

A new prescription for loving God	Page 10
Wolf Point celebrates new beginnings	Page 17
New arts center is for community	Page 19





- Church Planting: assist with gatherings, assessments, training, cohort
- LEAD One (one-day regional events: Gospel Fluency)
- LEAD Cohorts (new lineup begins mid-January)
- Webinars: partnering with The Center for Anabaptist Studies
- LEAD Coaching for pastors & leaders
- Ethnic ministry summits
- ICOMB/BFL/Historical Commission Funding
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Christian Leader magazine/C-Link
- USMB Youth: network, programs
- Coming soon...LEAD Pods

USMB...empowering each local MB church to reach its full God-given ministry potential within the framework of our Evangelical and Anabaptist distinctives.







PO Box 20200 • Wichita, KS 67208 usmb.org



in this issue

January / February 2020

FEATURES: HOSPITALITY

 $10 \qquad \text{A new prescription for loving God} \\$

ERIC NELSON

How do I grow in my love for God?

12 Choices

TIM GEDDERT

Loving God in the kitchen and at the feet of Jesus

14 Avoiding tarnished teaching

GARY G. HOAG AND JON C. WIEBE

How to choose stewardship curriculum for your church

FIND MORE ONLINE:

Hoping for more stories? Find these and more online at www.christianleadermag.org

• A durable calling David C. Thiessen

• Living well by loving well Lynn Kauffman

DEPARTMENTS

- 7 5 minutes with...
- 17 Body Life
 - Wolf Point church celebrates new beginnings
 - New arts center is for community
 - Life after Eden
 - Kids learn new ways to worship
- 28 Church news

COLUMNS

4	Editorial
	Connie Faber

- Frontlines
 JOSH SHAW
- 9 Testimony
 Katie Willows
- 26 Mission & Ministry Don Morris
- Vantage point
 TIM SULLIVAN
- From the national director
 DON MORRIS

editorial

20/20 vision

Loving God, our neighbors and ourselves

Tstill remember my amazement when I got my first pair Lof glasses in fourth grade. As we drove home from the optometrist's office, I was surprised that I could read the billboards well before we were right in front of them and

that the world looked so crisp and clear. I was thrilled! So, I appreciate the play on words in a meme I recently saw on Facebook: "People who wear glasses must be excited for the new year. It's the first time they'll see 20/20.'

This year—2020—we are planning to publish a series of articles in print and

online that we hope will inspire us U.S. Mennonite Brethren to pursue 20/20 vision. Our thanks to the C.S. Lewis Institute's Annual Spiritual Checkup resource (http://cslewisinstitute.org/ASC) for suggesting Matthew 22:37-40 as a framework for this spiritual check-up. Here Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments."

In each issue this year we plan to include at least one feature article that explores how we can better love God, our neighbors and ourselves—or what we call self-care. We invite readers to share stories and theological reflections as we think together about what it means to be healthy disciples and healthy churches who are guided in their choices by the Great Commandment. Please contact me (editor@usmb.org) if you are interested in making a contribution.

In this issue you will find three essays, marked with the Vision 2020 logo, that introduce this year-long focus by challenging us to think more carefully about what it means to love God. Thank you to Pastor Eric Nelson and Professor Tim Geddert for their thoughtful contributions in print and to Pastor Lynn Kauffman for his online essay. News stories in the BodyLife department offer three examples of how the fine arts can help us express our love for God and neighbors.

This issue also highlights two congregations that are enjoying a new beginning—Lighthouse Church in Denver (p. 8) and Gospel Fellowship Church in Wolf Point, Mont. (p. 17). This summer, when USMB holds its biennial convention, Gary Hoag will be one of the guest speakers. Hoag and MB Foundation president and CEO Jon Wiebe have teamed up for the third feature article on evaluating stewardship curriculum.

It is helpful for all of us to get our vision checked regularly. We hope you will experience a refocused and clarified vision for following Jesus this new year.



Connie Faber has served as editor of Christian Leader since 2004. She and her husband, David, are members of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.



Vol. 83, No. 1 January / February 2020

> Connie Faber **EDITOR**

Janae Rempel ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Shelley Plett GRAPHIC DESIGNER

The Christian Leader (ISSN 0009-5149) is a gathering place for the people, passions and mission of U.S Mennonite Brethren. The Christian Leader is published bimonthly by the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. However, the opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the church as a whole.

COPYRIGHT: The articles printed in the Christian Leader are owned by the CL or by the author and may not be reprinted without permission. Unless noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version

READER PARTICIPATION: Letters to the editor are published online (www.christianleadermag.com) and should be 500 words or less and on one subject. Letters must be signed and include the writer's city and state Letters will be edited for clarity, appropriateness and length

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$10 for six issues and \$20 for 12 issues (\$15, \$30 in Canada; all other countries \$25 for six issues); \$1.50 per copy

CORRESPONDENCE: All correspondence, including subscription questions and address updates, should be addressed to

> Christian Leader Box 155, 107 N. Main Hillsboro, KS 67063-0155 Phone: 620.947.5543 Email: editor@usmb.org

MEMBERSHIP: The Christian Leader is a member of the Evangelical Press Association and Meetinghouse, an association of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ editors

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Leader, Box 155, Hillsboro, KS 67063. Periodicals postage paid at Hillsboro, Kansas.

Christian Leader is published by



U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Gathering 2020 speakers announced

USMB Gathering 2020, to be held July 21-25, 2020, in Independence, Mo., will feature three guest speakers.

MB Foundation is sponsoring Gary G. Hoag, president and CEO of Global Trust Partners (www.global-trustpartners.org). Hoag provides spiritual and strategic counsel for nurturing a culture of generosity in local churches. He has encouraged



Gary G. Hoag



Kadi Cole

Christian generosity for more than 20 years, serving in leadership positions at Denver Seminary, Colorado Christian University and Biola University.

Convention speaker Kadi Cole is an author, speaker and leadership trainer who is passionate about helping local churches thrive and equipping leaders to fulfill their calling

(www.kadicole.com). Her newest project is to help church leaders better develop the female leadership talent in their congregations. Cole's credentials include being a certified Leadership Coach; 25 years of working with recruitment, training, project management and leadership development for churches, colleges and businesses; and serving in executive leadership at one of the largest multisite churches in the U.S.

Pastors' conference speaker Rob Reimer, founder and president of Renewal Ministries International (www.renewalinternational.org), is the



Rob Reimer

author of Soul Care, Deep Faith, River Dwellers and Pathways to the King. He serves as associate professor of pastoral theology at Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, N.Y. Reimer desires to build the kingdom of God by training and equipping pastors and leaders in the work of personal and corporate renewal.

The convention will also feature Boris Borisov, pastor of Pacific Keep Church in Spokane, Wash., and a panel of pastors; Don Morris, USMB national director; and one additional in-house speaker to be named.

For more information, visit www.usmb.org/gathering2020.

Giving Tuesday donations to USMB exceed \$28,000

Donations to USMB on Giving Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2019, totaled \$28,005, surpassing the goal of \$20,000. Funds

raised will be used to provide resources for three specific ministries: church multiplication and evangelism, leadership development and ethnic integrated ministries.

"When people give to help our MB family with mission and ministry, it is simply a wonderful thing," says USMB national director Don Morris. "It's God's people doing things together to help bring the good news to those who are currently lost. So, from my heart, thank you to all of those who gave to USMB mission and ministry on Giving Tuesday. The amount far exceeded what was raised last year."

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. In the six years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed \$176,295.—USMB

CDC holds convention

Approximately 80 delegates gathered for the 109th Central District Conference (CDC) convention hosted by five Sioux Falls, S.D., churches at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls, Oct. 24-26, 2019.

Three churches were welcomed into the CDC: Butterfield (Minn.) Community Church; Emmanuel Evangelical Church in Sioux City, Iowa; and Rehoboth Church of God in Lincoln, Neb.

Delegates voted on two CDC BFL statements clarifying the district's position regarding women in pastoral ministry and the doctrine of the atonement. Both statements were affirmed, the first clarifying that the CDC desires to uphold the 1999 USMB resolution regarding women in pastoral ministry that limits the role of lead pastor to a qualified male and the second an affirmation clarifying the CDC BFL's position that the doctrine of the atonement—addressed in Article 5 of the USMB Confession of Faith—be seen through the lens of penal substitution. Both statements will be presented to the U.S. BFL.

the news

Executive Board chair John Langer announced the addition of one-third-time District Minister Dan Strutz, pastor of Community Bible Church in Mountain Lake, Minn. At a Sept. 16, 2019, CDC District Ministry Council meeting, the Executive Committee voted to hire Strutz to work alongside District Minister Rick Eshbaugh.

In other business, delegates unanimously approved an amended 2019-20 budget of \$495,000, granted licensure to three CDC pastors and held elections.

The convention theme, "Not Alone!" was based on Hebrews 10:19-25. Pastor Paul Stevens, from Epikos Church in Milwaukee, Wis., was the guest speaker. The event also included workshops, worship, a celebration banquet, reports and a ministry panel representing various Mennonite Brethren and inter-Mennonite agencies.—*CL*

NCDC changes name, licenses new pastors

When delegates from seven congregations of the North Carolina District Conference (NCDC) gathered Sept. 13-15, 2019, at The Life Center in Lenoir, North Carolina, for the annual district convention, it marked two historic firsts.

The convention celebrated the name change from NCDC to Eastern District Conference (EDC) and the potential growth it represents. Two years ago, the EDC voted to change its name when a new church in Virginia comprised of Ethiopian immigrants was in the process of joining the district. When immigration issues slowed the affiliation process, the district name change was put on hold. Earlier this year the church, Assemblies of Trinity International, contacted the district to begin the process of re-engaging with the district, says Terry Hunt, EDC minister.

In addition to the Virginia Ethiopian congregation, Congolese congrega-



Four new pastors stand with their spouses as they are licensed for ministry at The Life Center in Lenoir, North Carolina, by Terry Hunt, district minister. Darrin and Carrie Foddrell (far left) were licensed as youth pastors. Cliniece Bradshaw (fourth from left) and Greg Snyder (second from right) were licensed as associate pastors. Photo by EDC

tions in Maine, Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio are also interested in joining EDC. Conversations with these congregations prompted EDC leaders to contact the churches this summer to inform them that the name change would go forward.

The 2019 convention also marked the first time that women were licensed for pastoral ministry in the district. A total of four individuals, including two women, were commissioned for pastoral ministry at The Life Center during the closing convention worship session Sunday morning. Cliniece Bradshaw and Greg Snider were licensed as associate pastors and Darrin and Carrie Foddrell were licensed as youth pastors.

