

CHRISTIAN LEADER

July / August 2020

The place we've never been Page 12

Churches serve during coronavirus Page 17

Are we there yet? Page 31





- LEAD One: one-day regional leadership training events
- LEAD Cohorts: a new lineup coming in early September
- LEAD Coaching for pastors & leaders
- LEAD Pods: podcasts on various topics by MB leaders, experts
- Webinars: partnering with The Center for Anabaptist Studies
- Ethnic ministry summits
- ICOMB/BFL/Historical Commission funding
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- *Christian Leader* magazine/C-Link
- USMB Youth: network, programs, camps
- Church Planting: assist with gatherings, assessments, training, cohort

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



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in this issue

July / August 2020

FEATURES: CHURCH LIFE

10 Comings & Goings

TIM GEDDERT

*Reflections on the why's and how's
of our journeys*

12 The place we've never been

RICK BARTLETT

*Our congregations can be places
of innovation*

14 Who inspires you?

SUZANNE HADLEY GOSSELIN

*My list includes Tabitha,
Priscilla, Claudia, Gina
and Maria*

FIND MORE ONLINE:

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

- 10 steps to becoming a praying church
FRED LEONARD
- Christian unity in spite of global diversity
ALFRED NEUFELD FRIESEN

DEPARTMENTS

5 The news

7 5 minutes with...

17 Body Life

- USMB churches serve communities during coronavirus:
 - Church promotes small businesses during COVID-19
 - Free food, no strings attached, surprise recipients
 - Lighthouse Church practices generosity during COVID-19
 - Meeting practical needs opens doors
- What's in a name?
- Hoops with heart
- Church relief fund offers a lifeline

28 Church news

COLUMNS

4 Editorial

CONNIE FABER

8 Frontlines

NATHAN ENSZ

9 Testimony

JESSICA SCHROEDER

26 Mission & Ministry

27 Vantage Point

DENNIS FAST

31 From the national director

DON MORRIS

That's all I want

God commands us to seek oceans of justice

Last summer I visited the Dutch Resistance Museum in Amsterdam. The museum recounts the five-year (1940-45) occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany. Visitors are invited to consider the question the Dutch faced: Will I adjust, collaborate or resist? While the museum rightly champions those who resisted, the exhibit got me thinking about the insidious ways day-to-day life and worries keep us from paying attention to injustice around us, educating ourselves about the issues of our day and taking action when we know something is wrong. Our choice to adjust, collaborate or resist is as relevant today as it was 80 years ago.

The marches, rallies and protests following the death of George Floyd, a black man who was killed May 25 while in police custody, remind me that followers of Jesus must continually and actively resist injustice. We must with Amos call one another to “seek good and not evil” (Amos 5:14) and work to make the world more like what God desires: “Do you know what I want? I want justice—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s all I want” (Amos 5:24, The Message).

Will this time of soul-searching, protests and calls for reform actually produce any meaningful change? I don’t know. I hope so. Change will only happen if we confess and repent of our participation in racism. Those of us who are white must acknowledge the ways in which we have not challenged racism individually or structurally. We don’t know the exhausting fear that burdens black men and women every day of being threatened, arrested or killed because of the color of our skin. As we affirm that black lives matter, we must be ready to be challenged and made uncomfortable as we admit and attempt to address our unfair actions toward people of color.

Those of us who are white have been slow to admit that racism goes beyond how we treat one another and extends to the very systems and institutions of our country—education, health care, banking and financial systems, transportation, real estate, criminal justice, voting laws, employment, policing, the court system, etc. As we join the work for oceans of justice and rivers of fairness and against institutional and structural racism, we must recognize that people of color will lead the way and that because the structures benefit us, we are part of the problem. We must listen more than we speak; ask questions and be willing to be critiqued. This is hard work, requiring continual effort. We must assume a posture of listening and learning not just for a season but for the long haul. ▀



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USMB cancels Gathering 2020

Due to coronavirus realities and restrictions, the biennial USMB National Pastors' Conference and National Convention, scheduled for July 21-25, 2020, has moved online. The gathering that was to be held at Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center in Independence, Mo., was cancelled June 1.



