

CHRISTIAN LEADER

March / April 2020

MCC turns 100 Page 10

Busting barriers with a buddy Page 17

Strong and generous Page 26



The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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in this issue

March / April 2020

FEATURES: COMMUNITY

- 10 MCC turns 100
EMILY JONES
Mennonite Brethren part of the MCC story

- 12 Living resurrection power
LYNN KAUFFMAN
Reflections on balance, forgiveness and freedom

- 14 On the road to recovery
KEVIN LARSON
How small groups can lead to big change

FIND MORE ONLINE:

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- Friends with God
RYAN TURNBULL
- Do what Jesus does
MARK ROGERS

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 The n ws
- 7 5 minutes with...
- 17 Body Life
■ *Busting barriers with a buddy*
■ *Scripture is emphasis of series*
■ *Sanger church hosts Neighborhood Market*
■ *Congolese churches explore joining USMB*
- 28 Church news

COLUMNS

- 4 Editorial
JANAE REMPEL
- 8 Frontlines
JASON QUIRING
- 9 Testimony
ROBERT BOESE
- 25 Mission & Ministry
- 26 Vantage Point
JON C. WIEBE
- 31 From the national director
DON MORRIS

Community voices

Viewing immigration through the lens of community

The March/April issue continues our Vision 2020 focus on Matthew 22:37-40 in which Jesus commands us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. You'll find features pertaining to loving others in community, whether providing humanitarian aid to those in need, gathering in a support group for transformation or the practice of confession leading to forgiveness and freedom.



I've wrestled a bit in defining community. It seems like community involves the gift of time spent with others, of stories shared and heard. It provides a support system for sharing fears and dreams, as well as space for difficult conversation. I've concluded that community not only offers solidarity, security and hope, but also welcomes others to sit at the table.

Thinking about loving others in community has given me a unique lens through which to view my recent experience on a Mennonite Central Committee-led borderlands tour in Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, in January.

On the border, I saw community in action, providing hope in what feels like an overwhelming situation.

For example, in Agua Prieta, Mexico, where migrants experience harassment from organized crime, Christian Peacemaker Teams volunteers accompany migrants to help them feel safe while they wait to present themselves at the port of entry. The CAME migrant shelter is another safe space.

In Tucson, Casa Alitas welcomes asylum-seeking families in transit and offers housing, food, clothing and medical screening before ultimately helping families reach their sponsors.

Listening is also part of community, and on the border, I heard many voices.

One evening I sat across the table from an asylum-seeking family fleeing violence in Guerrero, Mexico. The man's grandfather, uncle, cousin and father have been killed by organized crime, and he fears he will be next.

The next afternoon, I sat with a Border Patrol agent who said increased infrastructure will help secure the border. He's undergone resiliency training to support agents experiencing emotional turmoil and has also added his own water to stations in the desert. He fears his career choice could negatively impact his family.

We visited with a victim of labor trafficking who spent more than two years in detention, toured the Florence Detention Center and much more. If anything, listening helped me better see the complexities of a situation that involves people, not only policy.

What does community love mean for the stranger at our southern border? While I'm not sure where to go from here, it's important to get to know people, resisting the temptation either to vilify or to romanticize.

Working toward a solution may mean revisiting immigration reform, or it may mean working to help people stay secure in their communities, as the coffee co-operative Café Justo is doing. (See www.justcoffee.org).

Either way, community begins with conversation. When strangers become known, we will be motivated less by fear and more by love and be better equipped to navigate a path forward. ▀



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Workshops slated for USMB Gathering 2020

USMB has announced a slate of workshops to be held during USMB Gathering 2020, July 21-25, 2020, in Independence, Mo. Workshops have been designed to equip attendees for increased impact in stewardship, leadership, evangelism and ministry.



Two workshops will be offered during the Pastors' Conference Wednesday, with one focusing on the development of a healthy marriage and the other an evaluation of a healthy church in small, rural contexts.

Ten workshops will be offered Friday during the National Convention, five in Track 1 at 1:15 p.m. and five in Track 2 at 2:30 p.m.

Topics include stewardship; developing and equipping female church leaders; the immigration crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border; church rebranding; the diaspora and the spreading of the Gospel; strengths of small, rural churches; modeling God's love in the local community; the plan for U.S. church-planting and strategies the church can use for connecting with Millennials and Generation Z.

As preparations continue to be made, a prayer team is being assembled to pray before and during USMB Gathering 2020 events.

Join us in Independence this July, expecting profound spiritual resurgence and transformation as we strive toward increasing our impact.

For a detailed description of workshops and list of presenters, visit: www.usmb.org/gathering2020-workshops. —USMB

USMB Leadership Board met in November

When the USMB Leadership Board met Nov. 8-9, 2019, in Omaha, Nebraska, their key topics of discussion coincided with decisions made by the board.

The board had a lengthy discussion regarding changes at Multiply, the North American MB mission agency that had partnered with the church planting agency C2C Network. The partnership ended in June 2019 with a \$1.5 million gap largely due to a church planting model that was not sustainable. Seventeen Multiply staff members were released. Randy Friesen, Multiply president, attended the board meeting while Brent Warkentin, Multiply board chair, joined via conference call.

The Leadership Board identified five suggestions going forward related to Multiply staff and board evaluations and financial reporting to the U.S. and Canadian boards.

National Director Morris says via an email interview that since the November Leadership Board meeting, a task force comprised of four Canadians and four Americans has been working with consultant John Radford to review Multiply leadership, organizational culture and board functioning. The task force hopes to provide a report this summer.

The board approved a letter written by the U.S. Board of Faith and Life regarding alternative service to the National Commission of Military Service. The letter was sent in early December and a copy was sent to USMB churches. In his report, U.S. BFL

board chair Tim Sullivan also reported on BFL's discussion of women in ministry and the wording of Article V of the Confession of Faith regarding the atonement.

Kyle Goings, representing USMB Youth, provided a detailed analysis of the ministry team's three efforts—YouthCon, The Network and Project: Serve—and outlined plans for the future of each.

The Leadership Board approved the proposed 2020 budget of \$809,200, with \$406,000 in income coming from USMB churches. This compares to a 2019 budget of \$812,200. Expenses include a 2.5 percent increase for staff salaries.

The board heard and discussed reports from Morris and Jon Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation; Xavier Piná of the Pacific District Conference Hispanic Council; and district ministers Tim Sullivan, Southern District; Dennis Fast, Pacific District; Aaron Hernandez, Latin America MB Conference; Terry Hunt, Eastern District; and Rick Eshbaugh, Central District. USMB staff members submitted written reports.

U.S. BFL affirms 1999 resolution on credentialing

The USMB Board of Faith and Life (BFL) has adopted a statement calling on USMB churches to encourage women to minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate, reaffirming the 1999 General Conference statement that currently guides USMB policy on pastoral credentialing.

For the past year, the U.S. BFL has discussed the "best path forward" following a January 2019 study conference on the topic of women in pastoral ministry. The resulting statement, emailed Jan. 16, 2020, to USMB

churches, acknowledges “there would be pain in any decision made by U.S. BFL on this matter.”

In its deliberations over the past year, the U.S. BFL concluded that “most of our USMB churches support the current policy on women in pastoral ministry. U.S. BFL believes that the 1999 resolution and the resulting U.S. BFL policy on credentialing continue to reflect our best attempt to Christ-honoring unity around an issue where we have not reached consensus. We call all our churches to affirm, bless and encourage our sisters to serve Christ and his church, as expressed in the 1999 resolution.”

The 1999 resolution also invites women to serve on conference boards and in congregations, institutions and agencies as “gifted, called and affirmed.”

The BFL letter, signed by chair Tim Sullivan on behalf of BFL, commends churches and districts that have “communicated to us that they have not always lived up to the standard set by the 1999 resolution and want to make efforts to increase their affirmation of women in ministry roles within the church.” The letter encourages churches to “do the work necessary to increase opportunities for women to serve and partner with men to the glory of God and the service of Christ and his kingdom.”

The letter states BFL does not consider this to be “the final chapter in this conversation,” as the board wants to be open to the Holy Spirit’s work given that this is an issue on which USMB has not reached consensus.

When asked whether delegates to the 2020 USMB National Convention would take action on the statement, Sullivan said the statement can be discussed but no action is needed given that no change is being recommended.

The BFL statement and letter are posted on the USMB website (www.usmb.org). —CL

Youth attend SDJHYC in Corn

Approximately 150 students, sponsors and leaders attended the Southern District Junior High Youth Conference (JHYC) hosted by Corn (Okla.) MB Church, Jan. 11, 2020.

The theme for the event was “Unshakable Kingdom.” Jared Menard, pastor of youth and families at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church, served as speaker. Menard encouraged students to find their identity in God’s kingdom.

The day-long event included worship, games, lessons and a service project in which students made 50 reusable building block ecobricks, intended to help prevent plastic from contaminating the biosphere.

“Students brought their own soft plastics,” says Kevin Larson, who serves as the Youth Commission’s director for JHYC. “We talked about caring for creation.”

New this year were 30-minute workshops offered in place of a second session. Youth leaders spoke on topics ranging from evangelism to social media to assurance of salvation.

“I think it was really well-received,” Larson says. “We weren’t sure if junior highers could handle that or (if workshops would) keep their attention for that long, but I really liked it. We haven’t collected any data or anything, but it just seemed like it was a good thing.”

The band from Cross Timbers Church in Edmond, Okla., led worship and was comprised primarily of teenagers from the church’s high school youth group. Two Tabor College students served as emcees.

Larson thanked host Corn MB and youth/associate pastor Sean Estes for their hospitality.

“They really stepped up—very accommodating, very hospitable, very warm and open,” he says. “It was great.”



Students and sponsors who attended the 2020 SDC junior high youth conference gather for a group photo in the Corn (Okla.) MB Church sanctuary. *Photo by SDC*

5 minutes with...

Because about 50 students from Ebenfeld MB, Hillsboro MB and Parkview MB Churches in Hillsboro, Kan. were unable to attend because of weather, a second, condensed “JHYC 2.0” event was held at Parkview MB, Feb. 9, that included worship, games and messages by Menard. —CL

MCC hosts summer event

Mennonite Central Committee will host Celebration 2020, the U.S. national celebration of MCC’s history and ministry, June 19-21 in Lancaster County, Penn. The weekend events will be a time of thanksgiving to God and for the supporters, partners and workers who have made MCC’s ministry possible.

In addition to a Saturday evening celebration, participants can enjoy food, music, demonstrations, children’s activities and storytelling at Friday events in Akron and Saturday events in Ephrata and Mountville.

Registration for the Century for a Century bike tour, Pax Ultimate Frisbee® tournament and an MCC Thrift shops bus tour will open closer to the event. Those who wish to express their interest now may email centennial@mcc.org.

Leonard Dow, a stewardship and development specialist, former longtime pastor and MCC board leader, will be the keynote speaker at the livestreamed Saturday evening celebration at Manor Church, Mountville.

On Sunday, MCC representatives will worship and share in local churches, and a children’s musical based on the book *Swords to Plowshares* will be performed.

