Randi Laverty and Gabe Robbins were baptized at **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, June 23. Ali Dablemont, Sarah Dablemont, Amy Janzen, Chelsi Janzen, Jeff Smith, Dianne Smith and Debra Thompson were received as members.

Jessie Mitchell, Ashley Lerud and Xavier Thomas were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**, June 16.

Anthony Bunch and Mya Lewis were baptized May 19 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Collin Brown, Deanna Schafer, Iris Klein and Hannah Klierer were baptized at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, May 12. Malorie Hein, Frank

Wichert, Emersyn Funk and Thelma Wilson were baptized May 5. Kayla Metheny was baptized April 28.

WORKERS

Asher Griffin began serving as lead pastor at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church**, Aug. 11. Chris Regier concluded his ministry May 12 as director of worship arts.

Dave Loewen began serving as visitation pastor at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, replacing Tim Schellenberg who concluded his ministry this summer as visitation pastor.

Candy Bergman began serving as part-time student ministry administrative assistant and AXIS program director at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Brian Allen concluded his ministry as lead pastor at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, May 26. Sara Jo Waldron concluded her ministry July 5 as youth pastor and worship director. Grant Shewey began serving Aug. 19 as youth pastor.

Randy Reiswig concluded his ministry as pastor of family ministries at **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church**. Kathy Manning began serving as children's ministries leader.

Shellie Bowman began serving as Missional Director at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.** Jason Morones began serving July 1 as Next Steps pastor.

James Bergen concluded his ministry as lead pastor at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**, at the end of August.

Jim Shellenberger began his ministry as associate pastor of youth and community life at **Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Kan.**, June 16. He was installed June 23.

Ken Ediger concluded his ministry as lead pastor at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, at the end of July.

Andrew Wuerffel began serving as associate pastor with an emphasis in youth ministries at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, July 8.

Russ Claassen concluded his ministry as youth pastor at **Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan.**, July 1, and began serving full-time as Southern District Conference youth minister.

Dustin Mulkey concluded his ministry as youth pastor at **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, June 10. Mulkey began serving as youth pastor at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, June 16.

Mike Petts concluded his ministry as pastor at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, May 26.

Daryle Baltzer concluded his ministry as visitation pastor at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Jordan Ringhofer, lead pastor at **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** graduated from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary May 3. The church held a celebration May 19.

DEATHS

Adrian, LaVerne L., Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, April 18, 1924—June 26, 2019. Parents: Peter H. and Teena Froese Adrian. Spouse: Lovella Martens, deceased, Maxine Danner. Children: Paula Strasser, Vicki Stobbe, Jack; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Chansone, Southeast Asia, Multiply missionary, May 10, 1957—March 15, 2019.

Cox, Demarius Amari, Hillsboro, Kan., of Hillsboro MB Church, April 1, 2003—June 7, 2019. Parents: Demetrius and Ciara (Harris) Cox.

Stony Brook hosts craft fair, concert

Whether it was by welcoming vendors, filling a tank of fuel for a stranger or helping a family with a housing deposit, Stony Brook Church's third annual Craft Fair and Outdoor Concert event June 8 provided ways for the church to bless its Omaha, Neb., community.

For its craft fair, held the second Saturday of June, SBC provided more than 105 spaces for various nonprofit organizations, craft vendors, direct sales representatives and food vendors. The event included a bounce house for children, a free-will baked goods sale, a free raffle with more than 85 gifts and prizes and two bands. Vendors' fees went toward SBC's benevolence fund to help Omaha families in need.

For the first time this year, SBC hosted a potluck to follow up on the connections made through the craft fair, which included a barbecue meal and an hour of worship music and prayer.

"[The craft fair fosters] connections made with vendors, others in our community and the opportunity for our church family to deepen relationships through volunteering," says SBC church administrator and craft fair planning team member Melissa Hanna. "These deeper relationships provide a love and relationship that God intended all along."—Janae Rempel

Epp, Albert H., Bakersfield, Calif., former pastor of senior care at Laurel Glen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Sept. 17, 1931—April 28, 2019. Parents: John Epp Jr. and Marie (Harder) Epp. Spouse: Susan Joan Walter. Children: Steve, Greg, Nathan; 13 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

Fadenrecht, Helen (Faul), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church and former member of Rosehill MB Church, Munich, N.D., June 11, 1922—June 2, 2019. Parents: Charlie F. and Caroline (Seibel) Faul. Spouse: Edwin J. Fadenrecht, deceased. Children: Willa Reddig, Kirby; four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Fast, Jeanette (Bartel), Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Nov. 2, 1928—June 10, 2019. Parents: Dan and Emma (Kruger) Bartel. Spouse: Roy Fast, deceased. Children: Debbie Enns, Royce, Lori Funk; seven grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Faul, LeRoy, Anamoose, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., June 1, 1935—June 12, 2019. Parents: Charlie F. and Carolina (Seibel) Faul. Spouse: Evelyn (Good) Faul, deceased.