In addition to business sessions, the weekend included worship times, workshops, a historical presentation and tour and a sermon Sunday morning by Joe Jones, president of Fresno Pacific University. —*CL*

PDC expands staff

Delegates to the Pacific District Conference (PDC) convention held Nov. 1-2, 2019, in Fresno, Calif., and hosted by Mountain View Church, approved a budget that included funding for a new position—director of church planting and leadership development.

For the past two years, district leaders have been working on a proposal for adding a staff member who would work in church planting and leadership development, said Pat Coyle, PDC chair. The PDC is a geographically large district and the district minister's responsibilities are beyond the job of one person, Coyle said. The new staff member will lead the district church planting, evangelism and multiplication efforts as well as the district leadership development ministry; raise "significant" financial support for these ministries and "serve the interests of our diverse district constituency," according to the proposed budget report.

To ensure that funds will be available for this new position, the PDC Executive Board and Trustees requested that the 5 percent cap on corpus distribution be increased to 7 percent for the next two fiscal years. The recommendation to temporarily change the corpus and the 2020-21 budget of \$575,710 passed unanimously.

Two new churches were welcomed into the PDC: Neighborhood Church,

minutes with...

a church plant located in an underserved neighborhood in Fresno and Ebenezer Ethiopian Church, a congregation in Portland, Oregon, that began as a Bible study in the home of pastor Demess Tadasse.

Delegates also heard brief reports and elected new board members. Coyle gave an update on the search for a new district minister, following the resignation of Gary Wall in July 2019. Church planting was the focus of the Friday evening banquet and program. Convention speaker Paul Andrew spoke three times. —*CL*

Former PDC minister faces legal challenges

A Dec. 9, 2019, article in *Mennonite* World Review reports that Gary Wall, former Pacific District Conference minister, was arrested for solicitation. The charges are deeply disturbing to USMB and U.S. Board of Faith and Life leadership. Wall has pled no contest to the charges but maintains his innocence. The facts of the case as reported in MWR are in dispute.

Wall has responded to the charges saying, "I have never been arrested. Based upon the plea agreement, in May 2020 the prosecutor will allow me to withdraw my no contest plea and enter a plea of not guilty. The judge will then grant the prosecutor's motion to dismiss the case. Because the case is pending until the next hearing, I have been advised not to discuss the facts of the case at this time."

Pacific District Executive leadership and PDC Board of Faith and Life are working with support from the USMB Board of Faith and Life to resolve the questions surrounding the events.

"The PDC Executive Board is saddened by the circumstances outlined in the article," says Pat Coyle, PDC moderator in a statement. "We ask our churches to be in prayer for the Wall family and for the PDC leadership as we discern next steps and appropriate responses." —USMB

Kalie George

As children came and went through her office, principal Kalie George took a few minutes to talk about the Christian school she and a friend have established in Kansas City, Mo. A 2008 graduate of Tabor College, Kalie's calling to urban ministry was launched by a chapel presentation about World Impact. After several years working with homelessness, in 2014 she partnered with a school teacher friend to establish Urban Christian Academy in their inner city neighborhood.

What prompted you to start a school?

My previous work was in rescue ministry which was like standing at the base of a river and pulling kids out. I felt this call to walk up the river and see why kids were being thrown in.

What did you find?

Our neighborhood school has had less than 10 percent proficiency in math and reading for the past 15 years. Helping in my friend's kindergarten class I got a really good look at the system's dysfunction, but I also saw how she could spark joy in her classroom. We began to wonder what would happen if these kids could find themselves in a safe place eight hours a day with a guide who loved them and shared the hope of the gospel with them.

What made you think you could start a school?

If we knew what we were getting into we probably would have run away—two young girls with two years teaching experience between us. But there was this relentless fire in me. We were going to start with a daycare in my basement, but God

surprised us. When I asked a friend for help he said it's creepy to start a school in a basement and offered to buy a school building. Another donor bought us a school bus. We raised over \$100,000 in three months.

What is most challenging about this ministry?

The injustice of it all can really weigh on you. Six of our scholars are living with me right now. It's not the workload of tucking them in and making dinner, but it's wondering where God is in the midst of all the brokenness, wrestling with my own understanding of who God is. That can get overwhelming to me.

Where do you find hope?

These kids' belief in God is so steady. Because of the pain they have endured, God is particularly close to them. We adults get jaded and it's hard to see the world the way they do, but if we just sit and listen to them, the world can be transformed.

For a video visit to Urban Christian Academy go to https://vimeo.com/233607938.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

frontlines

Change of plans

Lighthouse Church experiences miracle

Tt is not for you to know the Ltimes or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holv Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

I wish I could say that I am someone who loves change, but the reality is, I only love change when I am the agent of that change. This past year Lighthouse Church went through what many in our church family have called a "Mile High Miracle." In January 2019, we were given an eviction notice on a building we were renting for our church. Due to our imminent move, the Holy Spirit directed us to find and purchase a building we never thought we could possibly own. And in the midst of all of that, we were able to renovate, move in and host services on schedule, with very few hiccups along the way.

It was a miracle in the mile-high city of Denver. But it was change I didn't initiate.

You see, about a month before all of this happened our goal was to plant a second campus of Lighthouse Church at the former Garden Park MB Church location. We had dreams of reaching a new area of the city with the help of the kingdomminded believers of Garden Park. We planned, we prepared and we organized for change, but the Holy Spirit changed our plans.

It's so fascinating how the Holy

Spirit does that, isn't it? Just when we think we are going in the right direction, with the right intentions, Jesus turns us in a direction we never thought possible.

It reminds me of when the apostles questioned Jesus about the coming of his kingdom just before he ascended to heaven in Acts 1. They vigorously planned for Jesus to return and restore the physical nation of Israel. And in their planning, Jesus changed their plans.

He told them, "It is not for you to know..." In other words, "It is none of your business what plans the Father has." And then he says, "But vou will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus masterfully takes the plans of the disciples (as well intended as they may have been) and he changes them into something far greater—to be witnesses of the gospel throughout the entire world!

I don't know about you, but one thing I have learned in the past year is that Jesus loves to change our plans. It's his way of keeping us not on our toes but on our knees in obedience to him. And my prayer for you, as the reader of this article, is not to grow weary when your plans change into Jesus' plans but that you will fall to your knees in humble obedience to him. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 20:11).



Josh Shaw and his wife, Brianne, are the pastoral leaders of Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo. He is a graduate of Tabor College and Denver Seminary. They have two sons and live in Lakewood, Colo. The Shaws and 12 friends started Lighthouse Church in the summer of 2015.

testimony

My God is bigger

Unexplained infertility challenges marriage, sobriety

ear infertility, you can't have me. My God is bigger than you."

These were my fighting words as my husband, Donny, and I faced a five-year journey with infertility.

During a time when we were struggling financially and experiencing other health issues, infertility could have broken our marriage, but God spoke to us through his Word, giving us strength to carry on despite facing one of the most difficult challenges of our lives.

Donny and I met in a sober recovery program. We have a past history of addiction—we got sober when I was 19 and he was 20—but that's a story for another time.

After our marriage, we started having problems. We were struggling financially, living with Donny's mom in California. Donny had applied to several physician assistant programs without getting in and was also suffering from Crohn's disease. I was a social worker in child welfare, which was emotionally draining yet spiritually fulfilling.

When we started trying to have a baby, that soon became disappointing. Doctors said we had unexplained infertility, and we tried six failed Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) treatments. Each time doctors said everything looked great, but nothing would happen. After disappointment upon disappointment, we hit an all-time low. I had an emotional affair; Donny checked out with pornography. Our marriage was in crisis.

Although we had been baptized a few years into our relationship, we opened our Bibles for the first time and were convicted by Scripture.

A lot of people get divorced over stuff like this, but we confessed to each other, quit engaging in sin, extended forgiveness and chose to start fighting our battles together. Scripture came alive during this time. It was a joy to suffer for

Christ (James 1:2). We knew he'd see us through.

Eventually, God led us to Utah, where Donny had been accepted to PA school. I started seeing a new fertility specialist, who diagnosed me with endometriosis and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. I had two surgeries to examine and treat the endometriosis, including the removal of my fallopian tubes, which were filled with scar tissue.

The night before surgery, I repeated Scripture—"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous," (Joshua 1:9) and, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not to harm you." (Jeremiah 29:II) Despite being one of the worst experiences of my life, I knew that God, based on his Word, would not leave or forsake me.

Infertility was taking its toll, though, and each day, I felt the heaviness of heartbreak. Some days were worse than others, and I'd break down crying. I remember screaming and crying out to God—heartbroken, desperate, longing for a baby and not understanding God's plan. I felt like I would die from the pain. Meanwhile, Donny's Crohn's disease had spread to his stomach and landed him in the hospital.

Our situation looked hopeless, and it would have been easy to turn back to drugs or alcohol, but we continued to seek God and stay sober. I refused to listen to Satan's lies that God was abandoning us. In my darkest times, I studied God's Word eight hours a day. It wasn't out of obligation. I needed his Word like water or bread. It was the only thing that gave me peace.

At this point, our only hope for a baby was in vitro fertilization (IVF).

We had seen God's hand in so many things—he had healed our marriage, and he healed Donny's Crohn's disease. (Donny is in remission after finding a WARRIOR WARRIOR WINTAUTS WALTON

Katie Willows was born and raised in California and moved to Utah three years ago for her husband, Donny, to attend PA school. She works as a social worker in a hospital and has formerly worked for Child Protective Services and as a substance abuse counselor. She has been sober 16 years. She and Donny have been married six years and attend Greenhouse Community Church in Saratoga Springs. Donny recently finished PA school and is a licensed physician assistant in Utah. Katie loves hanging with her husband and 4-monthold daughter Trinity, reading the Bible. watching movies and TV shows, working out, laughing and serving people. She serves every year at Royal Family Kids Camp in California, a camp for foster youth.

a new prescription for loving God

hen was the last time you had your vision tested? If you are anything like me, it's been a while. I don't like vision tests. I'm not a fan of dimly lit rooms with strangers who sit too close. It's awkward. But the real reason I avoid the optometrist is knowing my vision is getting worse makes me a little uneasy. I always nail the first few lines at the top, "T Z P," but by the time I move to the smaller lines I start to struggle. The letters get fuzzy, out of focus and eventually I just guess letters in hopes that I'll get a few right. Let's just say, I'm nowhere near 20/20 vision.

My experience at the eye doctor is often very similar to the Christian's experience when it comes to loving God. We start off well and talk a big game but by the time we move deeper into what loving God means, things get fuzzy, out of focus and to be honest, I think people just start guessing. When it comes to loving God, Christians lack 20/20 vision.

I'm not surprised by this. Our culture is both nearsighted and farsighted when it comes to love. It's one of the words that can mean so many things to so many people that it's become a very abstract concept to most. I submit to you this definition of love as the clearest and most robust definition around: DEVOTION + DELIGHT = LOVE. Love is the sum total of a person's devotion to another and delight in another.