For details about Celebration 2020, visit www.mcc.org/celebration-2020.

—MCC



Joyce Neufeld

Community Ministry of Denver, Colo., was about to lose its 6,000-square-foot facility after 52 years of serving the low-income neighborhoods of southwest Denver. This outreach, of which Garden Park MB Church was a partner, has a food pantry, clothing bank, cooking classes and more. Lifelong Garden Park Church member Joyce Neufeld is also executive director of

Community Ministry. Last July she and her board began a capital campaign to raise \$800,000 to buy the building and save the ministry. Six months later the final \$10,000 donation came in. Neufeld took a few minutes from planning their celebration party to tell the story.

How did you lose your facility?

Community Ministry had leased the building from Garden Park Church for 18 years. The church closed in 2018 and turned its property over to Lighthouse Church for a satellite location. Through a series of events, Lighthouse had to sell the property.

Why did you choose to stay where you were?

We’re right in the middle of the five zip codes we’ve been serving. It’s a poverty pocket with lots of churches who want to have an impact in this community. There wasn’t another place suitable to house all the activities for the 53,000 people we serve each year.

Where did your funding come from?

I reached out to everyone I knew including City Councilmen. The city found \$200,000 to help us with a conditional loan that turns into a grant in five years. The Anschutz Foundation, the Gates Foundation and elderly members of a local church that was closing (who gave all their church savings) gave sizeable donations.

What about individual donors?

Stories like the widow’s mite happened a lot—clients would give us quarters or five-dollar bills while waiting to receive services. It was money they could have used to pay their bills, but they wanted to help. There were many older people giving out of their retirement funds and savings—money they had worked their whole life for, but they gave because of how we impact people’s lives.

What kept you going through the campaign?

The first couple of months we had a hard time finding grants and donors. One volunteer came in every single Monday and told me “God’s got this. Don’t worry.” When we received that final gift she said, “Didn’t I tell you, God has this.” And she was right. We’re buying the property outright, with only a \$75,000 loan to cover pledges. Raising \$800,000 in six months is pretty incredible.

For a crazy video of one supporter’s fundraising efforts go to <https://www.facebook.com/namedot-com/videos/2414395448777493/>

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Remember who you are!

Living as God's ambassadors who move

Whenever I left the house during my teen years, I always heard my mom call after me, "Remember who you are!" Those poignant words have stayed with me ever since, and I might even repeat those words to my own teens today. Thanks, Mom!

We all ask the "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" questions way more than we realize. It's often subconscious and unknown to even ourselves. We fill our minds, hearts, schedules, garages, portfolios and lives with attempts to answer these questions. We pursue comfort, security, wealth, power, "stuff" and much more. But when these things break, fade, fail or grow boring, we move on to the next things. Often, we're so focused on what could be "someday" that we miss what we're in the middle of right here and right now. We miss the very core of our identity and faith.

January is a great time to reflect on who we are and why we're here, both as individuals and as a church family. So, here at Greenhouse Community Church we started 2020 with a message series called "Right Here, Right Now," taken in part from Alan Hirsch's and Lance Ford's incredible book, *Right Here Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*. In this series, we looked at four central aspects to living out our faith "right here, right now": mission (move), incarnation (in), relationship (alongside) and commission (out).

It starts with **mission**. The Latin root of the word mission is "missio," which literally means "sent" and "to **move**." The fact that our faith has a mission implies that we are designed and called to be ambassadors who move. Ambassadors never give up their true citizenship. Rather, their true identity empowers them to be fully present and engaged in the context that they're called to. Ambassadors can't stay at home and simply talk about their assignment nor can they spend all their


time huddled with their fellow citizens in their embassies. To be true ambassadors, they need to move!

For our family, that meant literally moving to Utah. For you, it might mean moving across the community, the street or even the room. We need to move out of our comfort zones and join in with what God is already doing around us.

The **incarnation** of God shows us that we need to move **in**. We need to know our own culture and language and be able to translate the good news of Jesus in a life-giving and inviting way. Every place has a culture and even subcultures that we need to understand.

Jesus modeled this approach through **relationships**. We are designed to move **alongside** others. Jesus lovingly and virally spread his message along relational lines. It wasn't gimmicky, manipulative or forced but was real, genuine and undeniable.

Finally, Jesus gives us a **commission**. In other words, we are called to move **out** and intentionally share the love of Jesus with whoever God has put into our paths. This could be an act of kindness, a word of encouragement or asking somebody how they're really doing. We've found the question, "What is your religious background?" to be a great way to open up meaningful conversations about God and faith. For the person who strives to be a "good person" but lives in the chronic anxiety of "How good is good enough?" it is radically freeing to hear of the unconditional love of Jesus. Look for what the tangible "Good News" is for each person. The options are endless!

This sermon series has been both a huge encouragement and challenge for us. We need to reimagine ourselves as ambassadors and our church family as an embassy. We've been having a lot of fun processing what this means for us, and we pray it is an encouragement and challenge to you as well! 



Jason Quiring and his wife, Nicole, and their four children moved to Saratoga Springs, Utah, in the summer of 2013 to plant Greenhouse Community Church. Quiring worked for about a decade in youth ministry at two USMB churches in Oklahoma and Utah and served at Henderson (Neb.) MB Church, now Living Hope Church, just prior to moving to Utah. Whether living in Oklahoma, Utah or Nebraska it's always been a desire and passion of Jason and Nicole to get to know people, know their stories and to wrestle with tangible ways to love God, love people and serve the world.

One year to live

Serving God, proclaiming his goodness, sharing his love

“I can’t believe I’ll probably be dead in less than a year,” I said to myself on a late summer afternoon in 2017.

On August 14, I had felt a strange lump on my neck. A few days previous, our family had spent a day wakeboarding and tubing at the lake. I thought this lump could be attributed to overdoing it a bit but decided to see our family doctor, who advised me to watch it for two weeks.

After a week, the lump seemed to be getting larger, so I had an ultrasound and a needle biopsy. I started to feel uneasy, and two days later, my fears were realized. I had malignancy in my lymph node and needed surgery to remove it. I googled my early diagnosis and gathered there was a good chance I had less than a year to live. I was in shock since I had no symptoms at all.

Surgery indicated my lymph node was completely black—melanoma. A chest x-ray revealed additional tumors in my lungs. The malignancy originated in my skin and spread to other organs and was considered Stage IV Metastatic Melanoma. An oncologist confirmed the diagnosis with a prognosis of six months to one year. Although disheartening, it wasn’t a shock since I had concluded that myself.

I wanted my family to know how I operate my farming and cattle business, so we drove around together, and I explained each farm individually. Julie and the kids listened and asked questions, tentatively delegating each task. God gave me peace that it would work out. I asked a missionary friend to speak at my funeral and even talked to a friend about someone I thought might make a good future husband for Julie.

I later saw a second oncologist who, after seeing my PET scan results, informed us I was “lit up like a Christmas tree.” The cancer was in the lymph system throughout my body and had also spread to my lungs, spleen and an adrenal

gland. She recommended immunotherapy, which would infuse two medications through a central port, one to tag the cancer cells and the other to boost the immune system to attack those tagged cells.

Nine weeks after my first treatment and recovering from a life-threatening allergic reaction to one of the infused drugs, a PET scan revealed the number of tumors was already cut in half. Every nine weeks, my tumors lessened. God was hearing our prayers. In January 2018, only one stubborn active tumor remained on a lymph node in my abdomen. When subsequent scans showed activity had increased, my oncologist wanted to try radiation. We prayed even harder, but when the tumor remained, we moved forward with 30 radiation treatments. Unfortunately, a January 2019 scan showed there was no change. I continue infusions every two weeks with PET scans every four months.

Since I have been diagnosed with cancer, facing my mortality has influenced my life greatly. This Billy Graham quote has become a profound truth: “I am convinced that we will never be fully prepared to live until we are prepared to die. God has a plan for us right now, and life’s greatest joy comes from knowing him and living for him each day.”

Shortly after my diagnosis, a friend asked how he could pray for me, wondering if I wanted to be with Jesus soon or live longer. I told him I wanted to live and use every day I had left to serve God, proclaim his goodness and share his love. I began an ongoing prayer for opportunities to share my faith. I talk to anyone who will listen.

Soon after I found out I might not have a lot of time left, I wanted to write my story and include a prayer that anyone could pray if they desired a personal rela-



Robert Boese lives near Corn, Okla., where he operates a farming and ranching business. He and his wife, Julie, have celebrated 33 years of marriage and have four children. They attend Corn MB Church. Boese looks forward to infusions every two weeks because of the opportunity to connect with nurses and other patients. He tries to make a new friend on a first-name basis every two weeks with the goal of sharing his faith. To read an extended version of Boese’s story visit christianleadermag.com

See TESTIMONY, page 30

MCC TURNS 100

Mennonite Brethren part of the MCC story



It was December 27, 1944, and Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) executive committee was meeting to discuss how Mennonites might respond to shocking reports of the conditions inside U.S. mental hospitals.

World War II was still raging, and thousands of conscientious objectors exempted from military combat were engaged in alternative service. Among them were 1,500 Anabaptists assigned to serve where most people hoped never to go: U.S. mental facilities. The young men and women were some of the first outsiders to enter these buildings. They came out with terrible accounts of the filthy, inhumane and violent conditions within the hospitals.

Mennonite Brethren church members who heard these reports were compelled to act. In 1947, MB churches partnered with MCC to build Kings View Homes (now Kings View Behavioral Health Systems), a new mental health facility near Reedley, Calif. Arthur Jost, a member of Reedley MB Church, was chosen as the hospital administrator. The MB community banded together and raised \$20,000 toward building the facility.

A few years after Kings View Homes was established, the Mennonite Brethren once again partnered with MCC to create Prairie View Hospital (now Prairie View) in Newton, Kan. It opened in 1954.

These hospitals were markedly different from the facilities that had horrified young conscientious objectors. They provided compassionate, cutting-edge care. In 1968, Prairie View received the Gold Award from the American Psychiatric Association to acknowledge its leadership in progressive treatment for people with mental illness.

Over the years, Mennonite Brethren continued to serve these establishments as psychiatrists, psychologists and volunteers to help thousands of people seek wellness. Today,

both facilities have greatly expanded their offerings and stand as well-respected institutions in the field of mental health.

Called to relieve suffering

MCC was formed when representatives of various Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren groups met in July 1920 in Elkhart, Ind., and pledged to aid hungry people, including Mennonites in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine). The founders of MCC were convinced that "to be biblically faithful one must relieve human suffering," write historians Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen.

None felt more compelled to relieve human suffering than Mennonite Brethren, who had fled Russia to avoid obligatory military service just 40 to 50 years prior. Many of their fellow church members who had remained in Russia were now experiencing starvation and religious persecution in the wake of the Russian Revolution.

Peter "P.C." Hiebert was a MB educator and pastor and a member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church. His parents were among those who had fled southern Russia in the 1870s. Hiebert was elected chairman of MCC at its founding, an office he would hold for 34 years until 1954. He was among those who travelled to southern Russia to aid in the first MCC relief work. MCC opened 140 food kitchens, which fed up to 25,000 people daily. To that point, it was the largest inter-Mennonite relief effort in history.

