

# CHRISTIAN LEADER

November / December 2019

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A poster for the USMB Gathering 2020. The background is a white brick wall. At the top is the USMB logo. Below it, the words 'INCREASING' and 'IMPACT' are written in large, bold, black letters, separated by a thick black diagonal arrow pointing upwards and to the right. Below this, a red banner contains the text 'USMB Gathering 2020'. At the bottom, a blue banner contains the text 'USMB National Pastors' Conference and National Convention', 'July 21 - 25, 2020', 'Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center', 'Independence, Missouri (northeast Kansas City)', and the website 'www.usmb.org'.

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# The gift of conversation

Hospitality and dinner table conversations

The upcoming holidays are a time to celebrate God-with-us by giving special attention to hospitality, to making our homes welcoming places for others so that people—those who know our Savior and those who don’t—will experience Jesus in our midst.

My mom regularly practiced hospitality. She frequently invited people—extended family, friends and guests or newcomers at church—over for meals, especially Sunday dinner. She would serve delicious, plentiful meals, often preparing some of the dishes on Saturday while also supervising my sister and me as we thoroughly cleaned the house and set the dining room table with her best dishes. I enjoyed the meals, but I wasn’t sure the house needed to be quite as spotless as my mom insisted upon. Looking back, I realize that having a house that was both clean and free of the clutter of books and toys was part of her effort to make our home a welcoming place.

Mom also hosted her family well. Her children and grandchildren were treated to tables decked with tablecloths and seasonal centerpieces and abundant meals served on her best dishes. Soon after Mom was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, the days of preparing elaborate holiday meals were over and my sister and I began to help with the meals. Eventually, we prepared the meal and she set the table, something she could do over several days.

My mom died in March 2019, having lived the last two years of her life in nursing care and doing what she could to “host” us in her small room. After her death, one of her grandchildren noted her gift as a conversationalist, something I hadn’t fully appreciated while she was living. It wasn’t just a tidy house and good food that people enjoyed when they came to her home for a meal. It was also my mom’s ability to give guests her full attention, her questions that kept the conversation from lagging and placing a higher value on what others had to say than in her own anecdotes or ideas.

While Parkinson’s eventually made much of daily life a challenge, it didn’t stop my mom from being a conversationalist. She couldn’t always find the right word or remember names and sometimes reality got mixed up with her “dreams,” but my visits with her always involved visiting. She asked questions and listened to my replies. I miss our conversations.

Several of the writers in this issue mention the importance of conversation in nurturing hospitable homes for the holidays. I want to be a better conversationalist at Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings this year, and I wish for all of us the opportunity to affirm and practice the gifts of hospitality and conversation as we celebrate with family, friends and even strangers. ■



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## USMB Gathering 2020 slated for July

USMB Gathering 2020, the new name for the USMB National Pastors Conference and National Convention, will be held in Independence, Mo., July 21-25, 2020.

The name “USMB Gathering” was chosen by the convention planning team to be easily recognizable and consistent when referring to the National Pastors Conference and National Convention. It will be used for these biennial national events moving forward.

USMB Gathering 2020 will be held at Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center, 18011 Bass Pro Drive in Independence, Mo., a suburb of Kansas City providing easy access to all the city has to offer. A lake, waterfall, park and 2-mile walking trail provide a beautiful backdrop for the hotel, which with its large wood beams, outdoor themes and modern rustic décor has a lodge-type feel. The conference center, located at one end of the hotel, is on one level. The special room rate of \$112 for one to four people includes a complimentary breakfast buffet, coffee, wireless Internet and parking.



Save the date and make plans to attend USMB Gathering 2020, where you will experience community, support our national MB family and be encouraged, challenged and resourced. For more information about the location, visit [www.stoney-creekhoteles.com](http://www.stoney-creekhoteles.com) or call 816-908-9600. —USMB

## Celebrate 2019 explores living purposefully

Over 220 boomers, builders and empty nesters from 13 states met in Omaha, Neb., Sept. 27-29, to discover



John and Helen Quiring, Hampton, Neb., share with Phil and Judy Glanzer, Sioux Falls, SD, during the final session as people gathered in small groups to share what had impacted them during the weekend and pray for one another. *Photo by MB Foundation*

how to live purposefully in the last third of life. Sponsored by MB Foundation, the conference was held at Embassy Suites by Hilton Old Market. Attendees heard from Ray Pritchard, president of Keep Believing Ministries, and Amy Hanson, author of *Baby Boomers and Beyond*. They also enjoyed times of worship, the magic of David Gerard and the musical gifts of the Foto Sisters.

The theme of Living with Purpose was carried throughout the event. Three couples shared personal testimonies of ministry after retirement. Gordon and Karen Wiebe, Reedley, Calif., shared about serving through mission trips and camps. Larry and Elaine Nikkel, Wichita, Kan., volunteer at Tabor College and have collected and distributed computers and textbooks to a college in Tanzania. They spoke about the opportunity to build relationships while they serve as travel tour guides or work out at the YMCA. Bob and Lynette Ewert, Mountain Lake, Minn., minister by opening their home to men and women to detox and young mothers that have experienced spousal abuse.

They challenged attendees to “get off the shelf” and “open your curtains.”

Celebrate is held every two years with this being the third such gathering. Celebrate 2021 will be in California with the exact location to be announced. —Dara Halydier

## USMB ends church planting partnership with Multiply

The USMB Leadership Board has announced its decision by unanimous vote to end its formal partnership with Multiply for church planting in the U.S., effective immediately. The announcement, made Sept. 11, indicates the decision was made following Multiply’s decision to release its North American church planting element formerly known as C2C. A USMB Church Planting Task Force has been created to help determine next steps, structures and support for USMB church planting. The task force has met twice.

In an email announcing the decision, Don Morris, USMB national director, and David Hardt, USMB Leadership Board chair, say, “With significant changes anticipated, please be assured that we (USMB national, along with district and MB agency leaders) view church planting just as crucially important as ever before. Al-

though final determinations about how to move forward have not yet been completed, it's likely that districts, local MB churches, USMB national and other MB agencies will all have a vital role in this collective vision and in the work of birthing new MB churches."

Regarding Multiply, Morris and Hardt say, "As Multiply shifts to re-focus on MB global mission, which includes North America, USMB stands committed to supporting and championing that mission and our international missionaries. In the U.S., it is our understanding that Multiply will now focus on assisting in cross-cultural ministry with immigrant diasporic churches, as well as continuing short-term mission training programs through invested local MB churches. USMB leaders support this functional and practical application of Multiply's cross-cultural expertise." —CL

## MWC observes Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) has invited Anabaptist-related churches around the world to observe Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday (AWFS) on Jan. 19, 2020, a day to observe a common theme in a worship service as an act of solidarity. AWFS is typically observed on the Sunday closest to Jan. 21, the date in 1525 when Christians in Zurich, Switzerland, held a baptismal service that launched the renewal movement known today as Anabaptism.

The theme for AWFS 2020 is "Jesus Christ: Our Hope." Each year, different churches which are part of the global MWC community prepare guiding material that can be used for AWFS. This year, material has been prepared by churches in the U.S. and Canada and contains biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas and stories. Resources may be found at [www.mwc-cmm.org/awfs](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/awfs). —MWC



Fresno Pacific University is celebrating 75 years of God's faithfulness to the university, the Central Valley and beyond during the 2019-2020 school year. Four anniversary events were held this fall, beginning with Gather 2019 on Sept. 5. Gather 2019 began with a worship service in the Special Events Center on the main campus. Then around 850 family and friends swarmed the University Green for food trucks, music and magic (photo above). The second step was seven weeks of prayer for select professions in which alumni have made an impact in their communities and special honored alumni in each. The professions were health care, education, nonprofit/youth, business, ministry/human services, international relations and public service. The university hosted a birthday party the afternoon of Sept. 18, the actual birthday, and an anniversary gala will be held Nov. 2 at the Special Events Center on the FPU Main Campus.—FPU

## Support USMB on Giving Tuesday

Individuals and churches will have opportunity to support USMB on Giving Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2019. Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

All donated funds will be used to support USMB mission and ministry and may be designated to fund three specific ministry options: church multiplication and evangelism, leadership development or ethnic integrated ministries such as gatherings, training and translation projects.

"We're still in the game for church planting," says USMB national director Don Morris, adding that LEAD initiatives are ongoing and more gatherings for USMB's growing ethnic congregations are anticipated.

In the five years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed more than \$148,000, including \$15,851 last year.

"I want to express my great appreciation for those who have donated for past Giving Tuesday campaigns," Morris says. "The funds have been crucial for us as we seek to serve our MB pastors and churches. Without these funds, USMB would not be able to provide these services. So, I'm unabashedly asking for past and new donors to help us raise significant funds for mission and ministry for this next season. Please give generously—all funds will go to ministry, not to overhead costs."

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

# 5 minutes with...

## USMB hosts summits

The USMB National Strategy Team recently hosted two summits to further connections between the national conference and congregations comprised primarily of African immigrants.



Ethiopian pastors pray for USMB leaders.  
*Photo by USMB*

The first summit, held Aug. 16-17 in Cincinnati, Ohio, brought together 13 USMB leaders and 52 leaders from 20 churches comprised of immigrants from Democratic Republic of Congo, some with roots in the Congolese Mennonite Brethren church. Two of the Congolese churches present are members of USMB and many of the other 18 are considering membership. The summit, funded by USMB, Central District Conference, MB Foundation and Multiply, was intended to help the congregations in the discerning process.

The second summit was the first time the 14 USMB Ethiopian congregations gathered as a group for fellowship and orientation. A representative of a 15th congregation that is considering joining USMB was also present. This second summit, funded by MB Foundation, was held Sept. 12 in Atlanta, Ga., and included 17 Ethiopian leaders and six USMB leaders.

"Our immigrant churches need our attention," says Don Morris, USMB national director. "We haven't done a very good job of engaging our immigrant churches.... Several ideas evolved from these (summits) as to how to enhance this."

Morris anticipates that Congolese and Ethiopian leadership events will be held again, but no specific follow-up gatherings are currently on the calendar. —CL



## Jason Salazar

Jason Salazar is chief of police in the city of Visalia, a community of 138,000 in California's Central Valley. He and his wife, Christy, and their two daughters have been part of Neighborhood Church in Visalia for 18 years. Though his days are full with managing a staff of 251 and listening to the concerns of people in his community, Jason took a few minutes to talk about his role.