If you are reading this article, you are familiar with the Old Testament command, reiterated by Jesus in the Gospels, to love God. But, if you were sitting with a person taking their first steps toward Jesus and they asked you what it means to love God, what would you say? Most explanations fall into two categories. One category is all about affections usually measured by intense feelings. In this category it's not enough to love God, you have to really love God or better yet, really, really love God. You get the idea.

The other category is all about action, usually measured by religious duty. I think most would agree that loving God includes both actions and affections. To say it another way, most people define love by some sort of devotion or some sort of delight. I would assume that you lean toward one over the other. Here's the thing, it's not devotion or delight that explains loving God, it's this: MY DEVOTION TO GOD + MY DELIGHT IN GOD = MY LOVE FOR GOD. Love is the byproduct of devotion and delight. Where do devotion and delight begin? Glad you asked.

It's possible to be devoted to someone you doubt is devoted to you but it's not possible to delight in someone you doubt delights in you. With that in mind, check this out:

• "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

• "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God loves us. He is both devoted to us and delighted with us. This is the beginning of our devotion to him and delight in him.

I've been married to Carrisa for over 10 years. Without straining to manufacture more love, I love her now more than ever. Here's how that happened. When I experienced her devotion to me and her delight in me, I experienced her love for me. Consequently, this love increased my devotion for her and my delight

in her. This is how love grows. Love is the byproduct of devotion and delight.

Back to the eye doctor. There's nothing quite like the moment you put on new glasses for the first time and things are more clear than they've ever been. Understanding the gospel is like trying on a brand new pair of glasses for the first time. It helps us see clearly what it means to love God. Gospel is not an umbrella term for all things "Jesusy." It's a precise term; a technical

term.

Gospel means "good news," and it's the short title for the substitutionary work of Jesus. It's the good news that Jesus took what we deserve so we can have what he deserved. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Since Jesus took on our sin, we can take on his righteousness. When we trust Jesus, we exchange our sinful verdict for his righteous verdict. Consequently, God is just as pleased with us as he is with Jesus. God now delights in us. This realization motivates our devotion to him and delight in him. The more delighted you are that God delights in you, the more devoted you'll be.

So, I've explained what love for God is and where it begins. But what does this look like in everyday life? Practically, devotion and delight come together in three big areas of our lives: identity, authority and activity.

Identity: Everyone has a story they tell themselves about themselves. This sentence alone is the easiest way to think about identity. Your story can either be based on what you do or what's been done for you. The gospel offers us an identity based on what Jesus has done. His performance, not yours, can secure for you a story about you that no person, no pain and no poor performance could take away. Why wouldn't we delight in an identity like this? A gospel understanding of identity sounds like this: I love God when I delight in defining myself by what Jesus has done, not in what I do.

Authority: Everyone has an authoritative source that clarifies, defines and explains how the world should be. We are devoted to God when we are submitted to his authority. Since his commands have our best interests in mind, we can be sure that the more devoted we are to his authority the more delighted we will be. A gospel understanding of authority sounds like this: I love God when I delight in submitting to Jesus as my authority not another authority.

Activity: One's identity and one's authority produce a person's activity. When we believe the gospel, we become like the gospel and it sounds like this: I love God when I delight in doing for others what Jesus has done for me.

Growing love for God can be evaluated by an increasing delight in an identity from Jesus, an increasing delight in the authority of Jesus and an increasing delight in activity like Jesus. If you are a Christian and you sense that your love for God has flatlined, the solution isn't to try harder but to dig deeper into God's love for you. Just like when the eye doctor writes you a new prescription, I hope what I've written helps you love God with 20/20 clarity.

Eric Nelson is the campus pastor of South Mountain Community Church, Lehi, Utah.

By Tim Geddert

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

Jesus gladly accepted hospitality from Mary and Martha—or perhaps we should say from Martha. We have no way of knowing whether her sister Mary ever took her turn in the kitchen.

...Mary might have

serving you with all

here at Jesus' feet."

said, "Lord, I am

my heart, as I sit

What we do know is that on one particular occasion Martha is distracted with the task of preparing dinner for Jesus and his disciples. In fact, she is irritated, not that 13 men are joining their small family for the meal but that her sister Mary is not helping with the preparations. Instead of appealing to her sister, she tries to win Jesus' sympathy. Mary seems to be hanging on his every word—perhaps Jesus could drop a hint that she really should be helping in the kitchen.

It doesn't work. In fact, Jesus defends Mary's choice to sit at his feet, and he gently chides Martha for being all hot and bothered about the situation. And Luke tells this story to help his readers understand the priorities of Jesus.

But what does the text mean? A quick look at the commentaries on Luke reveals a surprising variety of conclusions.

- Some are sure Jesus is critiquing Martha for her intemperate mood. ("Calm down, Martha, you could learn a thing or two from your quiet, peaceful sister.")
- Some are sure Martha's problem is her busyness. ("Martha, Martha, don't you know that a contemplative life pleases God so much more than a lot of activity?")
- Some think her problem is with her priorities. ("Martha, it's fine to meet physical needs, but spiritual disciplines are so much more important.")
- Some think the problem is Martha's pride. ("Martha, Martha, the magnificent spread you are putting together might feed your ego. But Jesus delights more in Mary's humble fare.)
- Some think her problem is with *gender* roles. ("Just because you feel at home in the kitchen, Martha, doesn't mean Mary shouldn't get a theological education.")

Somehow, we know that Mary is affirmed, and Martha critiqued, but we're not quite sure what the

I remember the time I led a Bible conference. We were studying a series of texts in Luke. It was Saturday morning, about 10 minutes before noon, and all participants (including the Bible teacher) were eagerly anticipating the wonderful fellowship meal we were about to enjoy. Delicious smells wafted from the church kitchen into the sanctuary where we were wrapping up the morning, trying to understand this text about Martha and Mary.



Loving God in the kitchen and at the feet of Jesus

It somehow seemed unthinkable that this text was designed to critique those in the kitchen and favor those studying the Bible in the sanctuary. And then something hit me. What if Martha's problem is her assumption that Mary should make the same choice she has made. Mary chooses theological education (that's in fact what sitting at a teacher's feet meant in her world). Martha chooses to prepare the meal. Both are good choices. Both still are good choices. The challenge is to discern which choice is better in a particular time and place, given our unique needs, unique gifts, unique calling.

I suspect that if Mary had been the complainer—if she had said to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister is out there in the kitchen preparing a meal rather than sitting here at your feet as I am doing?"—that then Jesus might well have defended Martha's generous service and gently chided Mary for not recognizing that her sister had chosen well. I shared my thoughts with the group just as the clock struck noon.

We all filed eagerly into the gym where tastefully decorated tables had been loaded up with the dishes we had been smelling. I overheard numerous participants in the Bible study tell the cooks they had wonderfully served the Lord by preparing the noon meal. And I heard some of the cooks respond, "Glad to serve, and next time we would be happy if others would prepare the meal so that we could also be in the Bible study." I sensed that we had all learned something from Mary and Martha.

The call to serve at tables is not an inferior calling. And the privilege of sitting at Jesus' feet is not one to be taken from those called there. Both are ways of serving Jesus.

One day while conversing with a Pharisaic lawyer, Jesus asked, "What is written in the Law?" The Pharisee answered correctly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). In order to help the man understand "Love your neighbor," Jesus told the story of the socalled "Good Samaritan." But which story can help us understand what "Love the Lord your God"

means? I think Luke would respond, "How about the Mary/Martha story? That is why I put it next in my Gospel.'

Mary was loving God; Martha was too. Perhaps on that day Mary might have said, "Lord, I am serving you with all my heart, as I sit here at Jesus' feet." Perhaps she could have said, "I'm serving you with my mind, learning here from the Master." If Martha had had the grace to prepare the meal without getting all hot and bothered, without criticizing her sister's choices, she could have chimed right in: "I'm serving God with all my strength." Perhaps she could even have said, "I'm pouring heart and soul into this meal."

If we can have the grace to allow each other to make different choices in different circumstances—if we can learn to value all the ways that people love the Lord their God, then we, too, can follow the greatest of all the commandments, both in the kitchen and at the Master's feet.

Tim Geddert is New Testament professor and program director at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. He is also a member of the U.S. Board of Faith and Life. This article has been adapted from an article previously published (2004) in Canadian Conference of MB Churches magazines the MB Herald, Chinese MB Herald and Mennonitische Rundschau and in the German magazine Brücke.

tarnished teaching

How to choose stewardship curriculum for your church

By Gary G. Hoag and Jon C. Wiebe

How does your church select from the many stewardship curriculums available today? Do you gravitate to what everyone else is using or the one that is the most "successful"? Or, do you have a biblical criteria for your selection?

In I Timothy 6:3, the "sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ" are set in contrast to the false teaching linked to money prevalent in Ephesus. In other words, bad teaching in relationship to riches was present in the larger community of faith, and Paul wanted Timothy to be sure to teach only that which was "sound" or consistent with the instructions of Jesus. Most teachers don't intend to wrongly divide the word of truth. Most just teach what they were taught while others tend to go with what works.

How do we make sure the biblical stewardship instruction we offer is sound? By following a fourpoint checklist to rightly handle the word of truth when it comes to teaching about money.

r. Avoid sending people to slavery. Jesus never used the "tithe" in teaching his disciples, and neither should we. God owns all of the resources entrusted to us, not merely a percentage. The apostle Paul reminds the Galatians—and us—that if we teach from the Old Testament law, we actually send people to slavery. So, what should we do?

Let's replace Old Testament "tithe" language with New Testament instructions that encourage gracefilled, Spirit-led participation in proportion to God's provision.

In the Old Testament law, God's people were to tithe a percentage. Interestingly, most people today misinterpret the tithe, which referred to a number much larger than 10 percent, as biblical scholar Craig Blomberg states in *Heart, Soul and Money*: "Those who still think tithes are mandatory nor-

mally do not insist on 23.33 percent—10 percent to go to the temple, 3.33 percent to the poor and 10 percent in celebration during festival time."

In plain terms, we don't take the Old Testament law and the New Testament gospel of grace and mash them together like peanut butter and jelly. We celebrate that Jesus fulfills the law for us and sets us free with a new commandment to love. His followers show this love through sacrificial giving, which is the only giving celebrated by Jesus with his disciples (Mark 12:41-44). Sadly, the tithe may be the most Galatian-like teaching in the church today and one of the greatest hindrances to grace-filled, Spiritled generosity.

This is in keeping with Mennonite Brethren theology as we seek to read the Gospels through the



lens of the Sermon on the Mount, the rest of the New Testament through the lens of the Gospels and the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament.