The struggle for COs

MCC was founded in a time of global conflict, and soon another world war loomed on the horizon. During the First World War, conscientious objectors were often mistreated by the U.S. government. Leading up to World War II, MCC sought alternatives to military service by communicating with government offices in Washington. Through the efforts of MCC and the Historic Peace Churches, Civilian Public Service (CPS) was written into law in 1940. Nearly 12,000 Anabaptist and other conscientious objectors participated in CPS camps, 260 Mennonite Brethren among them.

MCC's Peace Section was formed in 1942. First chaired by Hiebert, the Peace Section provided information on peace-related current events. It also advised and represented Anabaptists who needed to deal with the government in matters such as war and the draft and promoted nonviolence in MCC's constituent groups and the wider world.

In 1970, MCC's Peace Section and MB churches helped Jerry Allen Penner, a member of Balko (Okla.) MB Church, bring a case before the U.S. Supreme Court. Penner had been denied conscientious objector status. When he refused military induction, he received a five-year federal prison sentence. Penner's family and MB churches contacted MCC's Peace Section for counsel. It advised Penner to appeal his sentence before the Supreme Court, agreed to help him file the request and offered to file an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief on his behalf. With the spiritual, moral and financial support of MB churches and MCC behind him, Penner was acquitted.

Serving around the globe

Overseas, Elizabeth Wiebe, a member of Springfield Krimmer MB Church in Lehigh, Kan., ran a children's program in Neustadt, Germany, where MCC administered post war relief from 1946 to 1950. MB service continued there after MCC closed its program.

In Canada and the U.S., MBs have served on boards, as staff and in volunteer positions, including in grassroots fundraising efforts. A volunteer fruit-drying operation based in Reedley, Calif., provided nearly 10,000 packages of dried peaches a year to be sold for MCC relief funds. Mennonite Brethren have organized many a relief sale and stitched many a quilt to be auctioned at the sales.

In recent years, MCC and MB churches have assisted flood survivors in Colombia and Peru, provided food and shelter in the Democratic Republic of Congo and brought humanitarian aid and peace-building resources to the war zone in Ukraine.

Around the world, MCC supports local MB church initiatives. One of these programs is a soccer school in Cali, Colombia, run by Sigifredo Godoy, a member of Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas Luz y Vida (Light and Life MB Church). The soccer school helps teach youth, who have grown up surrounded by violence, the peacemaking ethic and skills Jesus taught and modelled.

In the U.S., MB churches provide a strong base of volunteers for MCC thrift shops and relief sales. Mennonite Brethren also engage with immigration issues through MCC education opportunities, such as a leadership learning tour in October 2019 organized by West Coast MCC at the Mexico and U.S. border.

"Over the past 100 years, the example and commitment of Mennonite Brethren have helped shape MCC into the organization it is today," says J. Ron Byler, MCC U.S. executive director. "From the courageous and faithful leadership of P.C. Hiebert, to partnerships in areas like peace work and mental health care, to the thousands of Mennonite Brethren individuals who have served and volunteered, we have been greatly blessed by our relationship with Mennonite Brethren. We thank God for a century of partnership, and we pray for many more years of shared service in the name of Christ."

Visit mcc.org/centennial to learn how you can join MCC in giving thanks for 100 years and seeking God's guidance for the future.

Emily Jones is a freelance writer from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. MCC is grateful for the active participation and support of all its sponsoring denominations. As part of its centennial celebration, MCC provided this article focusing on MCC and its partnership with Mennonite Brethren churches.



Page 10: In 1922, MCC sent two shipments of 25 tractors to Mennonite settlements in Russia that were devastated by famine. In response to the famine, the American Mennonite Relief (AMR) organization was set up by MCC to distribute relief in Russia. It operated during the 1921–1924 Russian famine period. Under the direction of AMR, grain was sown and harvested, and the returns from the crops were used to feed the starving. *Photo by: MCC.*

Above: Members of the Mennonite Brethren church organize aid items for distribution to families living in rural communities along the San Juan River in Colombia's Chocó region following severe flooding in October 2016. MCC responded to the basic needs of those affected by providing humanitarian assistance through the Mennonite Brethren church to 500 families in 11 rural communities. *Photo by MCC/Chocó Mennonite Brethren Church*

Living resurrection



When living in Spain, we were overwhelmed with the attention given to Easter week. Elaborate religious processions winding through the streets and avenues of almost every city, town and village abounded all over Spain. The participation of the faithful, both as procession participants and observers, was obvious. The spiritual fever was high. One could sense the crescendo leading to Good Friday.

But on Resurrection Sunday—nothing in terms of public religious processions. Absolute silence!

Of course, Christ's resurrection is part of Catholic theology. But the public celebration of these events in Spain obviously favors Good Friday and the week leading up to it more than Resurrection Sunday.

There appears to be more balance within my own faith tradition. For example, many evangelical Christians will attend both Good Friday services and Sunday Resurrection services this next month. But when it comes to practicing the blessed results of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday for the believer today, I sense many think more about the cross and forgiveness of sins than the empty tomb and freedom from sins.

During the Easter season, many Christians are content with studying the biblical accounts surrounding these important events and emphasizing the theological significance of the cross and the empty tomb. While this is good and necessary, if we stop here and do not appropriate God's resurrection power to free us from our sins now, we most likely will continue to live in bondage in many areas of our lives. And Satan is content.

God's plan is different. In Matthew 1:21, we read that God wants to do something more than only forgive us of our sins and save us from eternal condemnation. He wants "to save his people from their sins." He literally wants to free us from every thought, action and destructive habit that keeps us from being "molded into the image of his Son and share inwardly his likeness" (Rom. 8:29, AMPC). And he wants to do it now!

Sadly, I don't hear a lot about this in my conversations. Forgiveness of sins—yes. Freedom from sins—very little.

Perhaps this may have something to do with a limited understanding of salvation. Scripture identifies three stages in the life of a Jesus-follower where salvation and liberation occur. These are seen in the usage of the verb "to save" in the past, present and future tenses in the biblical text.

■ In the past, we believers were powerfully freed from the enslaving power of sin, the penalty of sin, the kingdom of darkness, our sin nature and our former manner of life when we entrusted our lives to God's watch care (2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 3:5). This event is called conversion.

■ In the present we continue to be saved from the conditions mentioned in the first stage as we remain faithful (1 Cor. 1:18, 2 Cor. 2:15, Phil. 2:12). We also are being freed from every prevailing sin, emotional hurt, destructive attitude and manner of speech that prevent us from reaching our life's purpose to better think and live like Jesus. This lifelong process called sanctification happens when we repent.

■ In the future we will be powerfully freed from this corrupt earth and every satanic influence to spend eternity in his blessed presence (Matt. 10:22, Rom. 13:11, 1 Peter 1:5). This event is called glorification.

Bill Hull and Brandon Cook of the Bonhoeffer Project argue "the primary gospel preached in America today, by default, is the 'forgiveness-only gospel,' which is almost exclusively focused on sin and atonement. The forgiveness-only gospel is connected to the idea of saying a magic prayer that gets you into heaven one day."

With this "gospel," the second of the three steps is essentially overlooked. The resulting impact on us to be robust and emotionally healthy witnesses for his sake (Acts 1:8) is diminished. I have only to look as far as my own life to see how this "get saved to go to heaven" gospel negatively affected me for so many years.

power

Reflections on balance, forgiveness and freedom

I realize now that many behavioral changes have happened since I came back to Jesus as a wandering and hurting 22-year-old. I have experienced his forgiveness and resurrection power many times over. And for this I am most grateful. But at the same time, I have struggled with many other destructive patterns of thinking and living for most of my ministerial life that have left me, in the words of Brennan Manning, “bedraggled, beat-up and burnt out” and have caused me to grow “weary and discouraged along the way.” I didn’t have a well-balanced “Easter theology” or a sufficient understanding of how God transforms us from the inside out. But that has changed. And so have I, with still more road to travel!

I know many others like me; they are believers, but they remain dogged by besetting sins and deep relational problems and exhibit an emotionally unhealthy spirituality. Their impact as disciple-makers is minimal.

I have learned that for victory over sins to take place we first need forgiveness. Good Friday always precedes Resurrection Sunday; forgiveness of sins always precedes freedom from sins; God’s mercy always precedes God’s power. And for both to happen we need confession and repentance of known sins. Forgiveness of sins and freedom from sins soon follow when accompanied by deep sorrow, a sincere desire to live in victory and a commitment to his steps for gaining freedom over sins (James 4:7-10).

1 John 1:9 is a beautiful verse that illustrates the process that goes from confession to forgiveness to freedom: “If we make it our habit to confess our sins, in his faithful righteousness he forgives us for those sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness” (ISV).

This version’s rendering highlights how confession is to be a habitual activity. It is daily confession that makes Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday more than historical events to be studied.

We are to confess our sins before God and others. As to opening up to God with our deepest pain and shame, pastor and author Pete Scazzero says, “Powerful spiritual

breakthroughs take place deep below the surface of our lives when we slow down to spend time with God in stillness and Scripture. This provides space for his purifying love to burn away all that is false within us and set us free to live authentically in Jesus” (*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day*).

Confession before another brother or sister can happen anywhere where there is self-awareness of the false self within, a personal transparency that is honest and risk-taking, a hope that God can heal, deep repentance and a willingness to “sin no more.” Recovery and discipleship ministries such as Celebrate Recovery, Regeneration and Emotionally Healthy Discipleship are valuable resources for becoming more like Jesus. Each highlights forgiveness of sins and freedom from sins through confession to God and others in a context of confidentiality.

Many of those who proclaimed, “He is risen!” following Jesus’ resurrection went on to live and serve in this powerful reality. “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

As we follow the example of our post-Pentecost brothers and sisters and strengthen the gap between conversion and glorification, increasing joy and peace will blossom in our inner being; our interpersonal relationships will greater reflect God’s original and perfect design and our individual and corporate mission to the world will multiply. Only then will we today, along with the saints of old, “Sing to the Lord, for he has done wonderful things, and make known his praise around the world” (Isaiah 12:5 NLT).

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

ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

How small groups can lead to big change

By Kevin Larson



I will never forget the first time I shared in an accountability group for pornography addiction. I was ashamed and nervous, had a dash of hope and lots of pride. Like the Pharisee looking down on the tax collector in the famous parable Jesus told, I thought I had a corner on God and did not really need to be there. I have never been more wrong in my life.

I imagined I would only be in the group for a month, three at tops, mainly to show my wife that I was serious about change. Suffice it to say, I brought the proverbial car into the shop for an oil change, but it really needed a whole new engine. This became evident about 10 minutes into the first meeting.

Starting with silence

Riley was the group's leader, and he had a strange way of praying. He would begin prayer with a few minutes—it felt like 10—of silence, which always slightly annoyed me. In the quiet I could not hide. I felt so exposed to myself, others and especially God.