Hanneman, Wilbur E., Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Dec. 17, 1923—June 6, 2019. Parents: Henry and Pauline (Winter) Hanneman. Spouse: Mildred "Millie" Frick, deceased. Children: Elaine Nelson, Delbert, Gloria, Keith; eight grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

Hofer, Sylvia, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 12, 1918—June 8, 2019. Parents: Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Kliever. Spouse: David L. Hofer, deceased. Children: Donna Hofer, Nadine Shephard; three grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Jantzen, Norma Claire, Madera, Calif., member of Madera Avenue Bible Church, July 13, 1937—April 30, 2019. Parents: Warren and Kathryn Younger. Spouse: Bill Jantzen. Children: Greg,

Chris, Tracy Jantzen; five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Johnson, Dolores Helen (Wiens), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Nov. 26, 1926—June 12, 2019. Parents: George D. and Lena (Thiessen) Wiens. Spouse: Leonard Johnson, deceased. Children: Kaylene Unruh, Douglas, Gary, Geneva Just; 11 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

Jost, Waneta, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Feb. 7, 1927—May 27, 2019. Parents: John E. and Helena (Reimer) Reimer. Spouse: Donald Jost, deceased. Children: Gary, deceased, Betty Fleming; three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Klein, Amy, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, June 6, 1974—May 4, 2019. Parents: Clayton and Danelda (Goertzen) Klein.

Kliwer, Ruth, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Jan. 17, 1924—May 22, 2019. Parents: Jacob and Anna (Ratzlaff) Fast. Spouse: John B. Kliwer, deceased. Children: John, Philip, Lyle; six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

McCutchan, Duane, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 3, 1932—May 26, 2019. Parents: Irvin and Isa (Harris) McCutchan. Spouse: Gayle McCutchan. Children: Patti Beach, Mark, Mike; five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Richert, LaVerne, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, July 3, 1928—July 19, 2019. Parents: John and Martha (Kroeker) Richert. Spouse: Herb Richert. Children: Ed, Tim, LuAnn Adrian; 14 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

Schroeder, Hilda A. (Stucky), Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, April 8, 1920—July 15, 2019. Parents: Joseph T. and Anna (Gehring) Stucky. Spouse: Alvin J. Schroeder, deceased, Leonard Peters, deceased, Arthur H. Graber, deceased, Arnold C. Penner, deceased. Children:

Larry Penner, Donald Penner, deceased, LaVern Penner; five grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, 16 great-great-grandchildren; stepchildren Arlene Becker, Janet Reimer, Dennis Schroeder, nine step-grandchildren, nine step-great-grandchildren and several step-great-great-grandchildren.

Smith, Marilyn Doris (Nightingale), Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, March 16, 1926—June 28, 2019. Parents: Abraham and Lydia (Unruh) Nightingale. Spouse: William Eugene (Gene) Smith, deceased. Children: Bradley, Douglas, Janice Sipes; six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Wiebe, Allen, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, May 21, 1924—June 5, 2019. Parents: Peter H. and Lena (Ratzlaff) Wiebe. Spouse: Linda Wiebe. Children: Robert, Jeanette Cook; two grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Wiebe, Carol Elaine (Barb), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Feb. 7, 1936—May 7, 2019. Parents: Harold and Evelyn Barb. Spouse: Harold J. Wiebe, deceased. Children: Warran, Ward, Wade; 11 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

Wiens, Calvin L., Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, July 10, 1925—April 2, 2019. Parents: George D. and Lena (Thiessen) Wiens. Spouse: Mary Lou (Lohrenz) Wiens. Children: Charles, Phyllis, Philip, Cheryl; eight grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren.

Wiens, Esther (Berg), Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Sept. 21, 1922—June 11, 2019. Parents: Jacob and Mary (Woelk) Berg. Spouse: Ernest, deceased.