### ***You came to your role from within the ranks of the Visalia Police Department.***

Yes, I've been serving with the department for 26 years. I like to learn and grow and have taken promotions along the way. In February it will be 5 years that I've been serving as chief. I feel fortunate to be able to stay here and serve here in my home community.

### ***Many communities in the U.S. are experiencing great conflict with their police departments. What has been your experience in Visalia?***

We are blessed with a community that supports us. Our focus is to be community-oriented, working with other partners to ensure public safety. We have a role to enforce laws and fight crime, but our role is much bigger than that. We work closely with other community partners like schools and hospitals on long-term solutions rather than just enforcement, focus on quality staff and developing strong community relationships.

### ***How does Neighborhood Church connect with your work?***

At least 10 officers in my department attend Neighborhood. The church's vision is to be FOR Visalia. About 10 years ago, the city was experiencing a great deal of gang violence. Some of the Neighborhood staff approached me and asked about the

needs of the community in a particular area. We talked about the importance of impacting the lives of our youth, and the church ran with it. They adopted a local elementary school, and because of their work and other community partners, we've seen drastic reductions in gang violence there.

### ***What role does your faith play in your work?***

This can be a difficult job, both in my current role and also for officers at the line level. You see the difficult realities of life and society. My faith keeps me rooted in the fact that there's a God out there working for the good. That reality corrects my course to focus on what we are for, not what we're fighting against and always helps to keep perspective.

### ***What can Christians learn from people working in law enforcement?***

You've got to get out of the pews to make a difference. For example, churches might hand out meals to the homeless, but officers who deal with homelessness day in and day out know that it's about relationships and building a community of support that truly makes the difference. To hear the testimony of a Christian officer on Chief Salazar's homelessness team, go to Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/visaliapd/videos/661078677701861/>

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

# God's gentle whisper

The Holy Spirit empowers, equips us to share

Does God still speak today? People throughout church history have answered this question differently. As I think about how I would answer, I am reminded of one of my favorite Bible stories about Elijah from 1 Kings 19:11-12 which speaks of the Lord's "gentle whisper."

This whisper has become more real to me over the last few weeks. I should begin by saying that as I pray in groups, God often brings words or Scriptures to mind, and I then share these. Until a few weeks ago, I had never considered that these words or Scriptures might be for specific people. As I was sharing this with Brad Burkholder, lead pastor at Hesston MB Church, he encouraged me to let the Holy Spirit lead me as I use this gift.

This brought about a series of events over three days that I'll summarize by saying God spoke words and Scriptures to me for six different individuals or families which I then passed on to them. After each time, I thanked God for the gift and for the opportunity to encourage, edify, comfort and strengthen his people, the church.

As I was reflecting on these three days, I asked myself—and probably God—this question: "What happens if God speaks in this way with someone I do not personally know?" All of the situations above involved people that attend my church or that I know. God answered my question within a few hours.

I was sitting and reading at the local coffee shop when my attention was drawn to the door. A woman opened

the door, and I heard in my heart, "Matthew 6. Share this with her."

I don't have Matthew 6 memorized, so I opened my Bible. While I am looking for Matthew 6, all of these thoughts come to mind: "She is going to think I'm weird. God, are you sure I need to share this? I am afraid. God, am I hearing you correctly? What do I tell her from Matthew 6?"

With my Bible open, I was drawn to these words that are repeated three times in Matthew 6: "Your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." I knew this was what I was to tell her.

When she came to pick up her coffee, I said, "You don't know me, but I am a pastor at Hesston MB."

"Are you Brad?" she asked.

"No," I replied. I then shared my name, and she knew my wife from work.

"As you came in, God spoke Matthew 6 to my heart and he wants me to share these words with you today," I said.

After I finished, with tears in her eyes, she said, "Thank you, I needed that today," and then she left.

I share this to encourage my fellow introverts, because if you know me, you know this whole situation was out of my comfort zone. But because the Holy Spirit empowered and equipped, I was able to speak these words so that God gets all the glory. I encourage each of us to pray these words, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10). And then be ready because God loves to answer this prayer. ■



J.L. Martin  
is pastor of children and  
family at Hesston MB  
Church in Hesston,  
Kan. He is also the  
USMB social media  
coordinator.

# Hope in uncertain times

Weather brings hardship to farming communities

When I think about how the rainy weather has affected the farming community, a lot of items “flood” my mind. Flooding has been in the news from Kansas to South Dakota since springtime. Yet in the midst of excessive moisture and hardship, I have found hope in Jesus.

Our weather story in east central South Dakota started last year (2018). The crops suffered all summer because of drought, and grass in the pastures was short.

We had a nice fall, but in January 2019, the weather turned for the worse. Church was cancelled a number of times because of snow and cold. Never have I welcomed springtime as much as I did this year. It seemed like it would never warm up. But when the snow did begin to melt, it started to rain. The ground was still frozen, and culverts were not yet open, so water flooded the roads.

The snow returned in late April—24 inches in one storm. It came during calving, stressing humans and livestock to the max. The blizzard conditions meant many newborn calves did not live long—whether from exposure to snow and wind or from being trampled by the herd. When the snow melted, we found calves that we did not know had been born.

The weather also affected our crops. With the late spring and continuing rain, we could not put crops in the ground in a timely manner. All across the cornbelt, farmers were a month or more behind in planting. The rain totals kept climbing—we are now at 300 percent of normal—and stress levels rose as we waited to do what we love: plant the seed.

South Dakota had the highest amount of preventive planting in the country. Many farmers only seeded 25-50 percent of their crops. The adverse weather also left the infrastructure, like roads and bridges, needing serious repair.

The weather has not only affected farmers but also businesses providing seed, fertilizer and herbicides. A high percentage of seed was returned to dealers. Fertilizer, chemicals and equipment pur-

chased last winter were not being used. Uncertainty reigned.

The weather has not been the only stress culprit. Prices for the commodities have been equally stressful. Tweets about tariffs have sometimes caused market prices to fluctuate more in an hour than they did in a year.

One early Saturday morning, a hailstorm and high winds caused damage to our crops. We had hail on every field except one, and the wind blew so hard that corn stalks snapped off below the ear of corn.

As I drove around after the storm, I felt a little dejected and sorry for myself. I told God, “I know the crop is yours, but I am happy to do the harvesting.” Then I drove past the farm of a family who was driving two and a half hours daily for radiation treatment. That helped put my troubles into the right perspective.

Farmers are not the only people who have stress in their lives. Everyone is probably dealing with items in their daily walk that are almost unbearable. So, where is the hope that we so desperately long for? It definitely isn’t in crops or livestock or sales or teaching or doctoring or trucking or homemaking or cooking or well... the list goes on.

Hope just happens to be my favorite word. Not the hope that “I sure hope my car starts” or “I hope that I pass my test,” but rather the hope that comes from the words of a hymn: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ, my righteousness.” If somehow we can have this type of hope, then hardships can become bearable.

God gave us his son, Jesus Christ, to be our hope. When circumstances flood my life, hymns like this one remind me of the hope I’ve placed in Jesus: “What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see. When I look upon his face, the one who saved me by his grace. When he takes me by the hand and leads me to the Promised Land, what a day, glorious day that will be.”


That is exactly what hope is to me.■



Ludwig Hohm is from the Huron, S.D., area and attends Bethel MB Church in rural Yale, S.D. He graduated from James Valley Christian School in 1972 and received his bachelor's degree in agronomy from South Dakota State University, where he met his wife, Julie, during a Bible study. Hohm farms corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa, has a cow-calf operation and does custom farming and hay grinding. He is blessed with great employees that allow him to be on various boards, including the Huron Chamber, Bethel MB Church elder board, Central District Conference church plant committee and USMB Leadership Board.

# Filling and fulfilling feasts

God  
wants  
us to  
celebrate  
around  
the  
dinner  
table



**H**ere we go again—all those Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner gatherings! While there are the unfortunate few who long to be part of just one holiday feast, I’m guessing many of us have a difficult time fitting all the dinners into our schedule. There is the church dinner, the immediate family dinner, the grandparents’ dinner on both sides and then those on your spouse’s side of the family. Oh, and don’t forget the company dinner party and the time for just “us friends.” It can spill over past the official holiday season.

And what’s with this change of “capacity” as I grow older? The disparity between youth and age doesn’t seem fair. I recall with some gastronomical pain the days of my youth when I had the ability to “eat until I was sick” but not get sick. Oh, the wonders of those growing years!

Now, in my 70s, I take much greater care in planning my portions. I’m no longer at the head of the line as I calculate marshmallow covered yams, gravy-drenched mashed potatoes, soft butter rolls and mounds of turkey, ham and sausage before I reach the over-loaded dessert table. I know I’ll pay for it later if I fail to exercise a good deal of restraint, but then I weigh that momentary regret against the pleasure of a deep-sleep coma fueled by tryptophan. Oh, the joy of feasting!

Here’s the beautiful thing: Feasting and gathering around tables can be a great opportunity for engagement in spiritual things—eating can be a significant act of worship!

I’ve been reading Timothy Keller’s *Prodigal God* in which he looks at the Luke 15 parable of the two sons from some fascinating new angles. In that discussion Keller also observes that eating/feasting is a powerful spiritual metaphor. In fact, it is more than a metaphor; it is a biblical reality. Jesus ate with many people and did some of his best teaching over meals. We shouldn’t miss the fact that the story of the prodigal son ends with a feast, just as the story of human history in Revelation ends with a feast—the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19).

How significant that Jesus left us the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist) as the sign of his saving grace for all who will believe. I have at times told our congregation that something is not quite right when we offer those little communion cups as symbols

of God's saving grace. His grace is abundant and overflowing! His blood was poured out for us and then we only take a small sip of his grace at the communion "feast." What if we had large beakers of juice/wine and lots of bread to truly symbolize the abundant blessing we have received?

At a recent Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary campus gathering, Professor Lynn Jost pointed out that one of the key words in Deuteronomy is "celebrate" which, he added, can be linked to the word feast. God, in calling together a people to reflect his glory and character, invited them to celebrate with numerous feasts.

Psalms 23 declares that our Shepherd will "prepare a table (feast) before us (even) in the presence of our enemies." And let us not forget that Jesus, not long after feeding the 5,000, stood and declared himself to be the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). Something about eating together not only brings people together, it also points us to the nature of God and becomes a sign of his presence with us.

Could that happen for you and your families during this season of feasting? Here are a few simple suggestions for enriching your feasts.

**Make sure you are present.** I need to admit that I often fret about the details. My default in most situations is to ensure that everyone is comfortable and cared for. While not a bad quality in itself, when taken to the extreme I can spend more time on things than on people. When I do, I miss great opportunities to connect with those I love.