Saint John of the Cross says that silence is God's first language. God is very comfortable with silence, and the older I get the more I appreciate what silence can do: bring to the forefront what is really the root of our problems.

Soren Kierkegaard says, "If I were a physician and I were allowed to prescribe one remedy for all the ills of the world, I would prescribe silence. For even if the word of God were proclaimed in the modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise? Therefore, create silence!"

Rooted in unconditional love

After we finished the mostly silent introductory prayer, Riley would read the group covenant and then ask questions to whoever's turn it was to talk. The covenant consisted of tone-setting reminders like this is not a place to throw stones and what is said in the group must stay in the group unless someone is getting hurt or hurting themselves.

In just a few sentences the covenant reminded us that we were all broken and flawed in similar ways and yet perfectly known and loved by the God who created us and was in the room with us. That reminder of unconditional love and grace was so essential because what followed was one of the most difficult steps—actually sharing. Riley would help us along by asking questions that were thoughtful and open-ended.

Asking good questions

A good question followed by, you guessed it, silence can expose someone like none other. Author and pastor John Mark Comer says that spiritual disciplines are any behavior that Jesus routinely did when he walked this earth. A quick reading of any of the gospels shows a lot of red question marks. "Do you want to get well?" "Who was a neighbor to the man?" "Why are you so afraid?" "Do you believe?" Jesus' questions, much like Riley's, pointed people to the heart of the matter.

It's funny, sometimes in a group of 10 guys who all struggle with porn, that specific subject never actually comes up. Instead the questions can dig into root issues such as anger or financial insecurity, stress or fatigue, forgiveness or past childhood hurts. It gets very real very quickly when the foundation of grace is laid and then someone asks a good question or two.

The anatomy of change

No one can change by themselves. Lasting change at the heart, mind and soul level happens in community with God and others. There is an old African proverb that says if you want to travel fast, go alone, but if you want to travel far, go with others. I think this applies to every area



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of one's life, especially breaking free of unwanted behaviors. A group of Christians who all are open and honest with each other and all headed down the same road together can quicken the change process.

Change still takes time—three to five years is the average for someone to go from being addicted to porn to freedom. But when you are shoulder to shoulder with someone who wants to make the same changes you are making, it somehow becomes more doable.

It took a few weeks for me to let my guard down, but once I did, I knew I had just tapped into something more powerful than my shame. Once I was able to talk openly about the good, the bad and the downright ugly in my life without fear of being judged or criticized, the darkness in me fled. Like shining a bright light at cockroaches, the power of the secret sin vanished.

Community brings success

Over the years I have tried to dissect why groups are so critical to changing unwanted behavior. While this list is not exhaustive and not in any order, here are my top five reasons why community is so essential to real change.

Confession: The act of owning my mistakes and fully acknowledging them out loud to God and other people is imperative to the process. Sometimes Riley would say, "What is it that you really don't want to share? Go ahead and start there." Confession humbles us. It also forces us to see the lie(s) that we believe and provides us the opportunity to replace that lie with the truth that we are not alone.

Relatability: Being in a group with people that can relate to me and my pain is incredibly comforting, just as it's comforting to know that Jesus can relate with us on a human level. Isolation breeds fear and depression. Knowing that we are not the only one struggling, knowing that we are not alone, gives us hope. And hope makes the process of change bearable.

Vulnerability: Being vulnerable means I have to put words to my feelings and then I have to hear myself say those words to other people. Then the group asks me questions about what they heard. This process is painful, but like I tell the guys in my group—the alternative is worse. The alternative is to be covered in self-hatred and shame with no hope for change, in total isolation and confusion because of all the lies floating around my head. Vulnerability is hard but not being vulnerable is actually more difficult.

Consistency: Brené Brown says, "Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is just show up." After my first accountability group meeting, I knew that even though it was awkward and painful, I just needed to keep showing up. The guys were going to love me, encourage me, pray for me, celebrate with me and pick me up when I fell. At times when my sin increased, grace increased even more. And that is about the time when I realized that this was not just a group of Christians, this was the body of Christ consistently shouldering my burdens.

Grace: When God shows us grace, it does not mean that he lets us off the hook or lets us get by with sin. Grace means that God does for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. So when I am in the pit and there is no way out, my group

members can remind me of the truth of the gospel: I am loved, rescued and redeemed. I am not alone in the pit, and actually there is no pit at all, Jesus is with me and he is paving the way for me to get back out there. This gives me hope again to trust that Jesus will continue his work in me until it is complete. I just need to trust the process: confession, relatability, vulnerability, consistency and grace.

What can the church do?

Not everyone deals with addictive behavior, but all of us need to be transformed and being in true community is the only way it happens. Church services are important and valuable to grow in Christ. It is good to worship corporately and to have the Bible preached in a coherent manner. But there just is not time in the hour and 15 minutes that we give to a church service to have everyone confess, pray, celebrate, listen, encourage, cry with and in short carry everyone's burdens.

Our small groups, though, can do all that and more. The problem is our small groups often function at a surface level. Men and women eat and play games and talk about the weather or how awesome their favorite college basketball team is. No one really gets vulnerable. No one gets real.

When did the church become a place for people who have it all figured out? How did it change from a gathering of messed up people who love Jesus to a place where Pharisees would feel comfortable? I am not saying that church should look exactly like an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, but I am asking the question: Where does change happen consistently? I think the church can learn from and begin to practice what is at the heart of AA and other recovery groups: small groups of people who know they desperately need God.

How can this be done? Don't worry, it is not a new flashy program. There is nothing to download onto your computer. Churches don't need another line item in the budget. What you do need are small groups defined by the five practices that lead to change:

- Space for confession,
- Freedom to express doubts and questions,
- Opportunities for silence and other forms of prayer,
- Grace and acceptance as defining characteristics rather than relationships that are conditional in nature, and
- Consistent meetings.

God sent me someone named Riley. Could he be sending you? All you need is to be sensitive to the five practices that lead to real change, several chairs in a circle and one hour each week. God can do a lot with these ingredients—he has brought about change in my life and he can do it for you too.

Kevin Larson is a resident educator at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kan., which means he and his wife, Jill, and their three children live on campus in a residence hall apartment. For a decade, Larson was a youth pastor at two different churches, including Garden Valley MB Church, Garden City, Kan. The Larsons attend Hillsboro MB Church and Kevin serves on the Southern District Youth Commission where he works with the junior high youth conference.

Busting barriers with a buddy

Church ministers to families, children with special needs

Six years ago, when Ashley Fruguglietti gave birth to her second child, Jack, she and her husband, Anthony, received surprising news. Their son had Down syndrome, a genetic condition caused by the presence of a third copy of chromosome 21. The syndrome is associated with physical growth delays and mild to moderate intellectual disability.

The California couple, whose daughter, Sofie, was three at the time, had struggled to conceive a second child. While they were temporarily terrified by the diagnosis and what it meant for their family, Ashley says she and her husband were certain God had special plans for Jack's life.

"Because we had a hard time getting pregnant, it felt like God gave us this baby for a reason," Ashley says. "We have never doubted that Jack is exactly who God made him to be. We know without a doubt that he is perfectly and wonderfully made."

Even with their positive outlook, Ashley says the first year of Jack's life was difficult. Because of fears for his health, the family didn't return to their church—the Bridge Bible Church in Bakersfield—until Jack was six months old. Even then, Ashley felt nervous leaving him in the nursery.

"I was protective of him," she says. "I honestly had never seen anybody with special needs at church."

Finding a buddy

For the first few years, Jack, who is nonverbal, remained in the toddler classes instead of progressing with his



Jack Fruguglietti attends Sunday school with a buddy at The Bridge in Bakersfield, Calif. *Photo by Amie Akers*

peers. He needed one-on-one support in order to attend children's ministry with children his own age.

When he was three, Ashley learned that The Bridge offered a Buddy Program, through which a child with special needs is paired with a teen or adult volunteer who supports the child through the regular children's programming.

Ashley says words are not adequate to express what having a buddy has meant to Jack, who is now in first grade.

"I always say 'thank you,' but I never feel like it's enough," she says. "We feel like Jack is seen, and that's so amazing. He has importance. He has worth and value. To see him being taught and nurtured spiritually really means a lot."

Supplying spiritual support

In a national study released in 2018,

sociologist Andrew Whitehead found that the likelihood of a child with a cognitive disability never attending religious services was nearly twice as high as compared to children with no chronic health conditions. This was especially true for conditions that impacted social interaction, such as autism spectrum disorders, developmental delays and ADHD.

The study highlighted the reality that children with special needs and their families lack opportunity to receive spiritual support from the local church. For this problem to be solved, Whitehead says, churches must recognize the barriers they unknowingly create and maintain.

"Most congregations have a desire to help," he says, "but that doesn't mean they are meeting these families where they need the most help."

Amy Birkey, the special needs min-

istry coordinator at First Mennonite Brethren Church (FMBC) in Wichita, Kan., has seen this firsthand. “A high percentage of families with a child with special needs do not attend church frequently or at all, because they do not feel accepted or don’t have supportive options,” she says.

Parents appreciate support

Thirteen years ago, twin kindergarten boys diagnosed with autism began attending FMBC. The boys’ parents wanted them to attend Bible classes with kids their age, but it was difficult for the boys to remain engaged and still in a structured classroom environment, Amy

says. The twins’ parents would often skip their own class to stay and help out.

Members of the children’s ministry team recognized the need and developed the “buddy system,” pairing the twins with adult volunteers who could support their needs. The goal was to help these parents attend church on a regular basis so they could be connected and grow in their faith.

Over the next few years, the church became aware of many families in their community who could benefit from this type of support, so they made special needs ministry an official part of children’s ministry. Amy believes this decision has been a key to their success.

“As coordinator I get to be a part of children’s ministry meetings and decision making,” she says. “The budget allows me to buy needed curriculum and facilitate times of fellowship and training. By making special needs ministry a part of the team, the church is saying, ‘This is an important ministry that we want to get behind and help to thrive.’”

The results have been encouraging.

“I see our special needs ministry bringing in families who haven’t previously been able to attend church,” she says. “Multiple families have told me that they decided to attend because we were the only church in the area to offer support. This is a huge (evangelistic) opportunity that many churches are missing out on.”

A plentiful harvest

Jeff Gowling, lead pastor of The Bridge Bible Church, also sees special needs ministry as a tool for outreach.

“Life is not easy for these families,” he says. “If we can provide a loving environment for children with special needs, we can also allow their parents to come and worship God, fellowship with other believers and perhaps be exposed to the gospel for the first time.”

The Bridge is focused on growing its special needs ministry in the future. This year the church will break ground on a new children’s building, which will have designated space for special needs ministry.

“I love that our church gets the opportunity to minister to these children and families,” Gowling says. “So many people are excited to be able to serve in this way.”

Although research reveals that overall not much has changed in the past decade in how the church accommodates families of children with special needs, the number of children diagnosed with cognitive disabilities is on the rise. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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(CDC), one in 59 children in the U.S. has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by age 8. And that number keeps rising.