To summarize this first point, here's a rule of thumb to remember: Watch out for teaching that employs Old Testament law language and that focuses on percentages. Why? Our participation in the form of giving is proportionate in the New Testament. Be wary of law language, otherwise you too may send others

2. Steer clear of prosperity gospel. Biblical scholars work to ensure that biblical texts are understood properly in their context so the applications that readers draw from them are accurate. If we read texts out of context, we will likely come to the wrong conclusions. When numerous Old Testament promises linked to God's material provision are applied incorrectly to current contexts, the result is teaching known as prosperity gospel.

Prosperity gospel emerges when we misapply Old Testament texts and simultaneously ignore New Testament teaching. We get into trouble when we affix Old Testament covenant promises for ancient Israel to ourselves in our modern settings. While they may teach us much about God, in taking them out of context we are mixing up the message. Such teaching does not, in fact, reflect the gospel or sound words of Jesus Christ.

A flavor of prosperity gospel prevailed in Ephesus in the first century. Ephesus was the financial capital of the world, and the wealth of the nations was stored in the temple to Artemis. In that setting we could say it paid to be godly, as supporters of the goddess benefited from their pious service. Paul directs his letter to Timothy to this setting and helps him understand that there is great gain in godliness with contentment (6:6) because the purpose of God's provision is not simply prosperity or "enjoyment" (6:17) but also generous sharing (6:18-19).

Here is a guideline to help you be sure not to misread the Scriptures: Be on guard for teaching that takes Old Testament covenant promises for Israel out of context and misapplies them to modern settings, while also understanding Old Testament wisdom literature not as prescriptive ways to manipulate God but as descriptive explanations to help us understand God's instructions linked to his abundant provision.

3. Don't just teach stewardship material because it works culturally. One of our biggest concerns regarding the state of stewardship instruction in the church today is that it focuses on the symptom rather than the root problem. Specifically, the aim is to set people free from being slaves to debt, but rarely is the sin problem addressed, namely, the love of money.

Research studies reveal that most stewardship instruction comes from boxed programs which based on further exploration appear to work culturally but are not sound when analyzed biblically. One prominent church financial program promotes the saying, "Live like no one else so that you can live like no one else" in encouraging Christians to build wealth here on earth. Really? How about a youth curriculum that asks, "Do you want to be a millionaire?" This clashes with the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21.

Is Jesus trying to bankrupt us with his financial advice which makes no sense culturally for ancient or modern readers? The irony is that he is not trying to make sense in the economy of this world. In the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus inviting people to grasp life in the kingdom not linked to money but to God. In his kingdom, followers don't worry about even the basic necessities but rather seek God first and go to him when they need something.

The makers of such church financial programs describe "building wealth" as good stewardship. While this advice may reflect good stewardship instruction, culturally speaking it conflicts with biblical teaching. In other words, people who live on less than they make and build wealth for themselves may be celebrated as good stewards in the modern world, but Jesus calls such people "fools" (Luke 12:13-21). Of course, some giving is encouraged in these boxed programs but not at the level Jesus instructs.

Should we use such curricula in our churches to help people with debt problems? Undoubtedly! People who have never received instructions on living on less than they make should learn basic budgeting as a facet of stewardship. However, if leaders do not address the "love of money" root problem, all efforts will have no lasting kingdom impact.

I (Gary) can testify to this point because it reflects my journey. I followed the cultural teachings to the letter and found myself a greedy lover of money who was ignoring the teachings of Jesus and stockpiling for myself. The culture told me that because I earned it, it was mine, and I should keep it for myself to secure my future. Regrettably, I believed these lies and my actions revealed this. I had to repent.

I (Jon) am a natural "follower of the law." It is how I'm wired. As a young adult, I wanted to know how much I should give—and how much I got to keep. I had questions about tithing off of the net or the gross. It wasn't until I connected generosity with my heart for worship that I was able to give freely and begin to break my love of money.

When cultural practices, even within the church, are inconsistent with New Testament teachings or cause us to ignore Jesus, we must repent and change directions. Why? In the words attributed to Augustine, "If we believe what we like in the gospels and reject what we don't like, it is not the gospel we believe but ourselves." Many God-fearing Americans are playing the rich fool and their financial practices reveal their trust is ultimately in themselves.

So, what should we do? Don't use boxed programs just because they work as they may be promoting cultural rather than biblical values. Instead, be sure your stewardship teaching addresses the root sin issue of the love of money and not just the symptom, slavery to debt. The best way to do this is to read what Jesus said, look at how the early church obeyed and follow the example of the first disciples.

4. Teach and model Jesus' words in relationship to money to unleash generosity. Since the New Testament has much to say about money, the best advice for encouraging Christian generosity is to read Jesus' instructions and do what he says. Statistics show that when pastors teach and model these truths, their congregations grow in the grace of giving.

From a big picture perspective, Jesus' teachings proclaim that God is the source of everything we need, which is why people can enjoy his provision, share it with others in need and put it to work on mission. When his followers obey his instructions, they learn that God, not money, is what they need.

Christ's followers in the world of the New Testament taught and lived this way. They depended on God for everything. They called for cheerful giving, never out of compulsion but to maintain a posture of freely giving and receiving. When the early church lived this way, it celebrated the grace and generosity of their Provider and brought glory to him. Hopefully, this four-point checklist will help ensure that we are raising disciples in this modern era who bring the same glory to him.

Gary G. Hoag serves as president and CEO of Global Trust Partners, the international entity launched by ECFA. GTP multiplies disciples of faithful administration and mobilizes peer accountability groups to increase gospel participation in every nation. He's an ordained minister who trains pastors on stewardship and generosity, a biblical scholar who serves as a visiting professor at seven seminaries in four countries and an author who has written or contributed to more than 10 books. Hoag will be speaking at Gathering 2020, the USMB convention to be held this summer in the Kansas City area.

Jon C. Wiebe has served the U.S. Mennonite Brethren national stewardship ministry, MB Foundation, as president and CEO for over 21 years. MB Foundation provides assistance with charitable giving, fund management, ministry loans and champions biblical stewardship. He is a licensed minister who loves to help individuals and organizations honor God with their money.

body life

Wolf Point church celebrates new beginnings

New building, pastor open doors for new opportunities

For the congregation of Gospel Fellowship Church in Wolf Point, Mont., 2019 was a year of new beginnings, as they dedicated a brand new church building and installed a new pastor, Mike Andrews.

In November 2014, a fire damaged the church extensively, and the decision was made to rebuild at a new location rather than attempt to salvage the old building.

For the past few years, the congregation joined with Bible Community Church in Wolf Point to hold services while waiting for the completion of their new facility. Former pastor Bruce Bogar faithfully served the congregation through this time of transition, although he had announced his intention to retire shortly before the fire took place. He gave the message during the first public service in the new building this past June before handing over the reins to Andrews.

Andrews and his wife, Diane, come to Wolf Point after serving in the Denver area. Mike was the senior pastor at Belleview Community Church, a USMB congregation in Littleton, from 1989 until it merged with another church five years ago to become The Rock Community Church.

After the merger, Mike took on the role of pastor of discipleship at The Rock. After serving in this role for almost five years he felt the position didn't quite fit his areas of gifting.

"Both my wife and I kind of came to a place where we felt like the things we were most passionate about and our spiritual gifts could be better used in a different setting," Andrews says.

He reached out to USMB district ministers and began inquiring about opportunities to serve as a senior pastor.

"When we had made the decision to resign our position at The Rock Community Church, we literally told God, 'We will go wherever you want us to go if you'll just make that clear," Andrews says.

He soon received a call from Central District Conference minister Rick Eshbaugh about an open position at Gospel Fellowship. Mike and Diane visited the church in March 2019 to meet Bogar and the congregation and get a feel for the community.

"At the end of that week, we really felt like God spoke to us very specifically and said, 'Mike and Diane, I want you in Wolf Point," Andrews says.

They returned in April to officially candidate for the position; shortly after, the congregation unanimously voted to hire Andrews as senior pastor.



Nearly 50 women attended a one-day retreat organized by Diane Andrews at Gospel Fellowship in October 2019. Andrews plans to continue her ministry to the women of Wolf Point and surrounding areas through a Bible study launching in February and future retreats.

Photo by Gospel Fellowship Church

The move to Wolf Point was a significant transition for Mike and Diane, who had both grown up and ministered in larger cities, but they believe God made their calling clear.

"Over and over again and in a lot of different ways, God has really confirmed his call on our lives to be in Wolf Point," Andrews says. "We're grateful to be in God's will and serving here."

Celebrating new beginnings

Andrews preached his first sermon at Gospel Fellowship in June 2019, shortly after the first service held in the new building. He was officially installed July 7 as senior pastor.

As of November, Andrews estimates the building was about 98 percent complete with some minor interior finishes yet to be completed as well as some work on the parking lot and driveway.

A building dedication service was held Nov. 3. Andrews gave a sermon titled "Great Expectations," preaching out of Isaiah, and Eshbaugh attended and gave a prayer of dedication.

During the service, each person was given a 5x7 card on which to write their prayers, hopes and dreams for Gospel Fellowship.

There were really a lot of wonderful expressions of enthusiasm and faith," Andrews says. "I think as I read those, the most encouraging thing for me was the sense that the congregation realizes that God wants us to have a vital evangelistic and discipleship ministry in this community."

He adds that a common sentiment in the church body is that now that the building is mostly complete, it is time to be "more intentional about the real work of the church, which is Christ's Great Commission."

Andrews says he would like to work toward making the existing programming at Gospel Fellowship more effective. He believes the new building will allow improvements and growth that were limited when the congregation was sharing a facility with another church body.

Pursuing evangelism and outreach

One of Andrews' passions that he saw an opportunity to pursue more readily in Wolf Point is evangelism.

He was struck by the image of the historic Lewis and Clark Bridge that stretches across the Missouri River near Wolf Point, which he sees as "a reminder that a church ought to be a bridge between the congregation and the community."

He and Diane are looking forward to focusing more on outreach in their area of rural Montana. First, however, they want to take the time to learn more about the people and understand the culture and community dynamics, particularly as Gospel Fellowship sits on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

Both Mike and Diane emphasize the need to support and partner with indigenous leaders in the community in order to bridge the gap between the Native American community and non-Native American residents of Wolf Point.

'I think sometimes in our zeal and our enthusiasm, we rush into programming



When a fire severely damaged the Gospel Fellowship Church building in November 2014, the congregation relocated their facility to the edge of Wolf Point and constructed this new building. The building was dedicated Nov. 3, 2019. Photo by Gospel Fellowship Church

body life

that God's not really asking us to do," Andrews says. "My hope is that we would become very intentional and active and effective at serving as a bridge over which people can find Jesus."