For feasting to be fulfilling I need to remember that people are more important than the food or the seating arrangement. I need to be there with my eyes and ears open to others. Being present is more than a physical appearance—it is a choice to really "be there."

**Include a guest.** One thing that has given greater meaning to a number of our holiday gatherings over the years has been to include individuals or families that might be feeling alone for one reason or another. Some families don't live near their relatives and find it difficult to get "home" for the holidays. Having experienced broken relationships often brings renewed sadness that is intensified around family times.

Offering hospitality and including others in our gatherings has been meaningful, an example to our own children and grandchildren and fulfilling. I can recall a few of these that included a bit of difficulty such as guest children "running wild," but looking back I believe we would do it again as the rewards outweighed the demands. We trust that we were a blessing as we were being blessed.

**Create a memory.** Something that has added meaning to our gatherings has been simple activities around the table, often just before we stop to give thanks and as we find our seats. At our feasts it has been common to have wide age ranges represented, from infants to the elderly.

And one way we have found to bridge these age gaps is to plan a simple activity around the holiday theme.

At times we have prepared place cards with a Scripture verse to be read. At other times there has been a question to answer in a sentence or two, while at other settings we have invited those who can (or want to) to share a blessing from the past year.

There are many more ideas and each family typically has someone that enjoys creating an activity that can bring everyone together in spirit and help make memories for the future.

**Invite Jesus.** Jesus performed his first recorded miracle at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11). A bridegroom's future was in jeopardy after the wine ran out in the middle of the party. The part of the story I like, among other things, is that John records in verse 2, "Jesus . . . had also been invited to the wedding." Jesus' presence made the difference and turned a near tragedy into a triumph as the groom was later commended for "saving the best for last."

Similarly, Jesus' presence at our family gatherings can turn an average meal into a spiritual feast. We invite Jesus to our feasts when we take time to pray and read Scripture, to acknowledge the food being part of his provision and welcoming him as the "unseen" guest at each table. When conversation is directed to thanksgiving and spiritual blessings our Lord is welcomed and honored.

Someone has to take the initiative on this or the conversation will stay at the level of weather, sports, the kids' latest achievements or Aunt Franny's recent medical procedure. Feasting is fulfilling when Jesus is welcomed and celebrated.

**Savor the food.** Of course, there is no feast without food—lots of food. Here in the West we are blessed with not only an abundance of food but with an almost limitless variety. In our community we live alongside a number of ethnic groups, each one having a taste for unique dishes. Learning to enjoy this variety adds to the joy of our meals.

While we do well to remember those who have less than they need, we need not hold back in celebrating the abundance we enjoy as God's good gift to us. In this life our appetites will only be satisfied temporarily, but we can make our feasting fulfilling by adding thought and meaning to these gatherings, remembering that they are only a foretaste of that great feast still to come: "On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and finest of wines" (Isaiah 25:6).

*Dennis Fast is associate pastor of Hope Kingsburg, Kingsburg, Calif., and the MB Foundation church relations director. He is a graduate of Tabor College and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. In addition to serving the local church in a variety of pastoral roles, he has served on the Multiply board and as the USMB conference chair. He and his wife, Connie, have three adult children and 12 grandchildren.*



# Roadside Assistance

Lessons in hospitality from  
weirdos on the highway

By Melanie A. Howard

I love the 2006 comedy film *RV* starring Robin Williams. The film tells the story of Bob Munro (played by Williams) taking his family on a cross-country roadtrip in a giant recreational vehicle. While on the road, the Munros become the recipients of unlikely hospitality from an odd yet close-knit family, the Gornickses. Although the Gornickses seem quite strange compared to the supposedly “normal” Munro family, they practice a brand of traveling hospitality that is simultaneously humorous and heartwarming. Even as they demonstrate the nuances of handling sewage, it is ultimately these weirdos on the way who emerge as exemplars of hospitality.

## Hospitality in Acts 8:26-40

The roadside assistance in *RV* might seem like a strange way to begin thinking about hospitality in the Bible and in our own practices. However, the hospitality depicted in the film is not so different than the hospitality that appears in Acts 8:26-40 where a “weirdo” on the road offers hospitality to an “insider.”

This text describes an encounter between the apostle Philip and a traveler on the road from Jerusalem. Prompted to go along a deserted way, Philip meets another journeyer, an Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot who is reading from a scroll. After Philip asks the traveler if he understands what he is reading, this unlikely “host” invites Philip to join him in the chariot to explain the text (8:30-31). Following Philip’s proclamation of the gospel, the traveler points out a body of water, and Philip baptizes him before being snatched off by the Spirit to another location (8:36-39). Though brief, this

story depicts a brand of hospitality that contains wisdom for us today.

Although the passage begins with attention to Philip and his call to the wilderness road, the text shares far more details about the Ethiopian than it does about Philip. The Ethiopian is traveling from Jerusalem where he had gone to worship; he is the official treasurer of Queen Candace, and he is a eunuch. All of the details that the text provides to describe this person combine to paint the picture of someone who is radically different than the insider, Philip. In almost every way, the Ethiopian could have seemed strange to Philip.

Intended for a Christian audience, this story’s readers (both ancient and modern) might be inclined to identify with Philip. Christian audiences of the story might resonate closely with him as the Christian who promulgates the gospel and thus seems most familiar. Where the details of the Ethiopian eunuch serve to paint him as an “outsider,” Philip appears as the obvious “insider.” Furthermore, as a portion of the book entitled “Acts of the Apostles,” one might anticipate that the hero of the story would be the apostle Philip.

Given modern assumptions about how stories work, we might also expect this story to be about how “our” guy Philip offered kind hospitality to this stranger who is really different from “us.” In fact, we might even pat ourselves on the back a little because of what this suggests about how great “our” people are. But that’s not the story that we have here.

By the time we reach this episode’s conclusion, it becomes clear that Philip himself does very little. It’s the Ethiopian eunuch who actually drives the story’s action. There is only one invitation made, and it is an invitation from the Ethiopian eunuch to Philip, inviting Philip to join him in the chariot instead of running alongside of it (8:31). The Ethiopian eunuch is the host. Philip is the recipient of hospitality. The Ethiopian asks questions to extend the conversation (8:34) and suggests something to do, namely,

get baptized (8:37). Philip largely takes his lead from the Ethiopian.

In short, the hospitality that the Ethiopian eunuch offers may at first look all wrong. It's hospitality that is coming from a weirdo. It's hospitality that is happening away from home, and it's hospitality that doesn't let us pride ourselves on doing something "nice."

Like the Gornickes' hospitality in *RV*, the Ethiopian eunuch's roadside assistance may not be quite the model that we have in mind when we imagine exemplary hosts.

### A weirdo's lessons in hospitality

In these last months of the year, we are approaching the holidays and their seasonal emphasis on being the "perfect host." Magazines explode with tips for hosting parties, and websites offer an array of recipes for the perfect appetizers. We might read this advice and imagine that we have all of the answers for practicing holiday hospitality. However, if we allow ourselves to enter into the story of Acts 8, we might discover that the Ethiopian eunuch offers two very different lessons in hospitality.

#### Lesson 1: Practice hospitality on the way.

When I imagine practicing hospitality, it's almost always in the confines of my own space. I think about inviting people to my home, cleaning up my guest room and cooking in my kitchen. However, as the Ethiopian eunuch demonstrates, hospitality can take the form of roadside assistance along the way. The Ethiopian eunuch is not at home when he issues an invitation to Philip. Both are in the process of traveling to other lands.

Likewise, the holiday season often finds folks in grocery stores, boutiques, airports, train stations and roadside rest stops. None of these places are home, and all of them have an air of impermanence as they discourage lingering for too long. What does hospitality look like when it is practiced in these transient spaces? Yielding our spot in line? Paying it forward at the drive thru? Giving up a ticket when seats sell out?

The Ethiopian eunuch doesn't give precise advice for bringing his principles of hospitality into the 21st century, but his practice of welcoming another, even in transitory spaces, offers a new take on hospitality that allows all to be able to practice it.

#### Lesson 2: Accept hospitality from weirdos.

It's only natural to see ourselves as the heroes of our own stories. So, we might be readily inclined to act as hosts, even hosts in transit. However, the Ethiopian eunuch's lessons in hospitality are not just for hosts; they are also for prospective guests. This story, as well as the story in the film *RV*, suggests that the warmest welcome may come from the wackiest weirdos.

Not only was the Ethiopian a stranger to Philip, but he may have even posed a threat to Philip on the grounds of cultic purity. Deuteronomy 23:1 includes precise instructions about the exclusion of men with certain physical characteristics.



The Ethiopian's status as a eunuch would have fit him squarely within that category. So, if Philip were to have prioritized cultic purity over relationship with this traveler, he would have missed out on an important opportunity to share the gospel. Instead, though, Philip took a risk and allowed himself to be welcomed by one he may have initially deemed a threat.

Philip's acceptance of hospitality from a stranger can serve as an inspiration for us to be willing to accept hospitality from those that we might deem "weirdos." Who are the folks that have invited us to share life in a way that looks different from our own? What are the new activities that we might need to try in order to relate to someone else? What off-putting food might we need to taste in order to build a relationship with a stranger?

Accepting the hospitality of weirdos can take us far beyond our comfort zones. However, if the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts or the Gornicke family in the film *RV* have anything to say about it, then sometimes receiving hospitality from weirdos on the way can produce transformative and life-changing results. As we approach the holiday season, may we too be on the lookout for weirdos and the hospitality that they might have to offer.

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# *home* *for the* HOLIDAYS

What defines your home during the holidays?

By Dara Halydier

I was so looking forward to our first Christmas as a married couple. Decorating our apartment, shopping for gifts, baking my favorite Christmas goodies and learning to bake his and celebrating Jesus' birthday for the first time in a Christian home. The day surpassed my expectations as we were welcomed into my husband's family home for the holiday. Granny, his parents, his little sister and we all gathered by the tree in anticipation. Anticipation of gifts, yes, but more than that, anticipation of what my father-in-law wanted to share with us from the Bible.

That first Christmas lesson was on the presence of God being the place of joy. I have never forgotten those new ideas that were presented to me that morning 34 years ago. I have found that joy in serving my own growing family through the years. Now we settle down to Christmas at our house with the joy of laughter, shared friendships and lots of food and fun.