While research confirms that religion plays a positive role in youth development, the families of these children are often weary from advocating for them in other settings, such as school or at the doctor. For some, the church can feel like one more place where they must fight for inclusion and acceptance. And for others, church is not even an option without support.

Milan Dinsmore, who serves as Buddy Coordinator at The Bridge, used to work as a behavioral therapist for children with autism. One family she served could only attend church if she was able to accompany their student.

"The church they attended did not have resources to care for their child," she says. "That broke my heart. This family's spiritual development was dependent on my attendance."

In her current role, Milan is passionate about helping these families have a positive church experience. "God designed the church to function like a body," she says, "which means every person is important and that includes individuals with special needs. To me, it is crucial that every child is cared for and every family has the ability to attend church."

A place to belong

The Buddy Program at The Bridge is helping this become a reality for dozens of families.

One of those families is the Frugugliettis. Every Sunday morning, Jack joins his buddy—and his friends—in the first-grade classroom. He spends time playing with his peers before joining them in another room for worship (which he loves) and a Bible lesson. After that, Jack and his buddy go to a sensory classroom, stocked with objects that enhance Jack's ability to stay engaged and learn. His buddy reviews the

Bible story with him and shows him how to fold his hands to pray.

Ashley is delighted to see what her son is learning at church and how connected he feels to Christian community.

"It really makes a difference," she says. "It makes a difference for Jack and it makes a difference for us too. To be able to go to service and know that there are people there who care this much—that means everything to us." — *Suzanne Hadley Gosselin*

Scripture's emphasis of series

Women experience Scripture in five "Renew, Restore, Refresh" sessions

Attendees of Women's Day Out at Stony Brook Church in Omaha, Neb., placed a small bag of wool in front of them, next to strands of grass, a container of water, a collection of rocks, a small piece of wood and a sample of oil.

While listening to the words of Psalm 23, the women touched each item, providing a tangible reminder of God's loving care as shepherd.

The exercise was just one activity among a series of five interactive and experiential "Renew, Restore, Refresh" sessions designed to invite women to a life of renewal, refreshment and restoration by experiencing Scripture in new and creative ways.

The three R's

The idea for the free, five-session series was a collaborative effort between Tricia Croushorn, Susie English, Elaine Stoner and Melissa Hanna.

According to Hanna, the intent was to structure each session less as a one-day retreat and more as an invitation to a life of renewal in Christ. An overarching goal is for women to recognize God as the ultimate source of renewal, refreshment and restoration and to be the hands and feet of Jesus to serve others. Supporting verses include Ephesians 4:23, Psalm 51:10-12, Titus 3:5 and Lamentations 3:22-23.

"As one of the RRR session series team members, my hope is to accom-



During Session 2 of Women's Day Out at Stony Brook Church in Omaha, Neb., women planted White-leaved Savory Mint seeds as a reminder to savor God's grace and share around the table with family and friends. *Photo by Stony Brook Church.*

plish an atmosphere for women to experience Scripture in new and creative ways that can create a renewal in desire to be in the Word, a freshness of the Word and a restoration in women's hearts as they become in closer relationship to God through his Word," Hanna says.

Wanting more

The quarterly series began in September 2019 and will continue through September 2020.

With five interactive elements and a guest speaker, Session 1 encouraged the 67 attendees to experience Scripture through their senses and included activities like touching items representing Psalm 23; tasting food mentioned in Scripture; watching an artist create images and words on canvas, glass and chalkboard; listening to Scripture-related sounds and songs and smelling oils mentioned in Scripture.

Guest speaker Rachel McCowan spoke about the journey to Christlikeness using the image of renovating a house.

"It was an amazing hour that left people wanting more," Hanna says. "(Rachel) used the image of HGTV renovating and compared it to us as woman and our journey as becoming more Christ-like; being renewed, restored and refreshed through him."

A time to pause

Meanwhile, Session 2, held Dec. 14, 2019, and titled, "A Holiday Experience in Scripture," encouraged women to "Savor the Scriptures." The session included a variety of food and activities, including appetizers, dessert and conversation; Christmas music; giving to others and planting seeds.

Women were invited to pause in the midst of a hectic Christmas season and savor God's blessings, especially the blessing of Jesus. Attendees perused a buffet of appetizers and Christmas desserts, then listened to Scripture and a selection of five Christmas songs.

The women were encouraged to remember the surprising love and grace God showed that first Christmas and served others by wrapping more than \$1,500 worth of food, hygiene supplies, warm weather items, cleaning supplies, diapers and more donated by Stony Brook Church families for Release Ministries foster care families.

Later in the day, the women presented gifts to two foster care families.

To savor God's grace, women planted White-leaved Savory Mint seeds in a small pot as their first item in a keepsake "Remembrance Garden." The plant, an item used in biblical times whose silver leaves are good for teas and flavoring food, was intended to serve as a reminder to share around the table with friends and family, Hanna says.

The session concluded with a closing blessing offering the day as a reminder to stop, look, listen, remember and savor the grace of Jesus during Christmas and beyond. Each attendee also received an Advent devotional in the mail prior to the session.

Love notes from God

Session 3, "A Love Experience in Scripture," held Feb. 8, 2020, centered on experiencing and sharing God's love. Using the theme verse of Jeremiah 31:3, women were assured of God's everlasting love and in turn encouraged to serve others and show that same selfless love.

Women received a number of visual reminders of God's love, including a stationery set with Isaiah 43:1 on it, and on which they were encouraged to write reminders of God's love and presence to place throughout the house.

Women also received a manicure kit, a reminder to not only take moments to be with God and listen for what he may be saying, but also to allow God to trim brokenness, cleanse sin, polish with grace and take care of needs.

A keepsake heart served as a reminder of what faith in Christ brings, according to Revelation 19:6-8, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and Hosea 2:19-20, and attendees re-

ceived a flipbook containing love notes from God from Scripture.

Evidence of impact

Even as the series continues, Hanna shares a few stories illustrating the impact.

For one attendee, enjoying Scripture was a new concept. She said: "I want to keep looking for ways that I can make Scripture fun for me."

One foster care family expressed gratefulness for the gifts that came during a difficult time.

"They had just received another foster care child, and financial support from the State of Nebraska does not come until 30 days after the placement," Hanna says. "Funds were very tight, so the food, cleaning supplies, paper products and board games that were donated came at a most perfect time for the family."

Future plans

Plans for two more sessions are being made. Session 4, "An Outdoor Experience in Scripture," slated for May 9, will be based on Psalm 104:24-25, while Session 5, "A Balance Experience in Scripture," coming in September, will focus on Matthew 6:33 as it pertains to God, family, work and health.

"The RRR team has used many different resources and people to bring together the RRR sessions," Hanna says. "(We believe) being flexible to ideas, different resources and various people allows the Holy Spirit to lead the direction we go in." —*Janae Rempel*

Sanger church hosts Neighborhood Mark

Program addresses food hardship in Fresno area

The first Saturday of each month, people line a covered walkway at Grace Community Church (GCC),

waiting to peruse tables stocked with bags of food, fresh produce and articles of clothing.

GCC is a food distribution location for the Central California Food Bank's Neighborhood Market Program, which is structured like a farmers' market and delivers fresh produce to areas in need.

In 2019, GCC gave away 121,550 pounds of food, which is one way the church is helping meet needs in its Sanger, Calif., community.

While GCC has participated in food distribution in the past, the church's most recent involvement began about two and a half years ago, according to GCC pastor Paul Canaday.

When two local food distributions ceased operations, GCC stepped up to meet a specific need.

"I was volunteering with the Good Neighbor Center, which had been providing food and clothing in the Pinedale area of Fresno for over 20 years, when the Central California Food Bank reached out for ideas in Sanger," Canaday says.

The church and elders were immediately on board with the idea of hosting a market, Canaday says, and GCC agreed to provide a location for food distribution through the Central California Food Bank (CCFB), whose mission, according to its website, is to "fight hunger by gathering and distributing food, engaging in partnerships that advance self-sufficiency, and by providing community leadership on issues related to hunger."

Markets make a difference

According to the Food Research and Action Center, in 2016-17 the city of Fresno and surrounding counties ranked third nationally with a food hardship rate of 22 percent, behind Bakersfield, Calif. (23.2 percent) and Youngstown-Warren-Boardman, Ohio-Penn. (22 percent).

Robin Allen-Maddox, CCFB communications specialist, says one

in four people in the Fresno community are hungry, with one in three being children. Neighborhood Markets, like GCC hosts, are making a difference.

"Neighborhood Markets are extremely important for rural communities, as access to grocery stores can be limited," Allen-Maddox says. "Having the opportunity to receive fresh produce at no cost is life-changing for residents—providing a better and longer quality of life."

In 2017-18, the CCFB provided more than 35 million pounds of food through its partners, according to its website.

"These pantries and the volunteers who run them help us serve over 280,000 people each month," Allen-Maddox says. "People are hungry for so

many reasons—lost jobs, health issues, rent hikes and more. The food we provide allows people to have a little more wiggle room for unexpected bills, medications and unforeseen events."

Market depends on volunteers

Each market Saturday, a truck carrying food arrives at GCC 30 minutes before the start of the market. The food for the market is primarily fresh produce and comes from the CCFB and donations from members of the GCC congregation.

After the pallets of food are unloaded from the truck, volunteers open, sort and bag the food and begin signing in people prior to the market's 9 a.m. opening.

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Volunteers bag kiwi prior to the start of a food distribution market at Grace Community Church in Sanger, Calif. The first Saturday of each month, the church distributes fresh produce through the Central California Food Bank's Neighborhood Market Program. In 2019, the church gave away 121,550 pounds of food. *Photo by GCC*

An average of 100 families sign in to receive food each month, Canaday | says, but that is only the beginning of a ripple effect.

"According to what they tell us, that means about 400 family members are blessed," Canaday says. "We encourage them to share it with other family members and neighbors."

To ensure the process runs smoothly, GCC relies on volunteers, including about 10 to 15 from GCC and others from the community, some of whom also receive food.

"I would say that it runs smoothly because of the communication we have with the Central California Food Bank, people who have over 20 years of experience, having the best volunteers and lots of prayer," Canaday says.

The church distributes an average of 11,000 pounds of food each month, in addition to clothing and other donated items.

On one Saturday before Christmas, a man brought his grandson to the market. The boy, who was about 5 years old, Canaday says, asked his grandfather for a bicycle. It just so happened that a family from church had donated some small bikes their children had outgrown, and a volunteer blessed the young boy with his first bike.

On another occasion, volunteers offered prayer for someone at the market.

"One Saturday while we were cleaning up I (came) upon two of my elders praying for a man who had been sharing how hard things had been," Canaday says. "I know that this had an impact on the man, but it also had an impact on me. We are blessed to be able to serve and to have such great partners."

Plans for the future

Canaday says GCC plans to continue the market in 2020 and would like to help other churches start food and cloth-

ing ministries. A verse Canaday says he has identified for this ministry in 2020 is Psalm 115:1: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."