Diane Andrews' passion is fostering spiritual growth and transformation in women, which she has pursued through a nonprofit ministry she founded and directs called R&R Retreats.

She has already begun to impact the women of Wolf Point, as she held a one-day retreat Oct. 12 at Gospel Fellowship called "Divine," which focused on the "divine appointments" Jesus had with women in the Bible.

Nearly 50 women attended the retreat, and two accepted Christ for the first time. Diane says a couple of women who were not previously part of Gospel Fellowship have since begun attending with their families.

Currently, Diane is working to spread the word about a Bible study she is launching in February that will run for six weeks. She is the creator of the study, called "Intimate Moments with Jesus," and it will be open to women in the community of Wolf Point and beyond. She plans to focus on fellowship and giving the women opportunity for connection and friendship building.

She is also planning another retreat at Gospel Fellowship that will take place later in the spring of 2020.

Both Mike and Diane are committed to pursuing the call of the Great Commission in Wolf Point alongside their new congregation.

"It's not an easy commission, but it's not hard to understand," Andrews says. "We want Gospel Fellowship to be an effective instrument in God's hands to lead people to Jesus and then disciple them." —Jessica Vix Allen

New arts center is for community

Arts center provides place to meet Jesus

A well in Samaria. A performing arts center in Peoria, Ariz. The first, the site of a biblical story, the other an 8,000-square foot facility near Phoenix.

What do the two locations have in common?

According to Brad Klassen, lead pastor at Copper Hills Church in Peoria, both the well in the story and the

church's new Center for the Arts (CFTA) fulfill a need and provide a place for people to meet Jesus.

"When (Jesus) met that woman at a well, that is a shaping, molding story for us as a church across the board," Klassen says. "We see what he did and the effect that he has, and it is his effect, so we just simply have said, 'We want to build a well like that well."

Copper Hills' "well"—the Copper Hills Center for the Arts—brings creativity and community together in the church's effort to not only serve the Peoria community but also provide space for life-changing encounters with Jesus.





The Copper Hills Center for the Arts is one way that Copper Hills Church strives to be relevant in its community. The center offers a variety of group classes and private lessons. "We have credentialed, vetted, excellent artists, who also love Jesus and love people," says Cathy Beachy, director of the center. Photo by Copper Hills Church

Building trust

The Center for the Arts is a continuation of the vision Klassen and his wife, Elfie, had when they moved to Peoria to plant Copper Hills Church 22 years ago. After visiting 600 homes that first summer, Klassen says he learned the primary reason people didn't attend church was because the church lacked relevancy in the community.

With a desire to rewrite that narrative. Klassen set out to serve.

So, when Copper Hills put a down payment on a piece of property 12 years ago, Klassen asked the community what kind of facility to build. In visiting with civic leaders, Klassen says the unanimous response was a space for the arts.

"We could just build a church, but what would the community call their own?" Klassen says. "What would they

identify as their gathering space in the community? By then we had figured out we could meet anywhere as a church—a school, a park, a theater, wherever it would be. So to us, the building was secondary but primary for the community."

In waiting for the vision for an arts space to come to fruition, the church served its community and built a foundation of trust. For example, the church has hosted movies in an adjacent park and an annual four peak hiking challenge.

"We serve in a whole variety of ways throughout our community, so this was just a natural next thing for the church to do," Klassen says of opening the CFTA. "I don't think you can just start something like this and go, 'Oh, it's going to be a great ministry, and we'll open it up to the community and they'll all embrace

it, and they'll think it's fantastic.' No, they're going to be skeptical because it's church, unless that church has done years and years of foundational, community-loving work."

Eight years after purchasing the property, Copper Hills began construction on a black box theater for weekend gatherings and a kids' space to potentially double as an art studio.

With rapid growth, and involvement from MB Foundation from the beginning, Copper Hills moved ahead on constructing a performing arts center for the community. The grand opening for its two-story, 8,000-square foot CFTA was Sept. 7, 2019, with the city mayor and other dignitaries in attendance.

A craft coffee shop open seven days a week and an open-air plaza add additional community gathering spaces.

body life

Artistic opportunities

Director Cathy Beachy oversees the CFTA, including deciding which classes to offer and hiring instructors.

Last fall, the CFTA offered approximately 30 opportunities for students, including watercolor, calligraphy, photography, creative writing, sign language, sewing, theater, robotics and creative engineering. The CFTA also offers private lessons and dance classes.

"We're taking the term 'art' and using it quite broadly," Beachy says. "I sometimes say everything from container gardening to robotics and everything in between."

Beachy is intentional when selecting instructors.

"We have credentialed, vetted, excellent artists, who also love Jesus and love people," Beachy says, adding that some instructors are teachers at other educational institutions or former teachers or artists.

"We've really only publicly existed for a few months, but already people are finding us and hearing about what we're doing in the community and wanting to collaborate," Beachy says. "We definitely have a culture of collaboration rather than a culture of competitiveness."

The CFTA has artistic opportunities for a wide variety of ages, from a preballet class for 3- and 4-year-olds to private lessons for retirees. The CFTA's watercolor class had one of the widest age spans, Beachy says, with students ranging from teenagers to retirees.

With an average class size of about eight, instructors have the opportunity to build rapport with students.

"First we love people"

Klassen and Beachy shared stories illustrating the impact the CFTA has had on people's lives.

For example, while teaching a piano lesson to a young girl, Beachy noticed something was off emotionally. Instead of continuing with the lesson—she

postponed it—Beachy asked if everything was okay, then took time to listen to the girl's struggles at home.

"That's a moment from Jesus, and we want our instructors to be aware of that," Klassen says. "Because first we love people, and in that environment, we're teaching them a certain craft or an art form, but (that) never transcends the value of the person. (Jesus) could've just left (the woman at the well) with the water, but he took notice and he took interest. That opened up the story."

Citing other examples, Beachy told of a woman in a creative writing class who came in thinking Christians were weird, but her experience gave her a different frame of reference. She also shared about a young pregnant woman who gave birth and her watercolor instructor was the only one who called to check on her.

"We're using the arts to build relationship and to build rapport and to build trust and to build a love for Jesus," Beachy says.

What's next

Beachy says 2020 will be a year of growth for the CFTA, expanding the artistic disciplines offered to things like culinary arts, executive storytelling, juried art and photography shows, galleries and technology. She looks forward to seven or eight summer camps.

The hope is to offer theater as well.



Beachy says the vision is for another construction project to transform the auditorium into a theatrical space so it can truly be a performing arts center.

More than a place for Copper Hills Church attenders, the CFTA is a place for people to bring their friends and

neighbors.

As Klassen explains, the well in John 4 had faithfully met a need by providing water for years before Jesus showed up. The woman in the story not only got what she came for—water—but when Jesus entered the scene, she received liv-

ing water.

Our hope is people are going to come for water—that's the arts—and they're going to get art at an excellent level ' Klassen says. "Our prayer and our hope everyday—we're so careful who we pick as our teachers and artists and crafts people that lead—is that they will walk away with living art in their soul." — Janae Rempel

Life after Eden

One-man show modernizes story of Adam, Eve

What if Adam and Eve lived today? For Fresno Pacific University (FPU) faculty member Mark Tyler Miller, the headline is not hard to imagine: "Couple evicted from home, one son kills other son."

By exploring the idea, Miller, who serves as program director and assistant professor of theater at FPU, brought the story to life on stage with a reimagining of the biblical story in which a beaniewearing Adam is homeless, Eve is in a new relationship and Cain is serving time in prison for murder.

"Adam and Eve are people that everyone knows, whether they have a relationship with Jesus or not," Miller says. "I find their story to be incredibly universal. We all know what it is like to



Actor, writer and teacher Mark Tyler Miller says, "When writing, I ask the Lord to speak through me, and even in the times I've forgotten to do that, I've been blessed to see that he has spoken regardless. It's a lifelong process of surrendering your control over the thing you're creating and asking him for his far better, far more creative idea." Photo: Mark Tyler Miller

make a terrible choice, to choose ourselves, our pride, our lust, over God even if just for a split second."

In *The Adam Bomb*, a one-man, acoustic musical Miller wrote and

toured, Miller does not shy away from the difficulties of the human experience but embraces the tension in both an authentic and hope-filled way.

Inspiration

Miller says he has had a desire to create something about Adam and Eve for a while, but his graduate school schedule kept him from it. Having previously earned his bachelor of fine arts degree in theater with an emphasis on musical theater from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Miller worked as a professional actor at several theater companies in Seattle for about three years before completing his master of fine arts degree in theater at the University of Illinois: Urbana-Champaign.

Instead of returning to the hustle of the stage, Miller accepted his current position at FPU and moved to Fresno in July 2018. There, before the start of the fall semester, he found time for a new

The Adam Bomb began with a song. As Miller picked a new chord progression on his guitar, the sound sparked words that turned into verses and choruses and eventually became Drowning Man, the song used in the show at Adam's breaking point.

"Drowning Man is all about trying to survive on your own, fighting from your own strength to solve your issues and how utterly hopeless that is," Miller says. "We cannot fight against Satan without surrendering to Jesus and operating from the victory that he unleashed for us on Calvary."

With inspiration to continue writing after receiving positive feedback on Facebook, Miller says a larger story

began to take shape.

I am fascinated by how Adam and Eve moved forward after leaving Eden—after knowing perfection,' Miller says. "This show is basically an exploration in imagining what life would've been like for them if this happened today—how do they keep going

body life

once cut off from utopia, and have to watch the results of their sin everyday—even in their own family?"

When the world falls apart

By September 2018, Miller had completed a first draft of the script.

The name, a play on words with "atom," communicates that Adam views himself like a bomb that destroyed everything, Miller says.

"Adam and Eve are trying to figure out how to move on after their entire world has fallen apart," Miller says, describing the premise in an essay written for FPU's weekly email, Connections. "Adam is now homeless and plays his guitar on the street corner for cash. Eve is in a new relationship with a guy named Tim.... The reason it takes place today is because it forces the audience to deal with characters from the Bible as real people. We don't see them as fig leaf wearing cartoons, but rather, a modern husband and wife, father and mother, who have lost their way, as well as their son(s)."

Using funds from a Provost Faculty Research Grant, Miller developed the show's first full production.

Miller portrays all three characters, distinguishing between them with physical shifts and adding additional distinction by varying voicing in pitch, tempo and duration.

"I've found that many people can't fathom one actor playing more than one thing at a time without the script being a series of monologues or using a large number of costume changes," Miller says. "This script is written in scenes; it is mostly back-and-forth dialogue as opposed to a monologue format."

In addition to being a solo, acoustic musical, *The Adam Bomb* is unique in its willingness to be truthful about the difficulties of the human experience—Miller kept in mind the realities of things like shame, self-hatred, depression and wickedness as he wrote.