Growing up, joy was not part of Christmases. Christmas usually started with my dad yelling at my sister. We were ushered down to the tree where gifts awaited us. It was all about the production and whether we appreciated the love that went into the giving. More recently, after a hectic Christmas with new babies, a new house, new jobs and exhaustion, my parents told my daughter-in-law that she would not be receiving any more presents from them because she had not sent a timely thank you note. Always a string attached.

What defines your home for the holidays? Even if you are fortunate to have Christian parents and in-laws, there can still be personality battles, control issues, disrespect, expectations and disappointments that leave you wondering where the joy of Jesus is.

And yet, it seems, our hearts do draw us home for the holidays. Our unfulfilled hearts seek family blessings that we will never get. We go back year after year hoping that it will be different this time. Maybe Dad won't drink his Christmas cheer quite so much. Maybe Mom won't groan and gripe over the work of preparing the big feast. Maybe sister or brother will be grateful for your present rather than resentful.

Commercials, movies and songs romanticize being home for the holidays. Idealistic dreams become our expectations, whether real or imagined. The unfulfilled need for a blessing from our parents makes us ripe for disappointment and frustration. There is a solution. Get your needs filled up by your heavenly Father before the holidays. Go to him for the blessing, your joy, your contentment, your peace. Then when the holy night is not so peaceful, you can smile inwardly remembering the Father's great love for you.

Here are some helpful ideas for keeping your expectations in check and enjoying your home or another's for the holidays.

**Make Jesus the center of your celebration.** Ideas include a birthday cake for Jesus, reading the nativity story, hiding baby Jesus for the kids to find or a short devotional around the tree. If that is not accepted in your birth family's home, then have your own celebration at a different time including what is important to you and your marriage family or friends.

**Remember that memories are never 100 percent accurate.** We all tend to exaggerate the good, the bad and the ugly of our memories based upon our immaturity and feelings at the time the memory was made. If it's healthy to talk with your birth family about your memories, do so with an open mind, realizing that you all may remember the same event very differently.

**Decide what is important, what is necessary and what you can let go.** Last December, I had a spinal fusion one week before Christmas after moving from Texas to Kansas December 1. I had the presents bought and wrapped, but I left the tree for the

kids and their families to assemble and decorate. I made two kinds of cookies, and everyone added their own favorites from home. I planned the main meal for Christmas Day, but the grown kids and their families supplied and cooked the rest. We all relaxed and had a grand time.

**If you are expected to go to a parent's house there are a few things to remember.** You can always leave. Even though they are your parents, you are no longer a child. You are an adult. Respect, trust and truth should reign. You are still in charge of your own children. You might be able to relax a little but keep vigilant to the entertainment and relationships among the children.

**Remember "My house; my rules. Their house; their rules."** If Dad wants to smoke at your house, you have the right to ask him to do it outside. If Dad wants to smoke in his house, you have the right to leave the room. There are some nonnegotiables such as television programming, movies, games and conversation from which you have the right to excuse yourself and your children. You can always suggest an alternative or take the kids to another room and get them involved in a whole-some project.

**If things didn't work out last year, try something different this year.** Instead of someone ruling because the celebration is at their home, try a destination Christmas. This tends to put everyone on equal footing. If a week together is too long, try popping in just for the day or a couple of days. If you would rather have Christmas morning at home with just your marriage family, then arrange to meet with parents, siblings and in-laws at another time. We have had Christmas the day after because that was when everyone could get together.

**Do what you enjoy.** If you love to decorate, then decorate. If you love to bake, bake. If you love to sing, go caroling. It's your holiday, too. It's important to include traditions and activities that have meaning to each person that is attending if at all possible. I always ask my daughters-in-law and sons what they want us to include each holiday season. This makes them want to keep coming back for more.

If going home or having family in is not an option, then find others to share your holiday cheer with. Don't sit home alone and mope. The holiday season is the time of the year when more people commit suicide than any other. Don't give into depression and loneliness. Do something about it. Ask your pastor if there are any others in your church who are alone during the holidays and invite them over or to meet out for a meal or activity. Decorate your space. Make your prayer time and Bible reading a priority.

**Serve during the holidays.** This keeps your mind off of yourself and encourages others. You can serve within your own family by making your gifts, making a meal or dessert or leading out in a play or singing. You might make cards for those who are in nursing homes, visit a shut-in or shop for someone who has run upon financially difficult times. Serving is the best way to lift your mood.

No matter where you celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Year's, find family, church family or others to serve, and make your heart home for others during the holidays.

*Dara Halydier is married to Tracy Halydier and lives in Hillsboro, Kan. They have enjoyed raising five boys and are loving getting to spoil eight grandchildren. Halydier is the executive director of Abiding Truth Ministry, Inc. ([www.abidingtruthministry.com](http://www.abidingtruthministry.com)). She is the author of eight books including the Practical Proverbs series for children, teens and women.*

# CONNECTION

When distance is difficult

*"We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas."*

*Our television sang out the ending to another Hallmark holiday movie. I was too busy addressing our Christmas cards to know how the film ended, although I suspect it wrapped up with an elaborate marriage proposal. I looked over at Ben, hunched over his laptop preparing his next sermon of the Advent season, and sighed. Another Friday night on the couch trying to navigate our long Christmas to-do list and missing our out-of-town family.*

In the wet winter season, we are a five-hour drive from the Friesens in Oklahoma and a long day in and out of airports to get to the Bairds in Fresno, Calif. We knew when God called us to Topeka, Kan., that we would be further away from our family and have come to realize how difficult that distance is. We miss our family and our growing-up traditions, especially at Christmastime.

Holidays can be an isolating time for people like us, far away from home and trying to learn new local customs. We are blessed to be part of a community who recognizes our struggles and helps us navigate this season with fun and connection. Others may not be as fortunate to find people that reach out to include them.

God consistently calls us to connect—connect with God and with others. Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to "encourage the disheartened, help the weak, [and to] be patient with everyone." We can apply his teachings this holiday season:

**If you are far from home, it is OK to miss family and friends and talk about those who are not present.** It is wonderful to want to continue holiday traditions and be close to people you love. Don't let your longing for what is familiar make you miss what's going on now. Explore new opportunities, connect with people, be present in your experiences and be patient with yourself and others as you adjust.

**For those of us who are deeply rooted in our community, take some time this season to reach out and encourage those who aren't.** Even small acts

like sharing baked goods or telling newcomers some of your favorite things to do around town can help connect someone struggling to find their place.

Your engagement can make a difference to those stuck sitting on their couch on a Friday night.

*I searched for our next holiday distraction on the TV and heard a noise in our apartment complex parking lot: singing. Ben put down his computer, and we both went to open the door. Our friends were standing in the cold evening fog along with a dozen adults and children bundled in their winter coats. They handed us a tin of homemade cookies and continued to sing carols at the top of their lungs. Our neighbors opened their doors and we all sang along.*

*"We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas."*

*Ben and Caitlin Friesen are part of the family at Cornerstone Community Church in Topeka, Kan. Ben's favorite holiday tradition is eating cherry pie for Friesen Thanksgiving, and Caitlin enjoys walking Christmas Tree Lane in Fresno. They both love spending time with family—especially their nieces and nephew—any time of the year. The Friesens are creating new holiday customs in Topeka and look forward to this year's Christmas banquet at church and driving with friends through TARC's Winter Wonderland light display.*



## That's a wrap

### Christmas packing party concludes yearlong project benefitting foster care

**H**ow many wrapping supplies does it take to prepare Christmas gifts for 375 children? Volunteers from North Oak Community Church (NOCC) in Hays, Kan., are about to find out.

This Christmas season, NOCC will help Saint Francis Ministries (SFM), a foster care agency serving children in several states, wrap Christmas gifts for children in SFM's western Kansas district.

"We desire the child welfare workers to have the time and energy to focus on the joy of giving without the added stress and business of carrying this load on their own," says Stephanie Burkholder, a member of NOCC's 2018 Advent Conspiracy planning team. "It is truly more blessed to give than it is to receive."

Specifically, NOCC will donate wrapping supplies and money for party refreshments and provide volunteers to help with wrapping. It's the final act of NOCC's yearlong 2018 Advent Conspiracy project intended to bless the foster care community in Ellis County.

#### More presence, less presents

Begun at NOCC in 2009 by then pastor Ken Ediger, Advent Conspiracy is a ministry project the church adopts each year.

"The whole premise is to give more 'presence' and less 'presents,'" Burkholder says. "Our goal is to take the busyness and commercialism out of Christmas and replace it with meaningful interaction and worship."

For the past 10 years, the church has alternated between supporting local and international projects. The first, in 2009, involved sending water filters—and a team—to the Dominican Republic.

"Each year's project is approved by the church elders and then the planning is taken care of by a team," Burkholder says.

NOCC collects a special offering during the Advent season from which to fund the current project.

#### Supporting foster care

In 2018, NOCC decided to serve the local foster care community.

The idea began to take shape in summer 2018 when Burkholder met with Jess Albin, a licensed social worker and NOCC's CarePortal point person, to brainstorm ways to bless the foster care community. CarePortal is a technology platform that connects churches with

needs of local children and families.

"We both saw the intense need for support in this area of our community," Burkholder says. "From foster children, foster parents, foster care workers, to biological families, we wanted to bless this entire population."

While numbers fluctuate monthly, Burkholder says there are about 100 children in foster care in Ellis County, and about 25 foster families.

"We have seen the ratio of children to foster homes become worse as fewer families are becoming foster parents and more children are being removed from their homes," she says.

By choosing to serve the foster care community for its 2018 Advent Conspiracy project, NOCC embarked on a yearlong journey involving multiple projects.

For example, NOCC made 50 "bed packages" for foster children through CarePortal. Each bed package included



In July, 30 foster families listen to the keynote address during NOCC's "Fostering Growth in Foster Families" training event. Attendees earned continuing education credit for foster care licenses at the event, which included speakers, an expert panel, chair massages, gift bags and two meals. *Photo by NOCC*

a headboard, mattress, mattress pad, sheets, pillow and an age-appropriate Bible packaged in a duffel bag.

Albin describes delivering a bed package to a single mother of two who was trying to make ends meet. When the woman's sons discovered the children's Bible and asked what it was, the mother fumbled to answer, Albin says.

"I was surprised there were children in Hays, Kansas—in the Bible Belt of America—who really had never heard of the Bible," she says. "This was such an impactful moment for me. It drew my attention back to one of our main purposes of CarePortal and the

Advent Conspiracy project: to make Jesus known."