Workman, Melvin Curtis, Edmond, Okla., member of Cross Timbers Church Edmond, Nov. 2, 1946—June 5, 2019. Parents: Melvin and Lucy (Barber) Workman. Spouse: Evelyn (Horn) Workman. Children: Derek, Bradley; three grandchildren.

Francisco Rivera

Francisco Rivera, Mennonite Brethren pastor, died June 4, 2019, at the age of 70. He was born Jan. 12, 1949. Pastor of Jesus es Mi Paz Church in Pharr, Texas, Rivera's ministry spanned 47 years, including 17 years on the radio with Jesus es Mi Paz daily programs. Rivera is survived by his wife of 48 years, Alma; three sons, Jaime, Jose and Frank Jr.; and three grandchildren.

Madera Avenue Bible Church celebrates centennial

Madera (Calif.) Avenue Bible Church will celebrate its 100th anniversary Oct. 12-13, 2019. The celebration will include a Saturday afternoon tour of the Dixieland area of Madera County, followed by a German dinner and program. Sunday's celebration will include a worship service at Madera Avenue Bible Church and a barbeque lunch.

Established as Fairmead Mennonite Brethren Church in the Fairmead Community north of Madera, the church was organized on Oct. 19, 1919 with 10 members. The church constructed two buildings in the Dixieland area of Madera County, the second of which, completed in 1939, is still standing. The church was unofficially known as the Dixieland MB Church until its move to town in 1969 when the church changed its name to Madera Avenue MB Church and to Madera Avenue Bible Church in 1992.

MABC pastors have included Peter Wall, John Lichti, Bernard Wall Sr., J.M. Schlicting, Jacob Quiring, Bernard Wall Jr., Heinrich Esau, Robert Kroeker, Greg Langley, Heath McClure, Jim VanderMark, Virgil Reimer and Tim Bergdahl. Current pastor James Kennemur accepted the role in 2014.

church news

Vogt, Mildred R., North Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., March 1, 1924—July 14, 2019. Parents: Cornelius and Mary (Kornelson) Harder. Spouse: Vernon Vogt, deceased. Children: Richard, Janet Vogt, Joyce Wahr, Ken (deceased); five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

REACHING OUT

FELLOWSHIP

Hope Kingsburg (Calif.) held its annual swim night July 14 with homemade ice cream provided.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held a Summer Sunday July 14 with hot dogs, inflatable water slides, water balloons, a family summer photo booth and a succulent creation station.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., showed a movie in the parking lot July 12.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., hosted a "Picnic in the Park" July 28.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., held a cookout at Red Rock Canyon.

Henderson (Neb.) MB Church voted June 9 to approve a new name for the church: Living Hope Church. The church's new name will be officially rolled out during the church's Harvest Mission Festival in November.

Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Clovis, Calif., held a Summer Adventure Day June 28. The event included three stations for children to use exploration, imagination and recreation and featured animals from the Fresno Chaffee Zoo.

WORSHIP

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., held a night of worship July 24 with Ghost Ship, an indie/folk worship band from Seattle, and Wild Earth.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., held a night of hymn singing July 7. Watermelon and crullers were served.

CELEBRATIONS

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., celebrated its 25th anniversary with a May 5 party with tri-tip sandwiches, hot dogs, bounce houses and kids' activities.

Lighthouse Church, Lakewood, Colo., held its first service in its new building, Aug. 4.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., held a service project to trim shrubs, pull weeds and spread mulch at Sunset Elementary, Aug. 10.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted eight block parties with 850 people in attendance and 16 salvations.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., designated July 27 as "Serve Day." The church also held a teacher wish list drive in July.

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church held a worship service, games and a meal at its adopted school, Jefferson Elementary, July 7.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., gave away 200 backpacks and supplies to children July 25 as a result of its school supplies drive.

Love Your Neighborhood offers free services in Bakersfield

Heritage Bible Church (HBC) in Bakersfield, Calif. volunteered at a "Love Your Neighborhood" community event May 18 with the nonprofit organization CityServe and is looking at increasing its involvement. Volunteers met at 10 churches in Bakersfield and the surrounding communities to offer free services, including groceries, haircuts, family portraits, lunch, job services, health services and prayer, says HBC pastor Jim Aiken.

According to its website, CityServe is a "collaborative network empowering the local church to offer solutions to brokenness through God's template found in the Bible." Nearly 50 Bakersfield churches and 30 organizations have connected with CityServe, Aiken says.