USMB 2020 Gathering Online is scheduled for July 22-24 with morning webinars beginning at 11 a.m. (CDT) and afternoon sessions starting at 1:00 p.m. (CDT).

The one-hour opening session Wednesday morning will include a time of worship, a message by USMB pastor and LAMB Conference district minister Aaron Hernandez and a prayer time. An afternoon webinar, "Increasing your church's impact in the community," will feature a panel discussion led by Boris Borisov, pastor of Pacific Keep Church in Spokane, Wash.

Three online events are planned for Thursday, July 23. MB Foundation CEO and president Jon Wiebe will lead a morning webinar on generosity. An afternoon business session followed by a webinar on town and country churches with speaker Ron Klassen, executive director of Rural Home Missionary Association, are planned.

Kadi Cole, author, speaker and leadership trainer, will address leader-

ship development Friday morning, and the closing afternoon session will provide time to conduct unfinished business and for prayer and communion.

The Congolese summit, originally scheduled for Thursday afternoon, will be held online Saturday morning.

LEAD Pods featuring Cole, Rob Reimer, founder and president of Renewal Ministries International, and Nzuzi Mukawa, MB pastor, educator and church planter from DR Congo, will be released weekly beginning July 17.

For details on the online events, visit www.usmb.org—USMB

LEAD Pods now available

LEAD Pods—a podcast by and for U.S. Mennonite Brethren—are the newest addition to USMB's Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) initiatives designed to resource USMB churches.

LEAD Pods are designed to be accessible to a broad audience within the USMB family. A new episode will be released every two to three weeks. Matt Ehresman, media director at First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., serves as the host of LEAD Pods.

"There are tons of podcasts out there to choose from," says USMB national director Don Morris. "But



Matt Ehresman, host of LEAD Pods

this is us. This is Mennonite Brethren sharing ideas with other Mennonite Brethren, and hopefully beyond that as well."

LEAD Pods are accessible on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify and at www.usmb.org/lead-pods.—USMB

MB Foundation announces grants totaling \$700,000

In response to the impact of COVID-19 on churches, ministries and individuals, MB Foundation has provided grants totaling \$700,000 for the benefit of the Mennonite Brethren church family.

Over \$340,000 has been distributed in the form of a Borrower Relief Grant. The grants are equal to approximately one month's interest and have been issued in the form of a check to every church, organization and home loan borrower to aid in meeting expenses or caring for others. This is in addition to loan modifications already extended during this pandemic.

In addition, MB Foundation made a second contribution of \$350,000 to the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund. MB Foundation established the fund to provide support for MB churches so they could maintain financial stability and continue to meet the needs of congregants. The COVID-19 Church Relief Fund was established through the generosity of a donor and a matched gift by MB Foundation.

MB Foundation and USMB combined efforts to encourage generosity to the fund on Giving Tuesday Now May 5, a national day of giving. With matched dollars, \$32,426 was added to the fund in one day. All of the original \$60,000 in matching pledge funds were realized and matched.

"It is powerful to see how churches and individuals have come together to

help others through this distressing time,” says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation. “We are privileged to link arms with our MB family in giving.”

As of May 29, the total contributed to the Church Relief Fund stood at \$496,628.

Forty-seven churches have received grants from this fund administered by district ministers and the USMB national director. Any resources not used for COVID-19 relief will go toward future church planting.

MB Foundation’s response in these two areas exceeds any other granting year for the organization. The foundation’s 2020 grants to date include a firstfruits gift to USMB and a matching challenge of \$25,000 to help establish the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund, along with the two contributions of nearly \$350,000 each. —*MB Foundation*

Southern District cancels summer youth camps

All Southern District Conference summer camps for 2020 have been canceled. As a result of COVID-19, the SDC Youth Commission felt it unwise to host summer camps and, after prayer, consultation with camp leaders and research, decided to cancel Senior High Camp, Kids’ Camp and Junior High Camp.