## Church hosts multiple events

In July, NOCC hosted 30 foster families and more than 80 children for a "Fostering Growth in Foster Families" training event, which included speakers, an expert panel, chair massages, gift bags and a continental breakfast and catered lunch. Attendees earned continuing education credit for foster care licenses, and childcare was provided, with older children traveling by bus to the local recreation center to play games and eat pizza.

This attendee's response was printed in NOCC's September newsletter:

"Tonight we are tired but happy, weary but encouraged, typically overwhelmed but hopeful. Thank you for an excellent, positive experience. The speakers were good, the panel discussion was excellent, the food was delicious, and the childcare was brilliant.... It was obvious that a lot of people had put a lot of time and energy into making this a great day for all of us."

For another project, Albin facilitated a support group for Saint Francis Ministries employees, and the church provided coffee and breakfast, as well as a small gift and card, for participants.

"The purpose of this group was to recognize the impact of secondary traumatic stress (STS) on those working in the child welfare system and to build resilience to mitigate the risk factors for STS," Burkholder says.

The church also hosted an October lunch for the child welfare agency's offices in Hays. In addition, NOCC remains actively involved in CarePortal.


## Community wrapping parties

The Christmas wrapping party, a project headed by Michele Eiland, will be the culmination of Advent Conspiracy 2018.

Last December, Eiland helped Saint Francis Ministries wrap gifts for children, an event she described as "last-minute" and "pretty chaotic."

"When I heard NOCC was working with foster care services in our community, I instantly knew one way we could help, but it would take some planning and community effort to pull it off," Eiland says. "Starting in August 2019, we have been working with Saint Francis Ministries to streamline their Christmas project."


As part of the new system, SFM requests gifts be unwrapped when donated so child welfare workers can oversee the gifts.



# 25

## WAYS TO GIVE

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“We are planning on picking up pre-tagged gifts and having wrapping parties in the community,” Eiland says. “This will give volunteers of all ages—adults and kids alike—an opportunity to love on these kids, pray over their gifts and bring the foster care needs out in the public.”

### A generous response

The NOCC congregation has been helpful and supportive of the Advent Conspiracy project, Burkholder says.

“Everyone has been very generous, not only with the Advent Conspiracy project, but with CarePortal in general,” she says. “There have been some families from our church who are interested in becoming foster parents. One of the most important impacts is that it has brought the needs of the foster care community to light.”

The 2019 Advent Conspiracy project, while still being chosen, will be an international project this year, Burkholder says. It will be NOCC’s 10th year to participate in Advent Conspiracy. —  
*Janae Rempel*

## Church provides school supplies for city’s elementary school

MBF legacy gifts provide needed funds for project

For one evening in mid-August, school supplies instead of meals filled cafeteria tables at Hillsboro (Kan.) Elementary School (HES).

Around the tables, members of the Parkview MB Church (PMBC) congregation sorted supplies into boxes by classroom. Tubs brimmed with scissors next to stacks of folders and composition books. Pencils were piled high alongside highlighters, crayons and boxes of glue.



Delores Hiebert, Linda Dyck, Tami Driggers, Rachel Winter, Debbie Allen and Dorothy Broce (not pictured) spearheaded Parkview MB Church’s efforts to provide all elementary students in USD 410 with school supplies. *Photo by Michael Klaassen*

Handwritten notes for teachers provided a personal touch.

Using funds provided by legacy gifts and contributions from the congregation, PMBC purchased school supplies for every HES child in kindergarten through fifth grade for the 2019-20 school year.

### Facebook sparks project

The project was the brainchild of Tami Driggers and Linda Dyck, who say a Facebook post sparked the idea. When a mutual friend and former PMBC attendee posted a thank-you to the Emporia (Kan.) United Methodist Church for providing school supplies for her boys last year, Driggers says her thoughts went to her own community.

“The thought of someone taking that burden off parents in Hillsboro really resonated with me,” she says. “I also loved the idea that all the kids in school would have the same supplies. A student with a \$.07 pencil box wouldn’t have to compare himself to one with a \$10 box.”

Driggers received advice from Dana Roemer at Emporia UMC, who oversees the purchase of school supplies for Emporia students in kindergarten through 12th grades.

“She was extremely helpful and really gave us encouragement and confidence to try to get this going in our church,” Driggers says.

Next, Driggers and Dyck presented the idea to church elders, who agreed to adopt the project.

“I think the driving force behind our decision was simply a desire to serve the community,” says senior pastor Tom Byford. “Since I started at Parkview a year ago, multiple people were saying, ‘We want to do more for our local community.’ So, this idea was a great way to accomplish that.”

Driggers and Dyck gathered a committee, including teachers Rachel Winter and Debbie Allen and bargain hunters Dorothy Broce and Deloris Hiebert. Equipped with lists from each teacher, the committee purchased school supplies for 310 students, which included enough for five extra students per grade.

“Our committee split up the list of items, so each of us was in charge of finding a good bulk deal on six or seven items,” Driggers says. “We were able to purchase supplies locally in Hillsboro, in surrounding area stores and online.”

## Packing, delivery and prayer

Once the committee collected the school supplies, more than 60 people gathered at the HES cafeteria Aug. 15 to package and deliver them to each classroom. The evening ended with a prayer walk, led by Byford, through school hallways.

“The way the congregation rallied around (the project) and wanted to know how they could help and get involved felt like the essence of community,” Driggers says. “The contributions from members that have left a legacy through the MB Foundation added a neat element of how giving can go on beyond our years here on earth.”

## Legacy gifts keep giving

In all, PMBC spent more than \$7,000 on the project, or \$22.72 per student.

In addition to gifts from the congregation, Parkview received funds from endowments managed by MB Foundation and provided for by legacy gifts.

A legacy gift is a charitable gift made after an individual or couple passes away—a last act of stewardship, says MB Foundation planned giving advisor Andy Shewey. The gift may be used to bless one or more charities or ministries.

Several individuals or couples included legacy gifts in their estate plans to benefit PMBC, Shewey says. By establishing endowments—invested funds that provide an ongoing payout to a

charity or ministry—at MB Foundation, these donors provided a gift that keeps on giving.

MB Foundation invests and manages the endowments and sends payouts to PMBC, which used undesignated funds to help pay for the school supplies.

“When Tami presented the idea to the elders this spring, we knew we didn’t have a lot of time to get the work done,” Byford says. “The greatest benefit of the undesignated endowments was that we knew we had enough money on hand and coming in soon that we could approve the project.”

In addition to contributions from the congregation and legacy gift funds, the church received more than \$800 from offerings collected when PMBC and Ebenfeld MB Church partnered for a joint vacation Bible school.

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## Project made a difference

Responses to the project have been positive, both for the givers and the recipients of the gift.

“Personally, it has been a fun time, a blessing and joy,” Dyck says. “I have heard from many people that (this is) a great thing.”

Byford, too, has received words of thanks.

“I’ve been overwhelmed by the gratitude of so many parents,” he says. “We didn’t do this to hear people say, ‘Thank

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you.' But, the extreme amount of appreciation tells me that we made a difference in their lives."

HES principal Evan Yoder wrote a thank-you, printed in PMBC's bulletin: "Now that school has started and the supplies have all been distributed, it is time to deliver a huge thanks for all you've done.... Your entire congregation proved that it was possible for a small group to do great things! Whether they said so or not, I know many families were able to breathe a sigh of relief when school start-up bills were paid due to your tremendous efforts. Again, we (students, teachers, staff and parents) thank you from the bottom of our hearts!"

Ultimately, the project is about serving the Hillsboro community and is something Driggers says the church plans to continue.

"The best outcome of this project would be for the community to know that the church cares about their needs," Driggers says. "And not just Parkview church. There are many churches in this community that have such a heart and passion for God's work to be done, and the more we make ourselves a resource for Hillsboro and the surrounding communities, the more others will see the face of God." —*Janae Rempel*

## International student ministry builds friendships

### Volunteers support international students in Bakersfield

For a group of volunteers in Bakersfield, Calif., engaging in cross-cultural ministry doesn't involve crossing oceans.

Jerilyn Stewart is the coordinator of a ministry serving international college students on two campuses in Bakers-



International students attending college in Bakersfield enjoy a weekend excursion to the beach as part of a ministry program coordinated by Jerilyn Stewart through International Students Incorporated. *Photo by Jerilyn Stewart*

field. Stewart, who attends Laurelglenn Bible Church, has been involved in ministering to international students for more than 20 years.

Her desire to minister arose after she took a class through the U.S. Center for World Mission that focused on the history of missions and effective ways to minister.

"[The class] showed you God throughout the Bible and his heart for the nations," Stewart says.

Stewart talked with her husband about getting involved in international missions, but with children at home and their own business, she decided to look for ways to be involved in her home community.

Stewart began by hosting international students, but after a couple of years she wanted to get more involved. About 18 years ago, she began volunteering part-time with International Students Incorporated (ISI). The organization trained her and helped her launch the ministry in Bakersfield. She was also joined by others from Bridges International, the international

student ministry arm of Campus Crusade for Christ.

ISI is a national organization, present on more than 670 campuses across the U.S., that has been training Americans to meet international students' needs since the mid-1950s, according to their website. They equip volunteers, called Friendship Partners, to help these students adjust to American culture while introducing them to the gospel.

These Friendship Partners work to develop relationships with students while meeting practical needs such as rides to and from the airport, shopping trips for dorm supplies and opportunities for English language learning. Many volunteers also invite students into their homes for meals or take them out for coffee.

The ministry relies on the generosity of its volunteers, but Stewart says it's "a very cost-effective way to do cross-cultural evangelism."

For the last 12 years, Stewart has been volunteering full-time as a Ministry Representative. She now coordinates the pairing of students with Friendship

Partners and plans group excursions, which have included trips to the mountains, the beach and to visit California's giant sequoia trees.

Stewart is typically on the campus of California State University, Bakersfield four days a week. She also works with students at Bakersfield College.

On Tuesdays, Stewart hosts Tuesday Talk Time, an opportunity for the students to gather and learn about each other, American customs and other cultures while practicing their English language skills.

Stewart says a particularly special activity for many students is when they work together with their Friendship Partner to prepare a meal from their home country.

"It's the most labor-intensive thing we do, but it's also one of the best things," Stewart says.

Currently, Stewart estimates there are around 50 volunteers or volunteer families involved. They reach around 200 students, although the involvement levels of those students differ. Some come regularly to events and meet one-on-one with Friendship Partners, while others may only attend an event once or twice during the year.

She says some students can be suspicious or wary at first, so they start by attending a group activity or meeting with their Friendship Partner on campus. She organizes a welcome party at the beginning of each year for students to get to know each other and the volunteers.