"In 2020 we are calling these Saturdays 'Good Neighbor Saturdays,'" Canaday says. "It is more than just food. It is also clothes and a caring heart.... It's all about Jesus." —*Janae Rempel*

Congolese churches explore joining USMB

Church-to-church relationships being formed

Christians from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including those with roots in the Congolese Mennonite Brethren church, have been immigrating to the United States for roughly the past 15 years, forming congregations and reaching out to their neighbors and fellow immigrants.

About 20 of these Congolese congregations from 14 states have been exploring the possibility of joining the U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB). Last summer the USMB National Strategy Team hosted a summit that introduced Congolese leaders to USMB leaders and ministries. A Congolese Task Force was recently formed to develop strategies for integrating those congregations that want to become part of USMB into the denominational family.

As part of the ongoing discerning process, the task force is inviting pastors of these Congolese congregations to attend a half-day Congolese Diasporic Gathering July 23 and USMB Gathering 2020, the national convention to be held July 23-25. Both events will be held in Kansas City, Mo.

The task force is also working on developing ways for USMB congregations to partner with Congolese congregations for encouragement, prayer, coaching and support, says task force chair Rick Eshbaugh. Eshbaugh, who is the Central

District Conference minister, says details about these church-to-church partnerships will be announced via C-Link (www.christianleadermag.com).

One aspect of the task force planning is for USMB churches to contribute toward the cost of Congolese pastors attending the Congolese Diasporic Gathering and USMB Gathering 2020.

"We are encouraging our USMB churches to be a sister church and provide airfare and lodging for one Congolese pastor to attend the gathering and convention," says Don Morris, USMB national director. "We think the cost of that will be about \$750 per person."

Morris adds that USMB is covering the convention registration fee of \$189 per person for up to 20 Congolese pastors; there is no cost for the Congolese Diasporic Gathering.

The Congolese Diasporic Gathering will include worship and teaching, information from USMB, including the membership process and a question and answer time. Organizers anticipate that Nzuzi Mukawa, a Congolese pastor, mission professor and Multiply team leader and church planter who is a USMB Gathering 2020 speaker, will serve as a resource speaker during the Thursday afternoon gathering.

"This will be a time for the Congolese pastors to meet other Congolese leaders from across the nation," says Eshbaugh, "and for them to interact with our national USMB family.... We hope this diasporic gathering, the convention and these church-to-church partnerships can help to facilitate integration."

In addition to Eshbaugh and Morris, Congolese Task Force members are Terry Hunt, Eastern District Conference minister; Garry Prieb, a Multiply staff member who has lived in DR Congo; and Congolese leaders Claude Tambatamba and Henri Ngolo.

Tambatamba, of New Jerusalem Temple, a USMB congregation in Sioux Falls, SD, is the liaison between



Pastor Alexis Mutabazi of His Grace Christian Life Church International helps to unload Christmas gifts given to members of his church by people from USMB Eastern District Conference churches. *Photo by Terry Hunt*

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USMB and a network of Congolese congregations in Arizona, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. Ngolo, of Kettering, Ohio, is the liaison with a second network that includes congregations in North Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky and Maine, some with direct ties to MB congregations in DR Congo.

NC church provides gifts

The North Carolina District Conference has renamed itself the Eastern District Conference (EDC) in anticipation of welcoming some of these Congolese churches into the district. District minister Hunt, who is also

pastor of The Life Center in Lenoir, N.C., has formed a relationship with Pastor Alexis Mutabazi and his congregation, His Grace Christian Life Church International of Nashville, Tenn.

Mutabazi traveled to Lenoir to attend the EDC convention in September, and the next month Hunt and his wife, Kathy, travelled to Nashville to spend a Saturday evening and Sunday with Mutabazi's congregation.

"After the Saturday evening service, we wanted to get to know more about each person and how they came to America," Hunt says. "Their stories were so compelling and filled with a deep desire to serve Christ in a land free of war and sickness. Our hearts

broke in hearing these stories and then rejoiced with them in knowing that they are now in America."

As thankful as the Congolese are to be in the U.S., adjusting to life in a new country is not easy, Hunt says. "Each of these families still need people who are willing to walk alongside of them to help them navigate this land of opportunities."

As the Hunts made the six-hour drive home to Lenoir, they were "moved by the Holy Spirit to show the love of Jesus and seek out ways to bless our brothers and sisters."

As a result, EDC congregations provided Christmas gifts for the Nashville church. Hunt asked for the name, gender and age of all children and adults at His Grace church so that everyone in the church would receive a gift. The names were attached to two Christmas trees—one for children and the other for adults—that were set up at The Life Center.

"The names on the trees were all gone in a matter of days, and the gift-wrapped presents began to roll in, one by one," says Hunt. "Most people purchased more than one gift. Each gift was tagged with the name of the recipient, and no one put on who it was from."

In addition to the gifts, the Hunts collected household items for each family and a local grocery store donated a box of nonperishable foods. The couple delivered the gifts and supplies Dec. 20, 2019.

"To see the outpouring of love from one church family to another reminds me of the early believers in the book of Acts 4:32, 'Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common,'" (NKJV) says Hunt. —*Connie Faber with files from Terry Hunt*



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Celebrating USMB church plants

What God is doing in Minn., Colo., Utah and SD

Our USMB family has a lot to celebrate, including several church plants that God is blessing and where people's lives are being changed through new relationship with Jesus. Although there are more current MB church plants than these four, let's take a look at what God is doing in Minnesota, Colorado, Utah and South Dakota.

Minnesota: Redemption Church

Christian Kohs, pastor of Redemption Church in Owatonna, Minn., recently wrote in an update, "I must start off this update with our 33 baptisms in 2019! We've begun a Wednesday night kid's program now that we have our own space, and we have seen numerous visitors each and every single Sunday so far. Non-Christians keep coming and meeting Jesus, and then they are inviting their friends." That's definitely worth celebrating.

Utah: Lakeview Church

Phil Wiebe, planting pastor of Lakeview Church in Stansbury Park, Utah, has seen this church, launched Easter Sunday 2019, grow beyond expectation. "We baptized five people recently, three coming out of the LDS (Mormon) faith and our average attendance since September is 210," he writes.

"Currently over 40 former LDS people are a part of the church and are transitioning out of that false religion," Wiebe says. "We started a transitions class for them in January. We're outgrowing our current meeting space and anticipate being out of room by Easter 2020. As such, our local Elder Board made the decision to temporarily go to three services, short term, while aiming to start our second campus in the fall of



Redemption Church, a church plant in Owatonna Minn., celebrated 33 baptisms in 2019. The church began as a Bible study in the home of Christian and Erica Kohs.

Photo by Redemption Church.

2020." When we plant new MB churches, the vision is for reaching people with the gospel. That is happening exponentially at Lakeview Church.

South Dakota: Renewal MB Church

Church plant pastor Jon Fiester, from Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, SD, reports this new MB church is growing and continues to meet on Sunday evenings at an art center in downtown Rapid City. He writes, "Most of our attenders are self-proclaiming 'no religion.' These are people who are done with religion but are ready for a relationship with Jesus. They see God continually working even through many spiritual attacks and brokenness in people's lives. Several Grow Groups are meeting, and a Financial Peace University group started in January."

Colorado: City Church

Finally, Mario Trujillo, pastor of City Church in Pueblo, Colo., a church planted in 2017, is excited about how the church continues to reach people in the inner parts of this diverse southeast Colorado foothill city.

Trujillo writes, "This past year and moving into this new season, we have celebrated five baptisms, some new leadership and lives being transformed by the power of the Gospel. As we have been going through different seasons, we are learning to embrace changes, hardships, weariness, beauty and growth. We hold onto the words that Paul encouraged the church with in Acts 20:28 as we're reminded that it's the Holy Spirit's job to change hearts, convict people of sin, and breathe life into weary souls. So, we are embracing change and are looking forward to new seasons at City Church."

Pray for the Fiesters, Trujillos, Wiebes and Kohs and other leaders in these churches who are passionately sharing the gospel of Jesus and believe it is the only thing that has the power to truly transform lives. Changed lives mean people finding strength for living today and being redeemed for an eternal future in heaven. It's worth our investment as an MB family, to help fund, pray for, serve and celebrate these new houses of worship and discipleship. Let's do more. —USMB

Strong and generous

Evaluating the financial health of MB Foundation

The year 2019 will be remembered by many in our Mennonite Brethren family as a year of financial setback and hardship for several of our denominational entities. While the U.S. economy has been strong considering the historically low unemployment and record highs in the stock market, some MB ministries in the United States and Canada have been experiencing significant cutbacks, realignments and deep financial losses. Explanations of significant financial losses and organizational adjustments are being reported through our denominational magazines and by press releases from these MB ministries. One headline in *Mennonite World Review* on Nov. 11, 2019, read, “Canadian MB leaders apologize for financial losses.”

My purpose in this column is not to point fingers or highlight the misfortune of these MB ministries. I grieve with them for the circumstances our brothers and sisters have had to endure. But I have to wonder if some in our U.S. family are privately waiting to see if there is another shoe to drop.

In response, Don Morris, our USMB national director, asked me to highlight the financial condition of MB Foundation. Though some may not want to dive into the weeds (i.e. numbers), I encourage you to read on.

In my opinion, MB Foundation has never been stronger financially than it is today. Nor have we ever been more generous to our MB family than we are today. In this column I'll focus on the financial health of the foundation. If you are interested in hearing more about our generosity and service to the MB family, please send me a note.

It will be late spring 2020 before we have the audited financials of MB Foundation available, but here are some key indicators of our financial health and strength from my vantage point:

- Since incorporation Dec. 28, 1990, MB Foundation has experienced asset growth every year. In fact, in 2019, we estimate growth in assets of over \$46 million.
- MB Loan Fund was launched Jan. 1, 2003, to better serve our certificate and loan customers. From start to finish, it took less than a year to develop and launch this new vehicle for the lending ministry of our national family.

- We meet and exceed the regulatory requirements for operating MB Loan Fund as directed by our board of directors. Our offering circular is published annually outlining the operational health and strength of the Fund.

- Since I had the privilege of joining the foundation team in 1996, we have experienced a fully funded budget each year; we have never spent more than the budget approved by our board.

- We currently have 16 staff members, 15 in Hillsboro and one in Fresno. Our four-member lead team has a combined tenure at MB Foundation of approximately 57 years. (This despite our new Chief Operations Officer who has only been here 16 months!) The entire team is knowledgeable, dedicated and focused on serving our family with excellence.

- MB Foundation has a recently expanded Board of Directors consisting of 11 individuals who are active members of their local MB church. We also have a special consultant appointed by the board and two directors with emeritus status. These individuals bring a wealth of experience in management, leadership, finance, theology, architecture, construction, real estate, banking, accounting and more.

- Loan loss reserve is “fully funded” as determined by our auditors and would help mitigate any loan losses incurred in our loan portfolio.