“We feel that to bring together a couple hundred people from all across multiple states into a camp environment just wouldn’t be appropriate,” district youth minister Russ Claassen says in a letter posted online. “We are confident that this decision has not been made in fear nor lack of faith, but rather in faith and wisdom with respect, love and concern for the families we serve.”

Read the letter at: <http://www.sdcbyouth.org/register-now/>. —*SDYC*

Central District cancels camps

The Central District Youth Summer Camps, including junior and senior camps, scheduled for July 27-Aug. 1, 2020, at Sand Hill Lake Bible Camp in Fosston, Minn., have been canceled, according to Anthony Lind, associate youth pastor at Bethesda MB Church in Huron, S.D., and member of the Central District youth committee. The camps were canceled as a result of COVID-19-related restrictions in place in the state of Minnesota, Lind says. —*CDYC*

Tabor College announces plan to open in August

Tabor College plans to be fully open in August for fall 2020 classes. The plan was announced by President Jules Glanzer following a May 1 meeting of the Board of Directors. The plan complies with Governor Laura Kelly’s most recent orders.

“The Lord willing, Tabor College intends to be open in fall on time with on-ground classes, online classes, athletic competitions, performing arts activities and residential housing available for students,” Glanzer says.

Read more: <https://tabor.edu/tabor-college-announces-plans-to-reopen-in-phases/> —*TC*

MDS, Everence, MCC create relief fund

Anabaptist churches in the U.S. have submitted over 200 applications to the new COVID-19 Congregational Relief Fund since its launch April 13, 2020. The fund was created by Mennonite Disaster Service, Everence® and Mennonite Central Committee U.S. to aid churches facing financial crisis due to COVID-19.

The great majority of the applications have come from churches serving racially or ethnically diverse communities—congregations whose needs center around lost jobs and income that have led to a standstill of ministry in underserved communities that most need hope.

Judy Lopez, USMB representative to the MDS Board of Directors, reports that a number of small USMB Hispanic congregations have received grants.

Read more: <https://mds.mennonite.net/covid-19-donations/>.

—*Everence*

FPU sees record number of graduates, shares plan for fall

Fresno Pacific University will mail a record 875 diplomas to its May 2020 graduates. FPU’s commencement ceremony scheduled for May 9 has been combined with its annual December graduation because of the coronavirus.

May 2020 graduation numbers include 424 graduates of bachelor’s degree completion programs; 268 graduates of master’s degree programs, including 32 from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and 183 graduates of traditional undergraduate programs.

FPU also awarded more than 2,600 students direct grants totaling \$1.7 million through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic (CARES) Act. Funds are meant to help students pay for tuition and fees, technology, health care, childcare, course materials, rent, food, moving or other expenses. An additional \$261,679 has been reserved to assist students with exceptional financial hardships.

As FPU plans its fall opening for the 2020-2021 academic year, leaders are striving to provide the most personalized education experience possible while continuing to make safety the highest priority. The university is com-

5 minutes with...

Andrew Shinn

mitted to serving its students this fall with confidence, says FPU President Joseph Jones in a May 21 press release.

"We would love to see everyone back on our campuses and in classes this fall, and are planning towards that end, but may have to develop a hybrid model of virtual and in-person classes," he says. "We realize universities, like other public places, are likely to look very different than they did last fall."

Read more: <https://news.fresno.edu/article/05/21/2020/fresno-pacific-university-balancing-access-and-safety-planning-fall-2020—FPU>

MB Foundation reports growth

MB Foundation's 2019 annual report shows unprecedented growth for the second consecutive year. Assets increased by 22 percent, reaching a 2019 year-end total of \$251 million. The previous year tallied a 12 percent increase and ended with \$200 million in assets.

Several key components factored into the strong year, including a nearly \$10 million increase in investment certificates, the contribution of \$19.5 million by donors for the benefit of charities and the strong market performance leading to the standard endowment investment portfolio returning 18.58 percent.