## Providing a safe place

Stewart promotes the ministry by word of mouth and is always looking for new people who may be interested in befriending a student. She regularly has volunteers from several churches throughout Bakersfield, including five to 10 from Laurelglenn Bible Church.

Julie Smaby, who attends The Bridge Bible Church, is one of the Friendship Partners recruited by Stewart. She first heard about the ministry years ago

when she attended Laurelglenn with Stewart, but at the time wasn't sure about getting involved.

Then Smaby lived for three years in Los Angeles, where she was exposed to a multicultural work environment. When she moved back to Bakersfield, she realized she missed the diversity she experienced in LA and decided to get involved with the international student ministry. In the last year, she has developed relationships with students from Japan, China and Korea.

She and her husband have hosted students in their home for a few days at a time; other times they've simply taken students out for coffee to learn more about them.

This fall, Smaby has been paired with a student in her mid-20s from Germany who works for an international accounting firm. Smaby is an accountant herself; she says that Stewart does a good job of pairing students with volunteers with whom they share an interest or other way to connect. Smaby says many of the students are adventurous, and the ministry helps provide them with a safe place to experience their new culture and develop friendships.

"They're very brave and courageous to come," Smaby says. "They have a need for connection and a place to be and know that they're safe."

Stewart provides training for Friendship Partners at the beginning of the school year that focuses in part on awareness of cultural differences and techniques for building friendships and sharing faith effectively. She is also available throughout the year to answer questions and provide help with specific situations.

## Volunteers share; God convicts

Stewart emphasizes the relationship-building aspect of the ministry. While the heart of the ministry is to share God's love with the students, she says it is important for volunteers not to force conversations about their faith, but to in-

stead build a friendship and offer the opportunity to discuss faith if the students are interested or have questions.

The two Korean students who stayed with Smaby and her husband for a few days were interested and attended church with them. Smaby shared with them what she believes and simply gave them the opportunity to think on it.

"Our priority is to tell about the Lord, and God's part is to bring it about and convict them," says Smaby. "We don't have to convince them, just share what we believe and who God is."

Stewart says, "This type of ministry is a great way to evangelize students from closed countries where it is impossible to do traditional missionary work."

Smaby has found it fairly easy to build relationships with the international students.

"People are people in any culture," she says. "You can always find a connection." —*Jessica Vix Allen*

## Ready, set, launch

### Commitment, connection key when starting new church

Backyard barbecues in Utah. Basement Bible studies in Minnesota. S'mores in South Dakota. Not all church plants start the same, grow the same or look the same. While each location provides a unique set of circumstances, challenges, strategies and rates of growth, in each case success is measured not in numbers, but in life transformation.

What does it take to launch a church? According to USMB's three most recent church planters, Christian Kohs, Phil Wiebe and Jon Fiester, that list includes the commitment of a core group of believers, personal invitations and a sense of connection for everyone who attends.

## The beginnings

Christian Kohs launched Redemption

Church in Owatonna, Minn., on Sept. 9, 2018, having spent three years learning the culture and meeting people. Owatonna, a city of about 30,000 people, has Lutheran and Catholic influences, he says.

“In a day and age where there are so many choices, a new church is just another choice,” Kohs says. “Oftentimes people say, ‘Why another church?’ But not everyone in our city goes to church, so why not?”

What started as a Bible study in Kohs’ basement grew to Sunday morning gatherings in April 2018 as Kohs and his wife, Erica, gathered a core team.

It took about five months to launch Redemption, says Kohs, who spent that time raising money and connecting with people.

Phil Wiebe and his wife, Melissa, launched Lakeview Church in Stansbury Park, Utah, on Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019. Wiebe spent the 10 months leading up to the launch hosting Bible studies, barbecues, vision-casting meetings, pilot services and practice services.

Lakeview is the only Christian church in Stansbury Park, a city of 19,000 where about 85 percent of people are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

“For us to go there was just a matter of like, Jesus wants to take ground, let’s grow where the battle is ripe,” Wiebe says. “It’s dry, and we’re watching Jesus take ground quickly.”

Most recently, Jon Fiester and his wife, Michele, launched Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., on Sept. 8, 2019. Starting with a core group of eight, the Fiesters held their first official meeting as a church in July 2018. In the 13 months after, the church grew to capacity in its meeting space and secured a larger space in the Dahl Arts Center for its launch.

The Fiesters are attempting to reach those who have been hurt by the church



Worship leader Kali Schae sings with the congregation during Redemption Church’s first birthday celebration Sept. 8, 2019. *Photo by Redemption Church.*

or have little interest in it.

“Our city has many gospel-teaching churches meeting the needs of traditional churchgoers,” Fiester says. “We have a desire to bring a church that is presenting the gospel in a neutral location in our city that is comfortable for people who are skeptical of faith.”

## Pre-launch ingredients

Any church launch requires certain elements to be in place. Gathering a core group of believers is key, a sentiment shared by the three planters.

“The most important resource we have is a group of people committed to the mission God has given us,” Fiester says. “Without an awesome team around me, this would not be possible. One person alone cannot handle the stressors of starting something brand new.”

In order to gain traction and spread the word, Kohs, Wiebe and Fiester agree that having a website and social media presence are vital. Having space is also an important component, al-

though that looks different in all three locations.

Renewal MB meets in the Dahl Arts Center, Lakeview gathers in a space at a local strip mall, and Redemption rents a building from another church.

Kohs says it takes effort to make Redemption’s space feel like home, and if given the chance to do it again, he’d have secured his own building at the start in order to have space for during-the-week gatherings. One thing Kohs was glad to have in place prior to launch was a church staff.

## Spreading the word

Knowing just two families when he moved to Stansbury Park, Wiebe connected over lunch meetings with friends of friends. He started three home Bible studies in the four months following an informational barbecue in June 2018.

When it came time to advertise Lakeview’s launch, Wiebe sent out a county-wide mailer to 27,000 residents. Going door-to-door was not an attractive option.



"We launched (Lakeview) with a core team of 45 adults," says Phil Wiebe. "We had a fully staffed kids ministry, a full band, ushers, greeters, a staffed guest booth, coffee and cookies. The best part was, it felt like we had done it all before thanks to the practice services." *Photo by Lakeview Church*

Going door-to-door was not ideal for Kohs either, who, after his initial Bible study grew to Sunday morning gatherings, advertised Redemption's launch in the local newspaper.

"Church planting is most effective today via word of mouth," Kohs says. "Personal invitation is still the most effective way to get someone to church. That, and Facebook."

Fiester, too, relied on social media to advertise Renewal's launch and continues to engage people on those channels.

He's found it takes less talking and more doing, though, so every third Sunday, Renewal serves its community—meeting needs, praying for people downtown, offering complimentary s'mores and water—and follows these "Give Sunday" projects with a communion meal.

"We always have the opportunity to engage people and bring them a glimpse of the joy Jesus puts in our lives," Fiester says. "People are seeing something different and they are curious about what would lead a group of

people to give up the time and resources simply to make someone else's day better."

## All hands on deck

Whether in Utah, Minnesota or South Dakota, preparing for launch requires a commitment from the core group.

"The church is the people, and our people owned their church," Wiebe says. "They all jumped in with setting up chairs (and) prepping kid's ministry, to hanging mirrors and paper towel dispensers in the bathrooms."

The church launches themselves unfolded differently with highs and lows in each location.

In Rapid City, 80 people attended Renewal MB's launch, Fiester says.

Kohs admits launch day at Redemption was disappointing in terms of turnout—20 people attended—but the event was significant in solidifying his team's commitment.

"The core group of people who had put so much time into the day felt a sense of purpose and energy from it,"

he says, adding that Redemption has since more than doubled in size.

In Stansbury Park, Wiebe credits a smooth launch with 223 people in attendance to the pilot services held at a golf course clubhouse once a month from October 2018 to February 2019, as well as weekly practice services in March. But if he had to do it over again, Wiebe says he would reconsider the timing.

"Launching into summer isn't the best idea," he says. "Things are winding down. People are in and out of town. Our core was going different ways for vacations."

Wiebe says Lakeview continued to grow over the summer, and the church had summer interns courtesy of USMB, the Pacific District Conference and MB Foundation funds for future leadership.

## Next Steps

With the launches behind them, Kohs, Wiebe and Fiester are looking to encourage sustainability.

Wiebe says he is focusing on fostering connection, whether through a weekly church barbecue at his house or encouraging people to join small groups.

"You have to make a place for people to get connected—fast," he says. "They need a place to belong even before they believe."

For Kohs, too, follow-up, connecting on social media and saying thank you continue to be important.

"I write thank you cards to guests and the people that serve at the church every single Monday," he says, adding that he prints invite cards for people to hand out during the week. Redemption is adding staff and elders this fall.

For Fiester, personally acknowledging people who attend has encouraged them to return.

"People in our culture want to feel noticed and remembered," he says.

“We have found that to be true of anyone attending Renewal.”

### All about Jesus

After having 80 in attendance on launch day, Renewal MB saw 75 the following Sunday, Fiester says.

“We measure success by how many unchurched people God connects us to that continue to come back,” Fiester says. “The most rewarding part of Renewal has been seeing God work in people’s lives, bringing them to a place of surrender and submission to his power.”

In the year since its launch, Redemption Church has grown to an average of more than 50 people each Sunday. The church has baptized 23 people in 2019.

“We measure success in a few ways, one of which is how many people are reading their Bibles, how many baptisms (and) how many people are serving,” Kohs says, adding that sometimes the slow growth can be challenging.

Since its Easter 2019 launch, Lakeview Church baptized three adults Aug. 4 and a week later began holding two services. The church averages 170 people including children.

“I measure success by life-change toward Christ,” Wiebe says. “Individual stories. A crowd is good, but a personal life story that Jesus has grabbed ahold of, that is the biggest win I get to be a part of.”

So what’s next? The mission for all three remains to tell people about Jesus, a conviction expressed this way by Fiester: “I have learned throughout this process that people are the most important part of any church. God’s purpose for any of us is to seek his lost people. He loves people and we cannot lose that focus of giving them hope.”

—Janae Rempel



Renewal MB Church launched services in September. “Our desire is to intentionally meet people where they live and show them the love and kindness Jesus brings to our lives as a church body,” says Jon Fiester, church planter. *Photo by Renewal MB Church*

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## Task force considers future of church planting

USMB leaders discuss funding, strategy

An ad hoc task force was assembled to process a path forward for USMB church planting following the release in September of *Multiply* as a U.S. church planting resource. The task force first met Aug. 9 in Fresno, Calif., and an expanded group met Oct. 2 in Phoenix, Ariz.