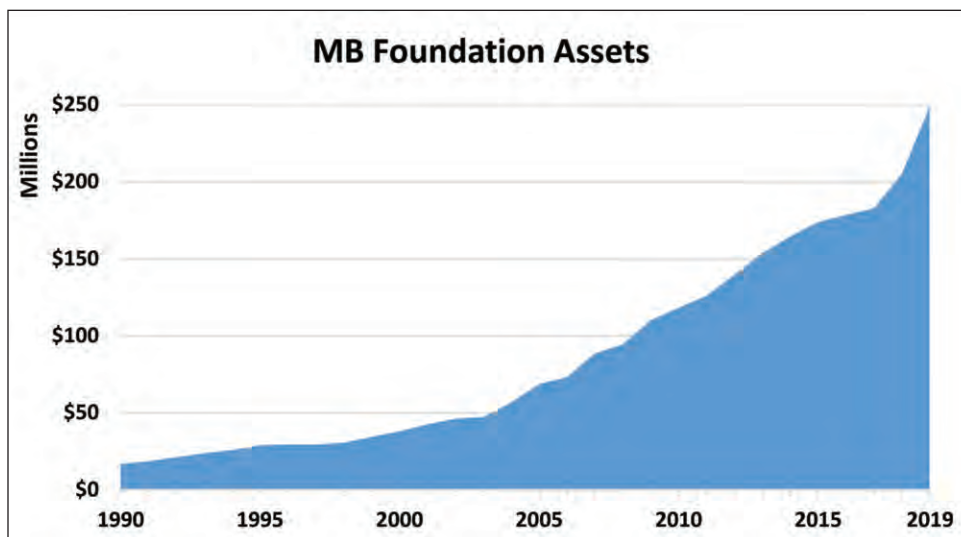
- An administrative reserve is in place to carry us through a season of difficulty.

- A newly developed financial model has been established to prudently ensure our financial stability and strength while providing additional funds in support of expanded MB ministries.

- MB Foundation has been a member in good standing of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) since joining in 2005.

- Our most recent audit and annual report can always be found on our website and copies are available upon request to our constituency.

“As USMB national director, I can assure you that without a strong, healthy MB Foundation providing resources and financial expertise, USMB would not be in a position to provide many of the necessary ministries that we currently do for our MB family,” says Don Morris, USMB national director. “There are a



number of ways that MB Foundation adds to the strength of our conference, and I am grateful that our foundation has taken the prudent steps along the way to insure robust financial growth, integrity and vitality. I also appreciate Jon's investment of time, energy and wisdom as a liaison with our USMB Leadership Board and as a member of the National Strategy Team."

David Hardt, chair of the USMB Leadership Board, says, "MB Foundation has been a key partner in our national conference of churches for many years. Through the generosity of MB Foundation, the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches has received consistent financial support to help with national ministry in our MB family. It's not only the financial gifts. MB Foundation has given wise council in helping USMB to stay financially solid as well. MB Foundation has also facilitated financial gifts to many of our MB partner ministries. The commitment of MB Foundation to lead by example in the area of financial stewardship has been a huge asset to our MB family!"

All this said, only God knows what tomorrow brings. We have done our best to build

and maintain a healthy financial position. Your faith in us and participation with us has been vital to our success.

More importantly, God has been at work through MB Foundation and we are deeply grateful. We take the instructions from I Timothy 6:17 very seriously and do not want to be proud, trusting in our money, but seek to put our complete trust in the living God. I'm the first to acknowledge that all success MB Foundation has had over the past 29 years is due to his working through us and in spite of us. All failures, large or small, are due to our shortcomings, not his.

I welcome your questions, comments and insights at jwiebe@mbfoundation.com. ■

Links for additional information:

<https://mbfoundation.com/resources/howweare/financial-profile/>

<https://mbfoundation.com/resources/howweare/boardofdirectors/>

<https://mbfoundation.com/resources/howweare/staff/>

<https://mbfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-2020-Offering-Circular-Packet.pdf>



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.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Cody Cummings, Chloe Espericueta, Elijah Espericueta and Melissa Espericueta were baptized and received as members at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church**, Dec. 22. Eli Espericueta, Keith Fields, Jennifer Fields, Nicholas Pool and Melissa Pool were also received as members.

Keith Letcher and Susan Letcher were received as members at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, Dec. 22.

Bo Welcker, Bri Welcker and Kalder Welcker were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, Dec. 15.

Jared Funk, Holly Funk, Peter Wall, Kara Wall, Garry Bull, Briana Bull, Cody Lubbers, Katie Lubbers, Tom Cox, Carissa Cox, Corey Harms and Aaron Bartel were received as members at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, Dec. 15. Kennedy Stewart, Alexis Wolfe and Annelise Bull were baptized.

Joe Donner, Cindi Galvan, Zach Shaw, Colby Reich, Zayleigh Reich, Cassie Britt and Aliyah Britt were baptized at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, Dec. 15.

Selena Donaldson and Easton Turner were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**, Dec. 8.

Paul Funk, Silas Funk, Hayden Gehring, Elijah Herndon, Nathan Reinecker, Cooper Wiens, Cooper Wilson, Sophie Wilson and Jerry Unruh were baptized at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, Dec. 8.

Alyssa Neufeld, Nicole Schmidt, Seth Wiebe, Bri Wiebe, Seth West, Jessie West, Dorene Engleson and Lori Hedlund were received as members at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, Nov. 24.

Noah Beavers, Rachel Schafer, Jameson Moss, Sadie Moss, Alyssa Matney, Cierra Gawith, Ashtyn Matlock, Tony Hein and Rebecca Kaufman were baptized at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, Nov. 24. Jim Boese, Beverly Boese, Staci Janzen, Ashley Jost, Jeanie Klaassen, Randy Stepanek, Shana Stepanek, Bryce Wichert and Sara Wichert were received as members in fall 2019.

In 2019, 85 people were baptized at **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**

WORKERS

Jamie Mack began serving as associate pastor of worship and discipleship at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**, in February, with a commissioning service Feb. 9. Connie Nicholson began serving as associate pastor of children. Vanna In concluded his service as associate pastor of youth and families, Jan. 31, 2020. Cheryl Dueck Smith is serving as interim executive pastor and Brian Ross as interim preaching pastor.

Pastor Jeremy and Krista Matlock were installed as pastoral couple at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, Jan. 12, 2020. Bailey Kaufman began serving as director of communications.

Pastor Darren and Sherry Rempel were installed as pastoral couple at **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, Jan. 5, 2020.

Pastor Kevin and Jennie Strobe concluded their service as interim pastoral couple at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**

Marshall Reeves began serving as discipleship pastor at **Discovery Church, Collinsville, Okla.**

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

John Biller concluded 35 years of service as worship pastor at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, Dec. 31, 2019.

DEATHS

Bartel, Vida Delores Neufeld, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, July 1, 1936—Nov. 30, 2019. Parents: Henry Julius (Jude) and Elsie Frieda Hiebert Neufeld. Spouse: Vernon A. Bartel (deceased). Children: Ronnda Bartel.

Bergen, David "Dave," Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Sept. 4, 1928—Dec. 27, 2019. Parents: Isaak I. and Margaret (Welk) Bergen. Spouse: Lydia Bergen. Children: Richard "Rick," Carol Holte, Gordon (deceased); seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Bergen, Walter W., Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, May 15, 1933—Dec. 5, 2019. Parents: Pete and Ada Bergen. Spouse: Judith (Nelson) Bergen. Children: Stanley, Gregory, Phillip, Clinton; 11 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Deines, Ella (Klassen), Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, Feb. 12, 1920—Jan. 30, 2020. Parents: Jacob G. and Katharina (Woelk) Klassen. Spouse: William Christian Deines (deceased). Children: William, Edward; two grandchildren.

Dick, Robert A., Phoenix, Ariz., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., Oct. 21, 1936—Oct. 1, 2019. Parents: A.N. and Katheryn Dick. Spouse: Verla Wichert. Children: Christine, Cameron; one grandchild.

Elrich, Willa Mae (Cornelson), Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Oct. 23, 1927—Dec. 11, 2019. Parents: William Henry and Dora Mae Cornelson. Spouse: Elvin Elrich, deceased. Children: LeAnn Augsbarger, Rick, Bill, Scott, Kay Spenser (deceased); eight grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Flaming, Vera, Enid, Okla., member of Enid MB Church, Jan. 20, 1925—Dec. 12, 2019. Parents: Carl and Tena Heidebrecht. Spouse: Harold Flaming (deceased), Fred J. Deutschendorf (deceased). Children: Phyllis Wipf, John Deutschendorf; five grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Franz, Harold Eugene, Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, Sept. 26, 1932—Feb. 2, 2020. Parents: George and Estella (Martens) Franz. Spouse: Eleanor Reimer. Children: Chris O'Bannon, Debbie Hardy, Susan Koslowsky; nine grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren.

Hertzler, Charles, Sanger, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Feb. 23, 1927—Dec. 10, 2019. Parents: Clement and Grace (Boeck) Hertzler. Spouse: Marilyn Hertzler, (deceased.) Children: Ken, Paul, Kari Larson; eight grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Janzen, Marilyn Ruth, Santa Maria, Calif., member of Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., April 23, 1935—Dec. 6, 2019. Parents: Henry H. and Viola Janzen. Spouse: Edward Janzen (deceased). Children: Jacqueline Awbrey, Tom; three grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Klassen, Peter J., Fresno, Calif., member of Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Clovis, Calif., Dec. 18, 1930—March 25, 2019. Parents: John and Elisabeth (Martens) Klassen. Spouse: Nancy J. Klassen. Children: Kent, Kevin, Bryan; eight grandchildren.

Kliwer, Rosalie Viola Fast, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, March 8, 1922—Nov. 26, 2019. Parents: David and Sarah Fast. Spouse: Ruben Kliwer (deceased). Children: Myron, Janice Hopkins, Duane, Daryl; five grandchildren.

Krause, Walter, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Jan. 4, 1925—Jan. 1, 2020. Parents: David and Anna Krause. Spouse: Helen Krause (deceased.) Children: James, John (deceased), Mary Krause (deceased); six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Kroeker, Arnold Dave, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Oct. 18, 1937—Jan. 22, 2020. Parents: David and Fern Kroeker. Spouse: Eunice. Children: Galen, Shirla Willems, Byron; eight grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Morrison, Richard Emerson, Omaha, Neb., member of Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Nov. 12, 1946—Dec. 30, 2019. Spouse: Jeanne (Hartley) Morrison. Children: Melissa Kelly, Joshua; five grandchildren.

Nickel, Laura Lily Klaassen Wiebe, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 23, 1920—Dec. 20, 2019. Parents: Nicholas and Alwina (Unruh) Klaassen. Spouse: Orlando H. Wiebe (deceased). Children: Joyce Epp Boettcher, Wayne Wiebe, Wendell Wiebe, Charis Pauls, Laura Beth Ramirez. Step-children: Sandra Estaville, Sharon Gomez; 14 grandchildren, two step-grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren.

Pauls, Helen Rogalsky, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 1, 1926—Jan. 31, 2020. Parents: Heinrich and Anna Block Rogalsky. Children: Roger, Darryl, Karen Anderson; two grandchildren.