HBC is exploring ways to offer services more often throughout the year and is considering doing a "Love Your Neighborhood" outreach once a quarter, Aiken says, adding the church would like to be a host site next year. —Janae Rempel

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Openings

Youth Pastor: Hope Kingsburg, a MB church located in Kingsburg, Calif., is looking for a part-time youth pastor to work with a team of established volunteers to lead the junior high and high school students. Our midweek youth group has an average attendance of 15 junior high students and five high school students. The youth pastor will also work with our pastoral team, Lead Pastor Jordan Ringhofer and Pastor of Care Ministry Dennis Fast, to help our church pursue our mission of being a source of hope in the Kingsburg community. Salary will be determined based on experience, qualification and quantity of work hours available (anticipated 10-20 hours a week). Those interested should contact the church office at 559-897-4162 or email their resume to office@hopekingsburg.org.

Pastor of Worship/Family Ministries: Shafter MB Church is currently in the search process for a full-time pastor of worship and family ministries. The community of approximately 20,000 is located in the southern San Joaquin Valley of California, 10 miles northwest of Bakersfield. Responsibilities include overseeing and implementing blended worship services as well as family ministry programs. A full job description and additional information is available at www.shaftermb.org/pastoralposition

Children's Ministry Director: Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, a Christ-centered church in the heart of California's Central Valley, seeks a children's ministry director. This team member gives vision and leadership to all children's ministries through volunteer management and oversight, training and resourcing volunteers and parents. Responsibilities include all children's ministries (birth-6th grade). For a full job description and to apply, please go to <http://www.reedleymbc.org/employment>

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Living as evangelicals and Anabaptists

What it looks like to be Mennonite Brethren

What does it mean when Mennonite Brethren say we are evangelical and Anabaptist? At the recent Southern District Conference convention, several speakers addressed this important question. It's good to remind ourselves what this means since today many use the term "evangelical" as a definition of a political group, those who hold to certain political principles. But that's not how we desire to use this word.

So, for us, what is evangelicalism? A major tenet is the belief in being "born again" or becoming a redeemed, regenerated child of God through faith in Jesus and what he accomplished at the cross and upon his dynamic resurrection. We believe this redemption is a gift of God's grace. It means there has been true repentance and belief. We become new creations through Jesus.

We believe in spreading the gospel message to unbelievers. In today's evangelical churches there is often a significant emphasis on spreading the gospel through mission work globally and domestically. We Mennonite Brethren have this strong missional focus.

Evangelicals believe Jesus will return. Although there are different interpretations of when and how this will occur, we believe in a triumphant return of Jesus.

Another core belief is a high regard for the Bible. As evangelical Christians, we believe in the Bible as the infallible word of God, and that it is the final authority for Christians.

In the booklet, "What is an Anabaptist Christian?" Palmer Becker says that Anabaptist is an invented name meaning "re-baptizers." It was given to 16th century Christians who saw little value in the practice of infant baptism and adhered to adult baptism upon confession of faith.

Anabaptist Christians hold many beliefs in common with other believers. We believe in the triune God who is both holy and gracious, the humanity and divinity of Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit and the church as the body of Christ.

What are the "sacred" core values of Anabaptist Christians? That Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our lives and reconciliation is the center of our work. We have an ethic of love and value peacemaking.

Jesus is the center of our faith: This means being a Spirit-filled person who is obeying Jesus in daily life and being transformed to become Christ-like in daily attitudes and lifestyles. In addition, the Bible is interpreted from a Christ-centered point of view. We see Jesus as the final authority for faith and life.

Community is the center of our lives: The early Anabaptists' strong sense of belonging to Jesus and their loyal support of each other helped them to live devoted ethical lives in the context of a hostile world. In today's world, Christians with an Anabaptist perspective understand that forgiveness is essential for community.

Confession and forgiveness remove the barriers that prevent fellowship with God and with each other, and Scripture is interpreted within the context of community.

Reconciliation is the center of our work: We believe that Jesus came to reconcile all those who would respond to God and to each other. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples that peace and justice come through loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you.

This means we believe that we are to help reconcile people to God and to take the initiative to do our part in reconciling others to him. In addition, we are to help reconcile people to each other. Reconciling people not only to God but also to each other is at the center of our work, and forgiveness removes the walls of offense.

Partaking in the Lord's Supper together becomes a fellowship experience made possible by the forgiveness that we have received from God and each other.

Much more could be said, but basically this is who we claim to be as evangelical/Anabaptists. Is this the way we are living? **D**



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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