Additional highlights that strengthened local churches include: an annual gift to support USMB in the amount of \$180,000; LeadGen scholarships to future leaders at 11 different churches; hosting Celebrate 2019!, an event for 221 boomers, builders and empty nesters from 36 MB churches and opening an office in Fresno, Calif., as an expanded commitment to serve the west coast constituency.

The full 2019 Annual Report can be viewed at www.mbfoundation.com/2019annualreport. —MB Foundation



Just four hours after being sworn in as a United States Foreign Service officer, Andrew Shinn took time for an interview. In March, with COVID-19 closing down state borders behind them, Shinn, his wife, Lisa, and their four children raced from their Reedley, Calif., home to Washington, D.C. Leaving behind his position teaching entrepreneurship at Fresno Pacific University and their home church, Reedley MB Church, the family was embarking on a new path that is expected to take them around the world with Andrew as a diplomat for the State Department.

What is the process for becoming a diplomat?

The entry is a written test covering history, U.S. law, geography, pop culture and other topics. You also write concise stories demonstrating the character qualities they are looking for. Those who pass are invited to Washington, D.C. for an oral assessment. I took the written test five times and went for two oral assessments before being selected.

Will you have a specialty?

I may start by adjudicating visas somewhere in the world, but when I get into my actual work it will be in the economic "cone." I'll advocate for the U.S. in negotiating trade treaties and helping the U.S. understand economic situations in other countries so we can craft wise economic policies.

Why did you choose economics?

My main motivation is the calling to bring people together. As a diplomat I don't serve the cause of peace, I serve the United States. But transactions can bring people together. If I do my job well, more people will be trading with each other and fewer people will be shooting at each other.

What has this process taught you about our government?

My colleagues are impressive and show that behind any presidential administration there sits a bench of public servants who are kind and self-sacrificing and ready to serve. I'm privileged to walk alongside these people.

Where will this job take you?

I'll learn about my first assignment at the flag day ceremony where you're handed the flag of the country you'll be going to. If it requires me to learn a language, I will study from a few months up to a couple of years to come to full fluency. My first two tours are two-year tours, and my family will join me.

What could the church learn from people who work in diplomacy?

When you cross cultures for a living, there's an ability to slow down and hear the stories of other people. We're living in incredibly divisive times. God would have us choose understanding each other over being right. We need to be able to slow down and listen, especially to people we don't agree with.

Read Andrew's blog at andrewandlisa.org

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Better than before

Flourishing in spite of the coronavirus

I had a clear calling to serve as pastor at Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore. Some ministry opportunities seem as though a yes or no response is justified either way. When this calling came, I knew I needed to respond affirmatively. I continue reminding myself of God's distinct call to lead the people he has put under my care.

Two and a half years into this new ministry a global crisis struck. The national goal of slowing down the spread of the coronavirus shut most of society, including churches. What a flurry of emotion this thrust on various people, me included! The Kingwood family has grown in vision and mission over the last few years. When the pandemic hit, maturing believers, with greater clarity, quickly embraced appropriate responses. Leadership teams, strengthened and established in the early season of ministry, stepped up. While COVID-19 took us by surprise and quick adjustments required our attention, the leadership teams did not despair.


Immediately, our elders expressed their commitment to helping me carry this new load. Our current five elders divided the church family equally, reaching out weekly to those within the body. They also contacted me weekly, offering assistance and personal care. I see this leadership team flourishing in ownership over ministry and believe this crisis accelerated their growth.

Other leadership teams followed suit, taking ownership of reaching out. The Operations Board, which oversees the facility, remained busy painting, pressure washing sidewalks, weeding and installing a permanent basketball hoop in the parking lot for the neighborhood

families to enjoy. The Women's Ministry Team delivered care packages to the doorstep of every Kingwood lady, and the youth leaders dropped off pizza and soda to every teenager.

The typical American church tends to fall a generation behind when it comes to technology, and Kingwood is no different. Current technology will likely be utilized 20 years from now. The speed at which the church embraces technology is normative and silently tolerated, but this pandemic required rapid adaptation for the church to remain relevant and continue to see impact. In God's goodness, he brought people into our church family at just the right time to help technologically accelerate our methods. While Kingwood still has room for technological improvement, it has come very far in the matter of months.