Penner, Eleanor, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, June 6, 1927—Dec. 9, 2019. Parents: Samuel and Anna (Becker) Reimer. Spouse: John R. Penner, (deceased.) Children: Carolyn (deceased), Janice (deceased), Cheryl McDonald; eight grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Reimche, Deloris “Dolly,” Harvey, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, Dec. 12, 1928—Dec. 9, 2019. Parents: Henry and Carrie (Rund) Delk. Spouse: Charles Reimche (deceased). Children: Tom, Richard, Clyde, Starla, Tim; 20 grandchildren, 35 great-grandchildren.

Suderman, Robert L. “Bob,” Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 6, 1927—Dec. 23, 2019. Parents: Ernest and Louise (Seibel) Suderman. Spouse: Wilma Suderman (deceased). Children: Karyn Freeman, Doug, Laurie, Kristie Strand, Robyn Suderman (deceased); eight grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

Suderman, Ruby, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Aug. 9, 1920—Dec. 13, 2019. Parents: Jacob C. and Minnie (Hein) Grunau. Spouse: Leon Suderman (deceased). Children: Gary, Jerry, Merlin, Becky Nuss; eight grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Tschetter, Barbara Ann “Bobbi,” Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, May 18, 1927—Dec. 21, 2019. Parents: Joe B. and Rebecca Walter. Spouse: Henry I. Tschetter (deceased.) Children: Marlis Klaassen, Craig, Douglas, Steve; nine grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren.

Voth, Johnny Eugene, Kremlin, Okla., member of Enid (Okla.) MB Church, Aug. 30, 1932—Jan. 17, 2020. Parents: Peter H. and Clara E. Voth. Spouse: Mary Ann Sherley. Children: Janet Streck, Diane Fosmire, Gary; 11 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Walter, Carol LaVonne, Yale, S.D., of Bethel MB Church, Yale, Nov. 7, 1936—Dec. 12, 2019. Parents: Jake and Justina (Gross) Stahl. Spouse: DeWayne Walter (deceased.) Children: Vonnie Boline, Rod, Robin Boldt, Paula Walter, Jill Rome; seven grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Wiebe, Linda, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Aug. 15, 1928—Dec. 26, 2019. Parents: Peter M. and Martha (Hildebrand) Schroeder. Spouse: Allen Wiebe (deceased.) Children: Robert, Jeanette Cook; two grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Willems, Lee, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 22, 1933—Feb. 1, 2020. Parents: George C. and Lizzie Dick Willems. Spouse: Lily Willems. Children: Brenton Willems, Grant Willems; six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Wittrig, Ina, Tony, Wis., member of Exeland (Wis.) Mennonite Church, Aug. 6, 1918—Dec. 11, 2019. Parents: Calvin and Emma (Boshart) Roth. Spouse: Roy Wittrig (deceased.) Children: Gerald, Frances Vaughn, Charlotte Kesan, Peggy Kuehne, Wayne (deceased); 11 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, 12 great-great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

FELLOWSHIP

Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church has changed its name to New Life Community.

Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a Valentine’s Day dinner and program Feb. 14.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., held its third annual Galentine’s Day celebration for women Feb. 12. The event included snacks, games and gifts.

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., hosted LBC elder and licensed marriage, family and child therapist Michael Sampley for a marriage seminar Jan. 24–25.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held “Christmas FOR Visalia” with six services Dec. 23–24. The event included carols, live music and kids’ activities.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., held a Community Christmas Celebration Dec. 22, which included dinner, a program and dessert.

The Elders at **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted a Senior Christmas Dinner Dec. 17.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., held a Christmas Eve candlelight service Dec. 24. The church held its fourth annual Family Christmas Celebration Dec. 8, which included instrumental and vocal performances, readings, skits and testimonies.

The Deacon Ministry Team at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a Christmas luncheon for senior adults with a program including vocal and instrumental Christmas selections.

Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., invited its AWANA family to a Happy Birthday Jesus Celebration, which included a free barbeque dinner, devotional, carols, hot cocoa and a craft. Kids purchased gifts at the AWANA Christmas store. The church held a Christmas Eve Candlelight Service Dec. 24, and traditional “tuit” goodie bags were distributed.

WORSHIP

Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held “Ascribe Night” Jan. 5 with worship, fellowship and hot chocolate.

The North Fresno (Calif.) Church choir hosted a program of Christmas carols, Scripture and choral anthems Dec. 15.

church news

The **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** choir led worship Dec. 15 with the presentation of the Christmas cantata, "Everlasting Light: The Promise of Christmas," accompanied by an 18-piece orchestra.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., offered free babysitting Feb. 14 as part of its LOVE PEORIA initiative, with the goal of loving and serving families and marriages in the community. People from the church participated in Old Town Peoria's annual Holiday Festival Dec. 14. Axiom showed Christmas movies and provided holiday snacks and an ornament-making station.

New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif., partnered with Christian Worship Center to provide Christmas gifts and food to 51 children at Jefferson School in December 2019. The church sent 165 shoeboxes through Operation Christmas Child.

Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., held "Christmas at the Barn" Dec. 24.

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, delivered 10 care packages put together by Good Neighbor Ministries following a time of sharing Dec. 22.

Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., hosted a Wrap and Roll party Dec. 18, where people wrapped shoeboxes and filled them with toiletries, toys, games and treats for The Mission of Kern County. The boxes were distributed to people staying at the mission for Christmas. Two groups of carolers visited church members living in senior care facilities.

Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla., joined the community in preparing food baskets to be distributed Dec. 15.

People from **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, distributed 121,550 pounds of food to people in their community in 2019. They gave away free fresh fruits and vegetables on the first Saturday of each month, with occasional bread, milk and nonperishable items delivered by the Central California Food Bank for distribution as well.

People from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, sang Christmas carols to residents in a local nursing facility. The junior high youth group assembled nearly 900 luminaries for the town's annual live nativity Dec. 14.

The praise team from **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, sang at the Salvation Army Christmas basket fundraiser Dec. 3.

GLOBALLY

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., collected 332 Operation Christmas Child boxes and sent 43 people to work at the OCC processing center in Dallas, Texas.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church assembled 20 MCC relief kits and 20 community food baskets for the church's Advent Conspiracy projects.

Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., volunteers made 40 comforters for refugees Nov. 25 during the church's 12-hour Comforter Construction Day.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church

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

Lead Pastor: North Fresno MB Church is seeking our next lead pastor. We are located in the urban area of the 500,000+ city of Fresno, Calif. We have a

passion for our community as evidenced by our deep involvement in our local neighborhood. Sunday morning attendance is approximately 300 between two services, one classic and one contemporary. Last year we celebrated our 50th Anniversary which reinforced our deep commitment to strong ministry in our local community. For our next lead pastor we seek a visionary leader who excels at preaching and leadership and who relates well to a diverse group of people. We desire to build upon our 50 year legacy while embracing changes for our next chapter as a congregation. A job description, church profile and instructions for interested candidates to apply is available at: www.northfresnochurch.org

Agency Listings

Chief Development Officer: For over 100 years, MB Foundation (www.mbfoundation.com) has developed a robust, successful stewardship ministry for individuals, MB congregations and ministries and other Christian communities and organizations across the U.S. with over \$250 million under management. To meet growing needs, MB Foundation is seeking an individual to serve on the senior leadership team as chief development officer who is an entrepreneurial leader to develop, implement and manage a comprehensive development and marketing plan. For more information go to <http://bit.ly/2R6VHnk> or contact Ron Infinger at ron@mba-search.com.

Church Relations Director: MB Foundation is seeking an individual who will champion biblical stewardship, serve churches and pastors, encourage generosity and promote MB Foundation and its services to pastors, churches and ministries throughout the MB family. This position may office out of either Fresno, Calif., or Hillsboro, Kan. Resumes may be sent to Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation, PO Box 220, Hillsboro, KS 67063 or jwiebe@mbfoundation.com. A full job description is available at www.mbfoundation.com/employment.

From TESTIMONY, page 9

tionship with God and the assurance of everlasting life. It is as simple as accepting that you are a sinner (Romans 3:23) and asking God to forgive you, believing that Jesus died on the cross for you and rose again (2 Cor. 5:15), and surrendering your life to him.

I believe God will use this trial in my life to minister to people. It might come through a miraculous healing, which

I could proclaim throughout a long life. It might come from the testimony of others at my memorial service, telling of a servant putting his trust in God and sharing the love of Christ with others. I don't know what God's plan is for my physical body, but I know I can trust him fully and use each day to profess his goodness (1 Peter 3:15).

Aaron Rodgers said what?

Talking with people who have a negative view of God

Sports and movie stars are often looked up to by people in our society to the point where their words might even carry more weight than what is reasonable. That can include what celebrities say about Christianity. Should we listen?

I think we should listen in order to know how people in general think about things—but not because they have a better handle on reality because they might be famous. Being famous doesn't make one wiser about God. In fact, it's possible that fame can cause a greater disconnect from God and an attitude of "I don't need God, look at me!"

For instance, in a Jan. 23, 2020, Fox News online article, Aaron Rodgers, quarterback of the Green Bay Packers who is likely headed to the NFL football hall of fame when his career is over, had some quite negative things to say about his parents' "religion." He is quoted as saying, "I don't know how you can believe in a God who wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell. What type of loving, sensitive, omnipresent, omnipotent being wants to condemn his beautiful creation to a fiery hell at the end of all this?"

Well, I don't know about you, but if I viewed God this way, I wouldn't want to believe either. Where in that diatribe is the truth that God created us for relationship, that he loves us deeply, gave himself up for us and desires an eternal presence with us? All I see is a warped view of the truth about God. Rodgers went on to say, "It (religion) can be something that people have to have to make themselves feel better. Because it's set up binary, it's us and them, saved and unsaved, heaven and hell, it's enlightened and heathen, it's holy and righteous...that makes a lot of people feel better about themselves."

Hmm. That's a rather harsh view of people who love God and follow him in life.

But how to respond? Well, for many, it might seem correct to write that scoundrel, idiotic sports star and let him know that he doesn't have a clue! So there! Some did just that. At the end of the article is a long list of posts from those who blasted him for his ridiculous views. Did that help? I'll bet a resounding zero percent of those who agree with Rodgers or even Rodgers himself were swayed to re-look at their views about God as a result of the resounding literary raves against his beliefs.

Instead of ridiculing him, I wish I could spend some time with him, talk this through at length and help him to see the truth of what a relationship with Jesus is truly like. Maybe we could do that while playing a game of catch? Well, probably won't happen. I like to watch him throw a football and he does it really well, but even so, ending up in the hall of fame will be very, very temporal. I hurt for those who have such a fatalistic view of God and the truth of who God is. I long to help people get through their negative views of God, the one who I know as loving and caring and who has been with me through so many things.

Football players, movie stars, politicians, business owners, cashiers, servers, lawyers, accountants, people on our block, friends, family members, so many of whom are lost. So many going through life giving little or no thought about why or for whom they were created. It's heartbreaking.

Hey, Aaron Rodgers, quarterback of the NFL's Green Bay Packers, grab a football and allow me to tell you about Jesus. The real Jesus—the one who loves you beyond measure while you thrill me with perfect spirals.■



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

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