The group processed at length the needs expressed by district church planting boards. These needs included assistance with church planter assessments, training, coaching, project management and developing more leaders/planters.

Funding for future projects was also discussed. Without a funding thread from *Multiply*, there is a continuing need for local USMB churches and individual donors to help fund church planting going forward. Districts will continue to be significantly involved in investing in local plants. USMB committed to helping and partnering with church planter gatherings, training and support services, likely provided by flagship churches that continue to have a passion for developing and resourcing planters as well as funding church plants themselves.

Districts will be heavily involved in the process of planting new MB churches and will most likely initiate plants within their districts, assisting with funding and providing support and connection. Cross-district “pollination”—church plants receiving assistance from churches outside of the plant’s geographical district—was a topic that garnered significant attention.

For instance, in the past churches in the Central and Southern districts have resourced plants in the Pacific district. The task force desires to see more of this as a national vision to enhance the overall mission of planting MB churches in the U.S.

The concept of churches planting churches will be an integral part of U.S. church planting going forward. The task force acknowledges the need for local churches to become even more invested in planting daughter churches and making this a priority, not only with their resources but through relationships and tangible hands-on assistance.

The ways in which we support and champion church planting among Hispanic and other ethnic groups was discussed. Although style of planting may be a little different, the attention given to these plants must be intentional and consistent.

A subtask force was created to provide a written path forward for consideration by the USMB Leadership Board. That plan is expected to be completed by year-end.

“Why do we plant churches?” says Don Morris, USMB national director. “Luke 19:10 says, The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. People need Jesus. Millions of people in the U.S. are headed for an eternity separated from God. That should break our hearts. That should cause an unrelenting burden and passion for telling them about Jesus. Church plants are the most effective way to reach new areas with the gospel. We must plant new churches and at the same time do those things which will renew and enhance the ministries and evangelism of our existing churches.”

The USMB Church Planting Task Force consists of district ministers Tim Sullivan, SDC, Rick Eshbaugh, CDC, and Terry Hunt, NCDC; district church planting board chairs Brian Wiebe, PDC, Dan Strutz, CDC, and



Jeremy Jordan, chair of the Southern District Conference church planting board, and Josh Shaw, pastor of Lighthouse Church in Denver, were part of the USMB church planting task force that met Oct. 2.

*Photo by USMB*

Jeremy Jordan, SDC; Jon Wiebe, CEO and president of MB Foundation; pastors with church planting experience including Fred Leonard, Mountain View Community Church in Fresno, Calif., Paul Robie, South Mountain Community Church in Draper, Utah, Brad Klassen, Copper Hills Church in Peoria, Ariz., and Josh Shaw, Lighthouse Church in Denver, Colo.; current church planters Christian Kohs, Redemption Church in Owatonna, Minn., and Phil Wiebe, Lakeview Church in Stansbury Park, Utah; current MB pastor Tim Thiessen, Birch Bay Bible Community Church, in Birch Bay, Wash.; David Hardt, USMB Leadership Board chair; Xavier Piña, chair of the PDC Hispanic Council; Cristobal Aleman, PDC Hispanic Council; and Don Morris, USMB national director. USMB staff member Lori Taylor took extensive notes. —USMB

# Past leaders inspire our future

## Celebrating Emily C. Prudden's work in NC

Someone once said that the seven last words of a dying church are: "We've never done it that way before." For leaders who are dreamers and visionaries, these words can be a dream-killer and can dampen vision.

I have been on a spiritual journey re-tracing the roots of the North Carolina District Conference, which once included 13 churches in North Carolina and Tennessee. What intrigues me most about this journey is how this work all came about thanks to a wonderful, spirit-filled lady by the name of Emily C. Prudden. I thought I knew all about Miss Prudden from hearing stories from the Hortons, Hattons and Lipfords and from reading the 1984 book written by Katherine Siemens Richert, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, which is no longer in print.

A few weeks ago, pastor Larry Smith of West End MB Church and I decided to drive up to Elk Park, NC, to see if we could find the two schools built by Miss Prudden, which were the birth place of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren mission work here. After we found the location and the remains of the foundation, we headed back to Lenoir. About half way back, we ran across a historical road marker in Blowing Rock, NC, that read: "Emily Prudden 1832-1917 Missionary. Founded 15 western N.C. schools including Pfeiffer College forerunner. Her Skyland Institute stood here."

It seemed to both of us that this was the first time we had ever seen this historical road marker—until Peggy Goertzen reminded me a few days ago that I was with her when she took a picture of this marker in 2006.

Well, my wheels began to turn. Where were the other 13 schools? Just who was this Emily Prudden? How could I find out more about her? So, I googled "Emily Prudden Elk Park" and found several websites with a wealth of information,

including her birth place, that she opened her first school in Gaston County in 1884 and two schools in Elk Park, one white and one black. Another school in Hudson, NC, only a few miles from Lenoir, was her most successful school. It relocated to Misenheimer, NC, and became Pfeiffer College.

This was truly intriguing, but what encouraged me the most, especially after all of our conversations around women in the ministry, is the fact that the one person used by God to start the MB work in North Carolina was a missionary and educator named Emily Prudden. A woman sent by God with a dream and a vision that was unstoppable, even when people told her, "We've never done it that way before." These words no doubt motivated her to keep going and not to give up.

After reviewing a policy that was affirmed in 1999 that stated that women be encouraged to minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate, The Life Center Church was compelled by the Holy Spirit to do something that has never been done here before: ordain the first woman as associate pastor and the first husband and wife team as youth pastors. As with Emily Prudden, The Life Center Church and NCDC decided just because something had never been done here doesn't mean that it can't be done.

Thank you, Emily C. Prudden, for being obedient to the Spirit of God and using your giftedness to become a pioneer missionary and educator in North Carolina. We belong to this great family of Christ followers because of men and women who refused to give up or give in to adversity in spite of the cost. That is why I refuse to allow the work of the Mennonite Brethren to lose its momentum in North Carolina. God is on the move here today as he was in 1898.■



**Terry Hunt**  
has served as the North Carolina District Conference minister since 2005 and pastor of The Life Center since 1985. He is member of the USMB Leadership Board, National Strategy Team and U.S. Board of Faith and Life. He is married to Kathy and they have four daughters and six grandchildren.

## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Kelly Dugger was received as a member at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, Sept. 29.

Jim Rodriguez, Yamilette Rodriguez, Pleashett Davis, Bounkhong Channita and Bounmy Channita were received as members at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, Sept. 29. Pleashett Davis was baptized.

Stacy DuPont was baptized and received as a member at **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, Sept. 15. Cindy Cairns was also received as a member.

Tyler Reich, Lindsey Marx, Daniel Reich and Stephanie Greensdale were baptized at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, Sept. 8.

Ryan Lee and Amanda Lee were received as members at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, Sept. 1. Brielle Loewen was received as a member Aug. 18.

Evan Betz, Dakota Maier and Judah Rigler were baptized at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, Aug. 25.

Luke Letorneau, Doug Cook and Scott Wright were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, Aug. 25.

Raquel Nelson, Ethan Nelson, Faith Nelson, Emily Wedel, Courtney Shumaker and Josalyn Wipf were baptized at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, Aug. 18. Ben Cardona was baptized Aug. 4.

Marri Tillema and Courtney Thompson were baptized at **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.** Paige Rogers and Shandreka Shelton were baptized Aug. 4.

Sarin Rhodes, John Gossett and David Wiebe were baptized at **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, Aug. 11.

Tristen Hunt, Dorothy Oswald, Ashley Saxey, Gina Monibi, Leane van Biezen, Jason van Biezen, Daniel Herrera, Cooper Beers, Alexis Southard, Monica Knight, Jacolin Herrera, Jory Rives and Lisa Zvingowanisey were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) campus**, Aug. 11.

Asher Griffin and Brooke Griffin were received as members at **Enid (Okla.) MB Church**, Aug. 4.

Holly Gwynn, Jennifer Stewart and Christine Morehead were baptized at **Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park, Utah**, Aug. 4.

### WORKERS

Dylan Nelson began serving as high school pastor at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**

Brian Ross began serving as interim teaching pastor at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Mike Shields began serving as interim pastor at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, July 22. Reuven Isaac began serving as interim director of worship and technology Sept. 1.

Luke LeViere was installed as lead pastor at **Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash.**, Sept. 1.

Kevin and Jennie Strobe began serving as interim pastoral couple at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, Aug. 26.

An installation service for associate pastor Andrew Wuerffel was held Aug. 25 at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, with pastors Tim Sullivan and Russ Claassen officiating. A celebration meal followed the service.

David Brown began serving as worship and youth pastor at **Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park, Utah**, Aug. 16.

John Dube began serving as associate pastor at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, Aug. 13.

DJ Toelle is serving as youth pastor at **Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan.**

### DEATHS

**Altona, Mary**, Custer, Wash., member of Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash., March 27, 1934—May 9, 2019. Parents: Eldon and Bessie Hunt. Spouse: Ted Altona, deceased. Children: Sharon Karber, Randy, Dale, Dan, Anthony; 10 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren.

**Boley, Darold Dewayne**, Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, June 14, 1940—Sept. 29, 2019. Parents: Russell Lee and Doris Louise (Richardson) Boley. Spouse: Alice Louise Mills, deceased. Children: Tayna McCloud, Darold II, Jon; seven grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

**Davidson, James "Craig"**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hills-

boro, Jan. 10, 1955—Sept. 3, 2019. Parents: William F. and Marilyn Lea Madsen Davidson. Spouse: Janice Unruh. Children: Christopher, Camilea Davidson, Cameron, Jamie, Jeremy, Joshua.

**Ediger, Esther S.**, Hampton, Neb., member of Henderson (Neb.) MB Church, Oct. 1, 1922—Aug. 17, 2019. Parents: Abraham and Agnes (Kliwer) Goossen. Spouse: Edward Ediger, deceased. Children: Ivan, Donna Dreblow, Ruth Peters, Dewayne; 13 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

**Ewell, Rubena**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Aug. 9, 1924—July 28, 2019. Parents: John and Helena (Johnson) Gunther. Spouse: Charles Ewell, deceased.

**Faul, Evelyn (Good)**, Harvey, N.D., Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., July 28, 1939—Feb. 18, 2016. Parents: Jesse W. and Alice (Putney) Good. Spouse: LeRoy Faul, deceased.