"The Adam Bomb is a truly unique piece in that it honors God without giving up the intensity and truth of the human situation," Miller says. "It's a gritty reimagining of what Adam and Eve might be if they lived today but were going through the same circumstances. The songs go deep into questioning where God is and how to rectify what happened to the two of them."

While being careful to acknowledge there is a place for a variety of art forms in the church, even ones of which he's not a fan, Miller says he intentionally shied away from content he describes as "corny" and "churchy"—storylines wrapped in tidy bows or conflict too neatly sewn up—in favor of creating

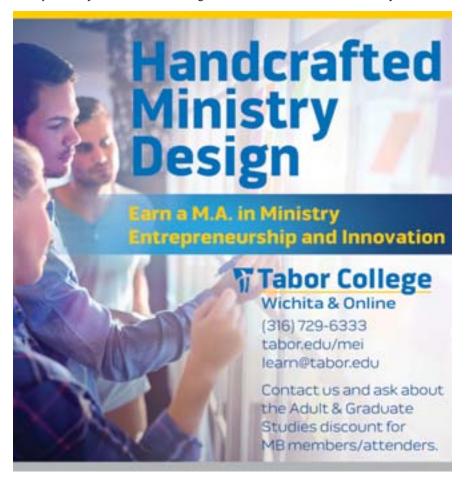
something realistic, raw and relatable.

"To me, the Christian experience is one of intensity," Miller says. "We worship intensely, have intense pain, intense questions and intense joy. When that *Drowning Man* came out on paper, I knew there was something innately true in it—we are all messes traveling toward our heavenly home, and God meets us in the midst of it all."

The tour

Miller says as he worked on the show, he decided it would be useful for out-reach while showcasing a new style of Christian art to churches.

Following an April 25, 2019, premier at FPU, to which he invited pastors and



church leaders, Miller toured the show at four Fresno-area churches the following summer.

"We had eight people respond publicly and accept Jesus as their Savior,' Miller says. "I can honestly say that for that reason alone, this is the most important show I've ever done."

He welcomes opportunities to tour The Adam Bomb and is seeking producers to financially support a national

"I want to do this show everywhere now, nationally and internationally," Miller says. "I've seen that theater can be a great tool for ministry. I've seen that it is possible to create a show about God that doesn't chase away nonbelievers."

More recently, Miller directed a November production by the FPU theater department of Leaving Iowa: The Comedy About Family Vacations. He is working with a new script about Judas and John Wilkes Booth interacting in

Miller also writes worship songs and serves as a worship leader at The Legacy Christian Church in Clovis,

Our job as artists is to reflect truth to our audience, and I believe that means we have to be painfully honest about what we go through as humans," Miller says. "We don't do that to ever degrade or accuse God in any way, but rather to let others know that they are not alone in their pursuit of righteousness—it is a hard journey in this life but there is an abundance of love and freedom to be tapped into because he first loved us." — Janae Rempel

For more information on a national tour of this show, contact Miller on Instagram at @theadambombmusical or Facebook at The Adam Bomb.

Kids learn new ways to worship

Worship through art focus of Bakersfield children's camp

eritage Bible Church in Bakers-I field, Calif., held its first ever Art Camp for kids going into kindergarten through sixth grade in July 2019. Art Camp, advertised as "an explosion of worship," was conceived and organized by Jen Gonzales, children's ministry director at the church.

Gonzales says she had been wanting to organize a program similiar to a vacation Bible school for some time, but she wanted to do something unique.

"I was thinking outside the box," Gonzales says. "What could I do to inspire kids, to teach them about the love of the Lord, but be more hands-on?"

Gonzales saw a need when she first began working at Heritage Bible Church to emphasize worship among the youth and also to give kids an expanded understanding of what "worship" can look like.

"I think when people think of worship, specifically children and even into adults, they think of just singing to the Lord, which is an amazing form of worship," Gonzales says. "But there's more than one way to worship the Lord. I wanted to bring out that they can worship God in art, they can worship God in singing, they can worship God in speaking with someone."

She also wanted to give kids an opportunity to disconnect from the technology they are surrounded by and create art with their hands.

'I wanted to get back down to being a kid and having fun," Gonzales says.

An idea in action

Inspired by the book The Art of Worship, Gonzales created the plan for four sessions that included arts and crafts, music—both singing and dancing—and teaching. Each child who attended would also receive a handmade tie-dved shirt that Gonzales and a friend made to exemplify the idea of an "explosion of worship."

The sessions were held on four Wednesday evenings in July, as Gonzales found she was able to secure more volunteer commitments with a once-a-week format rather than for four consecutive nights.

Gonzales advertised the event primarily on Facebook and by word of mouth. The camp was not limited to children connected to the church but was promoted as open to anyone in the community who wanted to attend.

She expected around 30 to 40 children the first week and was surprised when over 50 children showed up. Each following week also drew 45 to

The camp was held in the gymnasium of Heritage Christian School, a school for children in preschool through eighth grade that falls under the umbrella of Heritage Bible Church. Gonzales also serves as the director of the business office and admissions at the school.

Gonzales had between eight and 10 volunteers assisting her each week. She had inquiries from some parents of children with special needs and was able to call on volunteers who had experience with special needs to work one-on-one with these kids throughout the evening.

The camp was free and included a meal. Gonzales saw it as an opportunity to meet a need in her community, which is a lower income area.

"I wanted to be able to have a place for kids to come, get a free meal and



Children attending the art camp put on by Heritage Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif., in July 2019 display one of their art projects. The camp was held in the gymnasium of Heritage Christian School and focused on teaching kids about the character of God and how to worship him in different and unique ways. Photo: Heritage Bible Church

hear the Word and have some fun," says Gonzales.

She kept the meals easy and kid-friendly. One week, Gonzales ordered 250 chicken nuggets from McDonald's, where the employees thought the order was a joke—until she came to pick it up. She was able to share about the camp with the employees, and one woman ended up sending her daughter to the camp.

Teaching through interaction

Each week had a theme that focused on the character of God: God as my shepherd, my victory, my fortress and rock and as holy. Gonzales based the evening's craft and teaching around that week's theme, while also making sure the core of the gospel was presented each week.

"I knew we needed to make sure that we were doing the gospel every night because I didn't know if that one student was going to come back the next time," Gonzales says. The first week, Gonzales spoke about Christ as our shepherd. In order to keep the kids engaged, she instructed them to pay attention and "baa" each time the word "sheep" was said. Another week, she told the story of David and Goliath but began by telling the story incorrectly to see if the kids would catch her mistakes.

"I thought back to being a child, and what I remember the most is when there was interaction between me and my teacher," says Gonzales. "Instead of just telling them the story, I wanted to pull the story out of them. I wanted them to be a part of it."

She also kept her plan for each evening flexible, allowing for changes in the order of events from week to week based on how the kids were reacting and if they were staying engaged.

"I've been working with kids for over 15 years now and one thing I know is they don't hold their attention span very long," says Gonzales. "We kind of went with the flow of the night."

The month was capped off with an outdoor picnic and water slide night, during which Gonzales recapped what the kids had learned about worship throughout the camp.

Feedback and future plans

Gonzales says she received lots of positive feedback from both kids who attended and from parents. She heard from several kids during the camp that they wanted to invite friends or family to the next week's session, and students at the school have approached her in the months since camp with more questions about worship.

Two children dedicated their lives to Christ during the camp and were later baptized.

Gonzales has also had many parents ask about future plans for the camp. She is planning another art camp for the summer of 2020 and would like to try holding it on four consecutive days so kids will not miss weeks due to family trips. — *Jessica Vix Allen*

mission & ministry

This is us

Three core values unite USMB churches

s I think about doing mission and ministry as a conference of churches, I think in terms of a family. It's a family, with like-minded intention, doing things together for the sake of the kingdom of God. As Mennonite Brethren, we have agreed that we want to be joined, hopefully in unity, for living out mission, theology, values, serving and learning. One could say this is a covenant we have with one another. We are Mennonite Brethren—and what we have determined to do together is our collective identity as we serve the King of Kings. When you stop and think about the implications of that—that is a very big deal.

I believe we are united by our specific call to ministry because God has willed it so. Within this family God wants to shape us individually and together into the image of Jesus. Serving as Jesus served. Living as Jesus taught. Being passionate about helping more come to know him. Being deeply committed to Jesus occurs best when we are connected to a healthy family. First, that's our local church. Secondly, that's our larger USMB family.

As a national family, we have determined together three core things that we covenant together to be our priority: evangelism/church multiplication, intentional disciple-making and leadership development. These are not just cheesy words thrown on the page—they are our heartbeat. It's about telling and showing those who are currently spiritually lost about Jesus so that they might become his disciples. Helping each other grow as followers of Jesus and thus multiply our disciple-making. Planting new churches and strengthening our existing churches. Challenging gifted individuals to lead and develop their leadership so that the church grows, multiplies and is stronger—this is us.

These shared commitments represent what we believe we must be about and that we can do it better together than alone. Through this family, known as USMB, we are asking God to allow us to have a significant impact in our communities, regions and nation. Many of our churches are actively pursuing and investing in this collective mission and ministry. Some of our churches are not. I'm inviting all of our churches to commit to our family's vision!

I have a list of the many things we are doing as the USMB family. The list is way too long to add here. Yet, I hear from some that they don't find value in our collective mission, and so they don't support or participate. For me, that is so sad. We can accomplish so much more if we do it together and even more if every church is involved.

I thoroughly enjoy being a part of the MB family. I chose to become a part of this family in 1979 along with my wife, Janna. So, I don't get the desire and movement toward independence when it comes to churches. The body of Christ is local, regional, national and international. It functions as a body, with all the body's parts doing their designed thing (1 Corinthians 12). We need one another. We need healthy MB churches. We need healthy district conferences. We need a healthy USMB conference of churches. We thrive together.

We are a family of churches by the will of God, and we are united by one Spirit for the specific call to ministry—a believing community choosing to express our following of Jesus within this family.

So, as we begin a new year of mission and ministry, I invite all of our MB churches across the nation to invest, covenant, utilize, connect, network, enjoy and support our USMB family. This is us.



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, Ianna, live in Edmond, Okla., where they attend Cross Timbers Church.

vantage point

Will you be my neighbor?

Movie prompts thoughts on reconciliation, grace

onna and I spent Thanksgiving Day together without our children and grandchildren. We had gathered the weekend before, as is our custom, and enjoyed a wonderful time of loving family, delicious food and thankful hearts. God had blessed us more than we could ask or imagine!

But for Thanksgiving Day, the two of us were alone and enjoying a day of rest and relaxation. I thought it would be a good time to do something special for just us. So, I bought a couple matinee tickets to go see It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood, the story of Fred Rogers, "Mister Rogers" of children's television fame. On the way to the movie theater, I remarked to Donna that it would likely be a bit slower paced than the Star Wars movies we have seen and will be taking our children and grandchildren to when they come for our family Christmas celebration.