This crisis accelerated one more area: the younger generation. Guess who shows up to "run" church? The very generation absent in most churches—20- to 40-year-olds. When I look at the volunteers who come to help with the livestream Sunday worship gathering, I easily see the next generation stepping up. They are the ones who quickly told me they would serve however possible and show up without hesitation to serve.

In an email exchange with our elders I said, "When this is over, I want Kingwood healthier than we were before." I understand the difficulties in this season of ministry, but I refuse to waste what God can teach and accomplish through this crisis. It will pass. Will the church evidence itself stronger? God remains faithful and will use this for the good and growth of the church, ultimately for his glory! 



Nathan Ens
has been in ministry since 2000 and currently serves as lead pastor at Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore. He is a graduate of Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., and is working toward a master of arts in ministry, leadership and culture at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Ens enjoys walks in the evening and yard care over the weekend. He and his wife, Kelsey, have three children: Trenton (18), Livia (15) and Carson (11).

“I’m going to share Jesus today”

Kansas nurse volunteers in NYC during pandemic

On a Wednesday in early April, I boarded a plane for New York City to work with COVID-19 patients. It had all happened so quickly.

I’m a nurse practitioner with a hospitalists group in Wichita, Kan., where, in early- to mid-April, the patient census in hospitals plummeted. Patients purposefully avoided the emergency room, and we didn’t accept elective surgeries.

I saw fewer patients than normal, and I wanted to use the skills God gave me where there was a greater need. So my coworker and I decided to go to NYC to help at a hospital within our company that was working almost exclusively with COVID-19 patients. The next day we flew to NYC.

In New York, I worked 15 consecutive shifts at Montefiore Hospital in Nyack, approximately 15 minutes from NYC. I arrived at the hospital at 7 a.m. and couldn’t leave until 7 p.m. I diagnosed and treated COVID-19 patients almost exclusively. If the hospital admitted the rare patient for something other than COVID-19, the patient ended up leaving with COVID-19.

The hospital lacked medical supplies and staff. Some staff members were getting sick; others had already been sick and come back. The ICUs held only intubated patients. All other patients remained on the medical floors in makeshift ICUs in surgery suites and surgery recovery rooms. The nurses on the unit I worked on saw 12 very critical patients apiece.

The first week, I felt very hopeless. My stress level soared. A lot of people were dying; some of them were young. Only four COVID-19 patients had been extubated (taken off of life support) successfully in the few weeks prior to my arrival. To give some perspective, the hospital used 50 ventilators during those weeks. Those aren’t very good odds. In fact, 88 percent of intubated patients at the hospi-

tal weren’t able to ever be successfully extubated. A truck in the parking lot serving as a morgue held approximately 50 bodies.

One of my first days, three of my patients crashed within two hours, meaning they were quickly deteriorating and needed immediate interventions. I made several difficult calls to distraught families who couldn’t be with their dying family members and could only talk to them over the phone. Several family members called me the “Angel from Kansas.”

The efforts I took to avoid COVID-19 made me feel paranoid and crazy, though it may have been what kept me from getting sick. If I dropped a pen, I sanitized it. I didn’t allow housekeepers into my hotel room. I used a disinfectant station at the entrance of my room to spray my shoes, masks, coats and pens. I didn’t eat anything the first five days aside from the free lunch at the hospital because I feared I’d somehow come into contact with the virus by going to the grocery store or getting delivery food. (My family later discovered this and mailed me several boxes of food.) I needed to stay healthy for my babies and husband at home.

I pushed myself through this misery every day by viewing it as a ministry. I would wake up and say, “I’m going to share Jesus today.” One patient was particularly difficult for me. His oxygen levels were very low. He was maxed out on oxygen and needed to be intubated, yet he retained the ability to talk to me throughout everything. I encouraged him to call his wife because the odds of him coming off the ventilator were very slim.