**Feil, Jona Lee**, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, March 20, 1933—Aug. 15, 2019. Parents: Samuel and Bertha Feil. Spouse: Mary Lou (Penner) Feil. Children: Wanda Bishop, Darrell, Karen Heinrichs; 10 grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

**Franz, Joan Elizabeth**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, May 24, 1935—Sept. 26, 2019. Parents: John and Pauline (Stobbe) Gossen. Spouse: Archie Franz (deceased), Roland Schmidt (deceased). Children: Tim Franz, Richard Schmidt, Philip Schmidt, Russell Schmidt, Rita Williams, Lori Kliwer; 21 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren.

**Schmidt, Irvin**, Arapaho, Okla., member of First Mennonite Church, Clinton, Okla., Sept. 11, 1933—Aug. 9, 2019. Parents: A.P. and Hilda Schmidt. Spouse: Pauline (Muno) Schmidt, deceased. Children: Paula Hayen (deceased), Melody Johnson, Irving Schmidt, Leslie Schmidt, Katherine Ford and Holly Stratton; 12 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren.

**Steinhorst, Ruby Seibel Faul**, Denton, Texas, member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., Dec. 9, 1925—Aug. 2, 2019. Parents: Ben and Ella (Faul) Seibel. Spouse: Linden Steinhorst, deceased; Wilbert Faul, deceased. Children: June Halbrock, Cheryl Sartain, Bruce; five grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

**Stout, Kelly**, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Nov. 8,

1964—Sept. 13, 2019. Parents: Cory and Pat Sumner. Spouse: Tom Stout. Children: Denny, James, Romy.

**Thiessen, Arlene**, Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, April 27, 1931—Aug. 25, 2019. Parents: Leora and Ruth (Henderson) Algrim. Spouse: Harold C. Thiessen. Children: Beth Jones, Ellen Dick, Carol Thiessen; six grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

**Wiebe, Raymond Francis**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Nov. 29, 1926—June 17, 2019. Parents: David Vincent and Martha (Frantz) Wiebe.

## REACHING IN

### DISCIPLESHIP

**Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.**, hosted a panel of Christian professionals in the fields of psychology and philosophy to speak about mental health Sept. 1.

### FELLOWSHIP

**Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, started two new ministries: LEAD For Life, a men's ministry encouraging men to be committed to leading their families, the church and the community into the fullness of Christ; and Sharing With Another Person, a women's ministry focusing on prayer.

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted its annual family camping trip at Carpinteria State Beach Oct. 25-27.

At **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, the men's fellowship hosted a Sept. 15 trap shoot and the Sisters ladies' ministry held a kick-off event Sept. 22.

**Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, hosted a "Bouncy House Bonanza" with a pulled pork dinner and a bounce house to kick-off its Awana program Sept. 4.

### WORSHIP

**Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, held a hymns and ice cream night Sept. 29.

**Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted a worship night Sept. 29.

## CELEBRATIONS

**Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, dedicated its newly-remodeled schoolhouse for youth ministry Sept. 22.

**Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.**, celebrated a grand opening at its new location Sept. 15 with tacos and inflatables after each service.

## REACHING OUT

### LOCALLY

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, hosted a fall festival Oct. 12 with a bounce house, obstacle course, fall games and a food truck.

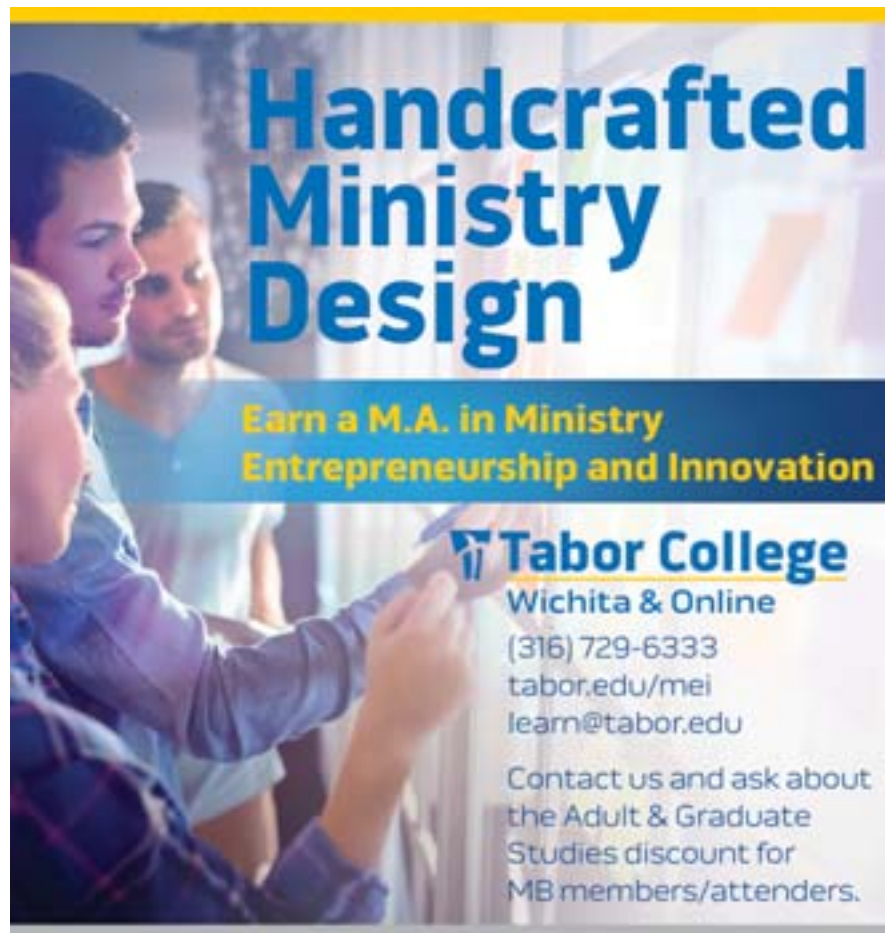
**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a Business Breakfast Tour Oct. 11. Guest speaker Jeff Henderson discussed two questions to leverage to create professional and personal growth.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, hosted a BBQ and drive-in movie Sept. 28.

Youth from **Henderson (Neb.) MB Church** cleaned community areas during a "Love Henderson" event Sept. 18.

**Enid (Okla.) MB Church** hosted 40 bikers for its Sept. 15 service and a meal. The event raised more than \$1,600 for Mennonite Disaster Service. Oklahoma director Jay Blough attended to highlight the work of MDS.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, held its fall kick-off Sept. 8 with a tri-tip meal after each service.



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# church news

**Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, held a community SHRED-Fest and outdoor concert celebration Aug. 23, providing document shredding, a bounce house for children, food and live music.

**Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.**, filled backpacks with school supplies Aug. 15 for students attending Summit High School across the street.

With help from surrounding communities, **Adams (Okla.) MB Church** held vacation Bible school for 32 children in July. Students raised \$254 for the Children's Hunger Fund, providing 1,061 meals.

## GLOBALLY

**Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, assembled 49 school kits, 15 sewing kits and one hygiene kit for MCC.

**Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, collected 250 school kits for MCC.

Women at **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, assembled 97 school kits for MCC.

Students attending vacation Bible school at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, raised \$3,518.52 to purchase school uniforms and picnic tables for children at Abundant Life Home in Thailand.

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** packed school supply kits for children around the world.

**Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Clovis, Calif.**, celebrated Peace Sunday Sept. 22, with part of its corporate worship filling 300 school kits for MCC.

## CLEARINGHOUSE

### Local Church Openings

**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](http://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>

### Celebration

**Save the date!** Sunday, March 29, 2020, Fairview MB Church, Fairview, Okla., will be celebrating in worship and praises 125 years as a congregation. Everyone is invited to attend this event.

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## Americans really think—what?

Statistics reveal surprising views on Bible, theology

Many Americans have a distorted view of things we Mennonite Brethren consider irrefutable. I've come to this conclusion thanks in part to an interesting article in the Jan. 7, 2019, issue of *Facts & Trends* called "19 vital stats for ministry in 2019," that shares statistics about Americans' beliefs. It is an interesting read, but more so troubling in a lot of ways.

For instance, the 2018 State of Theology Study from Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research reveals that seven in 10 Americans believe there is one God in three persons, but 57 percent say God created Jesus, and 59 percent say the Holy Spirit is a force not a personal being. I wonder—kiddingly—if perhaps Star Wars has something to do with this belief about the Holy Spirit?

Those of us who identify with the Great Commission and strive to live according to these words said by Jesus just before his ascension as recorded in Matthew 28 might find it hard to believe that over half of all churchgoers say they've never even heard of the Great Commission. Another quarter say they've heard of it but can't remember the meaning. Only 17 percent say they've heard of it and know what it means. Whoa!

Equally troubling is the statistic indicating that two-thirds of Christians and half of all evangelicals in the U.S. believe that many religions are a pathway to eternal life. Really? Didn't Jesus say, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)? It is unfathomable to me that half of all evangelicals would say that a religion like Buddhism or Hinduism can lead to eternal life. We have work to do, folks.

One thing in the article surprised me a little: Among Protestant churchgoers, church attendance has remained steady

over the years, at least percentage wise as 45 percent say they attend church on a weekly basis. Protestant church attendance has been consistent since the 1950s. In 2017, 45 percent attended weekly. In 1955, it was 42 percent. Even among Protestant 20-somethings, a higher percentage attend today than did in the 1960s and 70s.

But there are fewer American Protestants than in previous generations. In 1955, 71 percent of Americans were Protestant. That number has fallen to 47 percent. Protestants are as faithful to church as they ever were, but there are fewer around to be faithful.

According to the article, LifeWay Research found that 49 percent of Americans with evangelical beliefs say they read at least a little bit of Scripture every day and 63 percent of evangelicals say they read the Bible at least once a week. That's good news. The Bible is still the most read piece of literature in human history (Guinness Book of Records, 1995).

So, what does this all mean? These are just statistics, right? Do these numbers have any relevance? Well, to me it provides a glimpse into the minds of believers (and otherwise) in America. I would say we need to do a better job of educating those in our pews if half think other religions offer a place with God for eternity.

It means that many people are swayed by common thought rather than by the truth in God's Word. I'd prefer that 100 percent of evangelicals knew the Great Commission and were living accordingly. I know that's not realistic. But this article was written to reveal trends, some of which I feel are quite disturbing. Can we help to improve these trends? Might this cause us to shake off the cobwebs and collectively say, "Wait a minute! We need to set the record straight and investigate what God says is true!"



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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