The story is less about Fred Rogers and more about the investigative reporter who was assigned to do a small feature article for Esquire magazine on Rogers back in November of 1998 under the title, "Can You Say...Hero?" written in real life by journalist Tom Junod. Here's the online reprint of the article: https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a27134/canyou-say-hero-esq1198/

In the movie, Tom Junod's character is named Lloyd Vogel (played by Matthew Rhys). The movie is mostly about his estranged childhood relationship with his father who left his mom as she was dying. The story is as much about Lloyd Vogel's struggle to be reconciled to his father as it is about Mister Rogers and his neighborhood. It is about the inbreaking of the neighborhood in Lloyd Vogel's life and it affects every relationship he has, from his infant son, his wife, his sister and eventu-

ally to his dying father.

I identified with Lloyd Vogel. There are some parallels in the story to my own relationship with my father who divorced my mother, though not when I was a child, nor in abandonment of her or our family. Still, my pain and sense of helplessness were just as real as a 20-something, married adult as it must have been for Vogel in the movie. I had to find my own reconciliation with my dad, and though perhaps not fully, a degree of grace and forgiveness eventually came to me.

The pain we bear as unwilling victims of others' poor decisions or worse, outright sin, is hard to pry from our hearts. I suspect many of us live inside selfconstructed prisons of anger and bitterness that keep us locked in as much or more than it keeps those who have hurt us locked out. Truth be told, they are locked inside us when we cannot let go of

Jesus was asked once, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). He responded with the story of the Good Samaritan. I think the teaching is that anyone who is hurting and who I have the capacity to care for is my neighbor. Whoever is hurting encompasses a great number of people, maybe mostly everyone we know, likely even those who have hurt us. Could I, should I, be their neighbor too?

I hope and pray that I can become a better neighbor to those around me. Won't you be my neighbor?



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

church news

MII FSTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Angela Blanco, Alex Blanco and Jordan Blaska were baptized at Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., Nov. 24. Grace Barks, Ben Brakeman, Ashley DeVries, Makayla Firkins, Chester Lelea, Ana Lelea, Mayley Nord, Cohen Peters, Carter Stambook and Kate Stambook were baptized Oct. 27. Adam Kneale, Kobi Parks, Shelby Rogers and Lexi Russell were baptized Sept. 29. Aaron Kolb, Ellie Kolb, Chester Lelea, Ana Lelea and Marri Tillema were received as members Nov. 10.

Chad Tessman, Jessica Tessman, Steve Thieszen and Molly Thieszen were received as members at Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., Nov. 17.

Cole Moriarty, Virginia Kelly, Riley Ann Palmer, Shelby Harp, Sierra Hardy, Desiree Moriarty, Aspen Lerud and Evelyn Cabrera-Lopez were baptized at South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus, Nov. 17.

Two people were baptized at Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park, Utah, Nov. 17.

Ray Cardona, Vanessa Cardona, Serena Cardona, Sebastian Cardona, Tristan Cardona and Betty Sparks were received as members at Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., Nov. 10.

Jessica Norris was baptized at North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., Nov. 3. Bob Keener and Roger Pruter were baptized Sept. 15.

Katy Brashears and Taten Hubbard were baptized at Fairview (Okla.) MB Church. Nov. 3. Nelson Frantz and Pam Frantz were received as members.

Jacob Isaac and Kyla Isaac were baptized and received as members at Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., Aug. 18. Brandon

Garcia and Grayson Ratzlaff were baptized May 19. Garcia was also received as a member

WORKERS

Jeremy Matlock began serving as lead pastor at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, following a congregational vote of affirmation Nov. 17. Mike Shields concluded his service as interim pastor.

Marcia Shewey concluded her custodial service at Fairview (Okla.) MB Church.

Mark Mariscal concluded his service as children's and youth director at Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif., Oct. 20.

Susan Evans began serving as family pastor at Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., Oct. 21.

Clair Redcay concluded serving in maintenance at Corn (Okla.) MB Church.

Brian Isaak concluded his service as youth ministry leader at Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 6. Elijah Smith is the new youth ministry leader.

DEATHS

Boley, Darold Dewayne, Newton, Kan., 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.

Buller, Helen Rose (Unruh), Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Jan. 22, 1925-Jan. 25, 2019. Parents: Anthony H. and Anna (Albrecht) Unruh. Spouse: Charles C. Buller, deceased. Children: Gilbert, Edith Buller-Breer, Ethel Buller, Duane; eight grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Dick, Tiffany Jo (Pinkston), Wichita, Kan., of First MB Church, Wichita, Dec. 9, 1976-Oct. 16, 2019. Parents: Chris and Penelope Jo (Garrett) Pinkston. Spouse: Bob Dick. Children: Micah, Kaitlyn.

Enns, Jacob George, Dinuba, Calif., member of Dinuba MB Church, Oct. 7, 1920-Sept. 11, 2019. Spouse: Annie. Children: Norman, Joanne Tatum; four grandchil-

Enns, Johnny L., Kingsburg, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 24, 1919-Oct. 30, 2019. Parents: John F. and Anna (Friesen) Enns. Spouse: Erma Enns, deceased. Children: Bernie, Lois Pierce, Curtis; six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Euthon, Manning L., member of First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., Feb. 7, 1926—Jan. 21, 2019. Spouse: Sylvia, deceased. Children: Lynda Blakeslee, Andy, Dayna Payne; four grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

Ewert, Anna, Mountain Lake, Minn., member of Carson MB Church, Delft, Minn., Jan. 14, 1914—July 22, 2019. Parents: David H. and Agatha (Baerg) Ewert.

Fesler, Marilyn A., Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, March 6, 1935-Nov. 12, 2019. Parents: August and Clara (Hullman) Sittner, Spouse: Melvin F. Fesler (deceased). Children: Kathy Dick, Kris Murphy, Karen Schmucker (deceased); seven grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Glanzer, Emanuel Willard, Bridgewater, S.D., member of Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, S.D., Oct. 17, 1933-Oct. 30, 2019. Parents: Jacob H. and Lavina (Wollman) Glanzer. Spouse: Mary Magdalene Hofer. Children: Susan Hopkins, Tim, Tom; six grandchildren; six great-grandchildren.

Heinrichs, Leonard Ruben, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Nov. 4, 1918-Sept. 23, 2019. Parents: John and Anna Heinrichs. Spouse: Luella. Children: Stanley (deceased), Martin, Gordon, Leland, Annett, Laural.

Hilts, Sharon, Dinuba, Calif., of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 28, 1943-Oct. 7, 2019. Parents: Walter and Frances (Hofer) Warkentin. Spouse: Robert "Bob" Hilts.

Henderson MB Church changes its name

denderson MB Church in Henderson, Neb., has changed its name to Living Hope Church. The official transition to Living Hope Church happened Nov. 17, 2019, during the church's three-weekend Harvest Missions Festival, which included themes of "Honoring the past" on Nov. 10 and "Čelebrating the future" on Nov. 17 and concluded with a meal and guest

At the request of the church's Leadership Team, Pastor Luke Haidle began researching the possibility of rebranding in January 2018. The church voted to rebrand in Fall 2018 and voted to adopt the new name in Spring 2019. The church was founded in 1878.

"If you look at the 140-year history of this church, they have made some bold moves for the sake of the gospel," Haidle says. "This is another such step of faith, born out of a desire to see God's kingdom expand in Nebraska." -CL

church news

Children: Heidi Schmidt, Kristen Jones, Michael; six grandchildren.

Just, Wilbur 'Will' F., Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, Jan. 25, 1933—Dec. 26, 2018. Parents: Dave and Clara Just. Spouse: Hope Just, Phebe Just (deceased). Children: Mark, Tim, Lori Julius, Sharleen Murphy, Jonathan; 14 grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Peters, Donna R., Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, May 24, 1937—Oct. 12, 2019. Parents: Victor and Lydia Newfield. Spouse: Douglas Peters, deceased. Children: Deanna, Darleen Reimer, Delayne Huskey; five grandchildren.

Ramer, David W., Couderay, Wis., member of Exeland (Wis.) Mennonite Church, April 22, 1939—Oct. 8, 2019. Spouse: Marcile. Children: Kenyon, Myron; three grandchildren.

Rempel, Carl, Wichita, Kan., of First MB Church, Wichita, Nov. 19, 1961—June 19, 2019. Parents: Wendell and Janice Rempel. Spouse: June (Funk) Rempel. Children: Ethan, Graham, Stephanie.

Savoia, John Salvatore, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, June 5, 1927—March 9, 2019. Parents: Jeremiah and Erminia Savoia. Spouse: Lola Washmon, Daphyn Smith, deceased. Children: John, Tim, Ruth Restropo, Deborah Beman (deceased). Step-children: Terrie Todd, Cynthia Fleming, Janis McIntyre, Kim Washmon, Greg Washmon; seven grandchildren, seven step-grandchildren, nine stepgreat-grandchildren; three step-great-great-grandchildren.

Schroeder, Eldene Grace, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Feb. 3, 1941—Oct. 17, 2019. Parents: Arthur M. and Pearl E. (Koop) Schroeder.

Schultz, LeRoy L., Henderson, Neb., member of Henderson MB Church, Dec. 28, 1928—June 12, 2019. Parents: John L. and Helena (Loewen) Schultz. Spouse: Lilah Betty Goertzen, deceased. Children: Virgil, Lowell, Lola Dorsey, Milton (deceased).

Smith, Michael R. "Mike," Topeka, Kan., of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, July 20, 1946—Nov. 21, 2019. Parents: Mary Tipton Cellers and Lawrence Smith. Spouse: Jeanette (Kopper) Smith. Children: Wendy Richards, Jason, Jana Hildebrand, Kim Burk; 14 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

Teetzen, Nancy, Garden City, Kan., of Garden Valley Church, Garden City, April 20, 1951—Sept. 30, 2019. Parents: Molly and Duane Williams. Spouse: Paul Teetzen. Children:

Micala, Danelle, Briana Jamieson; two grandchildren.

Thiesen, Mary, Reedley, Calif., member of Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church, Dec. 29, 1920—Oct. 31, 2019. Parents: Jacob and Agnes (Hildebrand) Neufeld. Spouse: Edwin Thiesen (deceased). Children: Jerry, Jean Dick, Janet Warkentin, Joe; 18 grandchildren, 24 greatgrandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Thiessen, Frances, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 12, 1923—Dec. 3, 2019. Parents: Arthur and Kathryn (Bergen) Froese. Spouse: Willie Thiessen (deceased).

Wagner, Harvey Ronny, Omaha, Neb., of Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb., Feb. 16, 1941—Nov. 13, 2019. Spouse: Karen.