After they talked, I asked if he knew Jesus. He responded affirmatively and agreed when I asked if I could pray for him. As we pushed him down the hall-



Jessica Schroeder is a nurse practitioner in Wichita, Kan., where she attends First MB Church. She was raised in Hillsboro, Kan., and met her husband at Tabor College. Jessica and her husband have two girls, Charli (3) and Harper (almost 1). In her spare time, she enjoys working out, gardening, playing sports, DIYing and drawing/painting.

See TESTIMONY, page 30

Comings and goings

Reflections on the why's and how's of our journeys

Students at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary have unique call stories, hopes and fears related to their studies and dreams beyond their course work. I did as well when I first arrived at our seminary over 40 years ago. Unlike most of my students, I've never really left seminary!

Back in January, I was invited to share with current students some thoughts on “coming” and “leaving.” I share them with you, trusting these comments are relevant to non-seminary students as well. After all, we are all called. We all experience times of coming and of going as we pursue the mission of God. And most of us will eventually retire from one ministry only to be called to another. Here are a few of my thoughts on these things.

When did I come?

I arrived in Fresno, Calif., in August 1976 to begin my seminary studies. Like many seminary students, I had just finished my undergraduate degree and was preparing for whatever was next. During my last semester in the spring of 1978, I submitted applications to work for Mennonite Central Committee, MB Mission (now Multiply) and a Bible college in Canada. I ended up doing none of those things. I planted a church, and then, not many years later, became a seminary professor.

So, when did I leave seminary? I guess I never really did. I've just been temporarily gone a few times—from 1978 to 1986 to plant and pastor a church and then to get some more education; from 1990 to 1993 to co-pastor a church in Bavaria; and from 2001 to 2003 to be a house husband and a traveling preacher across German-speaking Europe. But I always came back. I've moved to Fresno four times! When will I leave? I suppose I will leave when I retire in a few years, but God only knows.

Why did I come?

Students come to seminary for many reasons. Some have sensed, tested and confirmed a clear call from the Lord to a very specific future ministry; they come to prepare for a life of service in God's kingdom. Some are far less sure what their ultimate calling will be. They come to learn, to discern options and to check out what might be an appropriate ministry or career. Some even come to test out the Christian faith: Does it hold up to honest scrutiny? Is the cause of Christ worth investing one's life in?

I came to seminary because my church community and some experiences alone with God had convinced me to give up my first dream—to be a math teacher—and to dream a new dream—becoming a Bible teacher. My motives and perspectives were not all that pure. I had become very good at arguing with my Bible teachers in Bible school. And then I developed some pretty haughty and judgmental attitudes when I majored in philosophy in university.

I came to seminary convinced I was among the best defenders of “True Evangelical Faith” anywhere around. I hadn't yet discovered that “true evangelical faith clothes the naked, comforts the sorrowful, binds up the wounded, becomes all things to all people....” (For those who don't recognize it, this is a quotation from Menno Simons, whom I never really met until I got to seminary. Well, even at seminary I didn't exactly meet him personally; he died 459 years ago).

I came to seminary quite convinced that my mission in life was to nail in place the last few boards in my theological construction and then proclaim and defend it against all detractors. I came to learn how best to convince the most hardened atheists that they were just plain wrong, and I was right. Now that I've divulged *why* I came you can also see pretty clearly how I came.

How will I leave?

How did I leave seminary the first time? How do I anticipate leaving again? I thank God I did not leave the way I came. Don't get me wrong. I've struggled with those haughty, know-it-all attitudes all my life. I'm sure many of my students have noticed them. I know my family has.

But seminary began to do something to me that desperately needed doing. It called me to be more like Jesus, to respect people who see things differently (and not assume that they “just don't get it”) and to love the Christian community as it is, not only as I think it should be.

When I finally leave seminary, I hope I will continue learning these important things. I've set three goals for myself, and they are the same ones I encourage my students to aim for in the few and occasionally many years that they share this seminary journey with me.