Wiens, Mary Lou (Lohrenz), Wichita, Kan., of First MB Church, May 16, 1929—Oct. 19, 2019. Spouse: Calvin, deceased. Children: Charles, Philip, Cheryl Doeden, Phyllis (deceased); eight grandchildren, 12 greatgrandchildren.

Wittrig, Roy "Russell," Tony, Wis., member of Exeland (Wis.) Mennonite Church, Sept. 7, 1921—May 6, 2019. Parents: Ed and Alma Wittrig. Spouse: Ina Roth. Children: Gerald, Frances Vaughn, Charlotte Kesan, Peggy Kuehne, Wayne (deceased); 11 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, 11 great-great-grandchildren.

Yoder, Merle J., Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, Jan. 28, 1945— Nov. 12, 2019. Parents: John B. and Anna (Jones) Yoder. Spouse: Judith (Johnson) Thiel. Children: Sheila Paiz, Jedidiah, Keturah Lee; nine grandchildren, five greatgrandchildren.

REACHING IN

FELLOWSHIP

Women's Ministries at **Parkview MB Church**, **Hillsboro**, **Kan.**, hosted "Evening in December" Dec. 1 with a catered dinner, a craft and music.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted more than 250 people for its annual Old Town Peoria Thanksgiving Feast.

Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., hosted a women's movie night Nov. 3, including popcorn, drinks and a time for fellowship after the movie.

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., hosted a "Minute to Win It" event with ice cream and prizes Aug. 18. The church hosted Southern Hills MB Church for a 55+ brunch Aug. 29.

WORSHIP

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted a contemplative Advent experience Dec. 1 with art, music, prayer and reflection curated to create space for encountering Christ.

Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo., hosted a worship night Nov. 15, including a new song recorded by Lighthouse Worship.

CELEBRATIONS

"Jingle Jam" at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.,** was a month-long Christmas
celebration including photos with Santa, various contests, carolers, food, inflatables, ornament making, a photo booth and fire pits.

The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., hosted a "Merry Christmas Bakersfield" event Dec. 13 with tree lighting, a Christmas express ride, food trucks, interactive crafts, face painting, a snow room, hot cocoa, bounce houses and music.

North Fresno Church, Fresno, Calif., celebrated its 50th anniversary with a family picnic Nov. 23, 2019, followed the next day by Sunday morning worship services and a gala that evening attended by nearly 500 quests.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church held a Celebration Sunday Nov. 24 to thank God for his faithfulness in the past year and praise him in advance for the year to come. The event included a Thanksgiving meal and celebration service with praise and worship and baptisms.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., assembled 20 "Blessing Bags" Dec. 13 with food to give to people in need in the community.

Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo., partnered with Community Ministry to provide Christmas gifts to 100 kids and families in need throughout Denver.

Advent Conspiracy classes and projects at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** encouraged opportunities to worship fully, spend less, give more and love all. The church partnered with Robinson Elementary to host a Neighborhood Carnival Oct. 31. The event included games, a slide, candy and prizes.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.,

hosted 400 people from the community for its Oct. 27 Trunk or Treat event, which included decorated trunks, a costume contest, games. two bounce houses and food.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.,

hosted local EMS, firefighters and police officers and their families for lunch after its Oct. 20 church service.

A group from Buhler (Kan.) MB Church served at the Hutchinson Soup Kitchen Dec. 21 and Oct. 19. Others helped by baking cookies.

GLOBALLY

Multiple churches packed shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child, including Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., (126 boxes), Buhler (Kan.) MB Church (71), North Oak Community

Church, Hays, Kan., (990 boxes) and Hillsboro (Kan) MB Church (204 boxes).

The women's Monday Bible study group at Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., organized a service project and completed 24 MCC Immigration Detainee Care Kits.

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church completed 202 school kits for MCC

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church Job Openings

Associate Pastor for Worship and Connections: Perkiomenville Mennonite Church in rural southeast Pennsylvania is seeking an associate pastor for worship and connections. This full-time role includes overseeing worship and youth ministries and guiding connection ministries. For a full job description, contact Pastor Mike Spinelli 215-234-4011 or mike@perkmc.com.

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

Celebration

Sunday, March 29, 2020, Mennonite Brethren Church, Fairview, Okla., will be celebrating 125 years as a congregation. A history of the church will be presented from 9:15-10:15 a.m., including testimonies from some of our older church members. The worship service will be from 10:40 a.m.—12:00 noon. It will be a praise time to highlight God's goodness, mercy and blessings to this congregation as well as a challenge to move into the future, called by God to be witnesses unto the ends of the earth. Larry Martens, from Fresno, California, will deliver the challenge. At noon, there will be a group photo taken of everyone in attendance, followed by lunch. We invite all of our friends and relatives to join us for this exciting day in the life of our

At noon, Sept. 16, 1893, approximately 6 million acres of virgin prairie in northwest Oklahoma Territory (now Oklahoma) was opened for settlement in the Cherokee Strip Land Run. About 100,000 people literally raced to stake a claim to the 160-acre parcels of land that were available. By nightfall, almost all of those quarter sections had been claimed. Among the large contingent of land seekers were a good number of Mennonite

Brethren families seeking land for a new start. Many of these families ended up in the Fairview, Major County, area of Oklahoma. Upon arrival new home sites (dugouts) were established.

A strong desire for worship was felt among these brethren. So, a small grove of trees one mile north of our present church became the first worship location. Soon worship was moved to various family dugouts. A decision was then made to establish a house of worship across the road to the south. Discussions revealed great distances to be travelled over rough trails to reach this site so a consensus was reached to build two churches. One was built about three miles to the southeast and named South MB Church. The other one was about three miles to the northwest and named North MB Church. In 1951, these two groups merged and built a large church building in the city of Fairview. In 1980 work began, and was completed in 1983, on our present structure which is one mile east of the center of town. Today this congregation is an active and vibrant part of the Southern District Conference of MB Churches.

From TESTIMONY, page 9

new doctor who prescribed different medication.) We knew God could give us a child, but we also knew we could be okay in the waiting if he didn't.

For IVF, I had to take shots to enlarge my ovaries—I ached from all the shots. I had ultrasounds to determine when my eggs had matured, then had a trigger shot to release them. The surgery to remove the eggs was very painful. After injecting my husband's sperm into the eggs, we waited about five days to see if the embryos would develop. During this process, we found genetic problems with some of our embryos. Had I gotten pregnant before I could've lost the baby. Even in this we saw God's hand.

Continuing to cover the process in prayer, we scheduled a transfer last March to insert two of the embryos into my uterus, then waited to take a pregnancy test. One took.

Throughout my pregnancy came other concerns. I developed gestational diabetes and also had various hormone treatments to make sure I didn't lose the baby.

I had a C-section at 37 weeks. After five years of infertility, we were close to bringing home a child. Still, there was uncertainty. How would the surgery go? Would she really be born alive?

Our daughter Trinity is four months old now. Going through infertility has made it hard for me to relax as a mom and trust that everything is okay, but God is showing me how to be the mother he's called me to be. He's giving me patience for the hard days and strength for the late nights.

Infertility made us better and stronger people because we allowed God to change and refine us through our suffering. Our faith was tested in the fire.

We know not everyone may have a child, but we also know God will never leave or forsake us. Scripture talks about running our race with endurance, setting our eyes on Jesus. If I had been desperate for quick fixes, my life would be in shambles, but because I trusted God, it's more beautiful than I could've ever imagined.

from the national director

The Cross is center

Focus for 2020 is the significance of the Cross

In this next season in the life of USMB, I'm asking our USMB staff to revel in the full breadth of God's work at the Cross. The very center of our lives as Jesus-followers (being Christ-centered) is the Cross's saving significance. To be clear, by the Cross I mean all the fullness of the passion, torture, nailing to, death, burial, resurrection and ascension that we know as the gospel. And for this essay I am capitalizing the word Cross for emphasis.

Ingesting into our hearts and more fully knowing the majesty and magnitude of what truly occurred on the Cross is paramount for us moving forward with renewed passion and missional urgency. As we emphasize the magnificent breadth of the atonement and focus in on Jesus' substitution (taking our place), an essential element of our salvation, this, the message, is what we must be ambassadors for with all our effort. The message of the Cross, what Jesus did for us as he gave his life as our ransom, is life-transforming—if believed.

The incredible work of the Cross: God's instrument of divine victory and divine revelation, illustrating God's character and displaying his power as victor in the defeat of the enemy, Satan, the ugly one who revels in sin and death. And throughout it all, occurred because of God's unending love for us even when we didn't deserve it. There's more to it than even all of that—as the full splendor of the Cross is truly beyond our full comprehension. I'm one of those who believes we can't even know the full extent of everything that was accomplished at the Cross until we get to heaven.

Why focus on the Cross? Again, the Cross compels us into the world of life

on mission as Jesus' disciples. Mission must be our response to the grandeur of the Cross's implications for us as a people and as individuals who follow him, love him and have been adopted by him as sons and daughters. Too often we focus on doctrine, and perhaps doxology, but neglect the effects and realities of the Cross for disciplemaking. Knowing about the Cross is not just about soteriological principles but about the shaping of a disciple's life. If we grasp just a minimalist understanding of what happened at the Cross, we'll likely lose out on the indescribable power we can know

Ephesians 1:18-20 tells us that the power available to us as believers is the same as the power exerted when Jesus was raised from the dead. Resurrection power! Too often, we don't even come close to realizing that kind of power and the freedom it can bring. At the least, more knowledge about the fullness of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross propels us to the world which desperately needs him and his forgiveness.

The world needs to know what happened on Calvary, that Jesus, the one without sin, took on sin for us, paying the penalty for that sin, satisfying God's wrath and making us right before God Almighty. It is amazing, is it not? People need to know and experience in their soul the Cross—what really happened that day, who it was (God) hanging there, why he had to die and why he could not and would not stay dead but is alive (resurrected) and can and will be our Savior if we turn to him, believe and repent. "We've a story to tell to the nations.... A story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light."



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.



YOU CAN DIRECT UP TO \$100,000

- Pay no income tax on your gift
- Help support your favorite causes
- Build your charitable legacy
- Use your IRA in the way you want



By taking a distribution from your IRA this year, you may pay more in taxes and even reach a higher tax bracket. If you are 70 1/2 or older, rolling over part of your IRA's required minimum distribution to your favorite charity can help reduce your tax bill while also investing in the Kingdom.

You decide which charities benefit from your gift and when they receive it. MB Foundation has the necessary expertise and services to set up your IRA Charitable Rollover gift and distribute the funds according to your wishes. Contact us to get started with your gift.

Get Started at www.mbfoundation.com/giftmyira or contact us for more information!