I want to leave *more humble* than I came. True followers of Jesus learn to be humble. As we learn to be humble, we are able to learn more and more, while at the

same time discovering how much we still need to learn and how important it is to learn from others. Humility helps us realize our personal convictions are not actually the final word.

I want to leave *more grounded* than I came. Oh, I thought I was pretty grounded when I came. I thought I had the Bible and the Christian faith pretty much figured out. All I really still needed was to get better at convincing others that my foundation was the right one. When I finally leave seminary, I want to leave more convinced than ever before that the only sure foundation for faith and life is the person of Jesus Christ: Jesus as presented and interpreted in holy Scripture. Jesus as loved and trusted by sincere followers. Jesus as the one who keeps drawing us back when we try to build our lives on anything else.

“Followers of Jesus never retire, they just keep discovering new ways to serve faithfully as long as life will last.”

I want to leave *better equipped* than I came. Now you might be thinking: Well, that applies to students, not their professors. Students come to get equipped; professors equip them. If I am still getting equipped now, I must have started my teaching career about 33 years too soon, right? Wrong. That assumes students come to seminary ill equipped and leave fully equipped. Not so.

We are always being equipped—before, during and after seminary. My seminary training helped equip me to be a church planter and pastor. My years as a church planter and pastor helped ready me to teach seminary. My years of seminary teaching are getting me ready for whatever comes next. Followers of Jesus never retire, they just keep discovering new ways to serve faithfully as long as life will last.

I recently told a group of seminary students: “When, why and how you came to seminary is water under the bridge. You are here now. And I'm planning on spending the next few years on this journey with you, this journey of becoming humbler, more grounded and better equipped. Plan to stay on that journey after you graduate; I plan to do so after I retire.”

I hope some of this connects with the journey you are on, even if seminary is the farthest thing from your mind.

Tim Geddert is professor of New Testament at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif. He is also a member of the U.S. Board of Faith and Life.

By Rick Bartlett

THE PLACE WE'VE NEVER BEEN

Our congregations can be places of innovation.

It was early 2007 and our son and daughter were strapped into their booster seats in the back of the minivan. My wife was in the store picking up a few items, and I was watching the kids. They started getting fussy, so I looked for something to distract them. I couldn't find any books or toys, and I was beginning to panic when I remembered—my new iPhone had the YouTube app! I quickly took out the phone, found the Crazy Frog video, hit play and handed the phone to the back. Problem solved!

It's no longer a novelty to watch movies, YouTube or TV on our phones, but in 2007 it was awe-inspiring. It's incredible how in just a few years the pace of innovation has increased to the point that with our phones we can watch something anytime we want and also summon a car, pay bills and get a workout plan.

It doesn't take a futurist to notice we live in a time of rapid change. Most of us love this cheaper, faster, smarter, more connected world. But I wonder if we are also celebrating innovation in the church. Consider what your church is doing. What have you innovated and changed since 2007, the year the iPhone came out? We're used to a yearly update of technology. What updates have you avoided installing and why?

When we embrace change and innovation in our congregational ministries, we affirm future generations, give witness to

God's power and find new ways to bless the world around us. How can our congregations become places of innovation?

Why is change important?

Change is a challenge. We live with a number of biases we often don't recognize. One that is relevant to change is "loss-aversion;" we like things to stay the same. In *Out of the Maze*, the follow-up to the classic *Who Moved My Cheese*, the main character, Hem, wishes for a return to how things used to be. Unfortunately, his cheese has moved. Not only does Hem have no cheese, now there are apples instead.

Sometimes we want church to be the one space in a sea of change where we can count on consistency—we want cheese, not apples. To be alive, however, is to be in a constant state of change.

When we consider the challenges that come with doing something new, it's helpful to understand that people naturally respond to innovation differently. The innovation adoption curve created by Everett Rogers identifies five categories of response to an innovative idea.

The "innovators" themselves are the smallest group (2.5 percent). The second group of "early adopters" (13.5 percent) are open to trying new ideas. The third group, the "early majority" (34 percent), pick up an innovation quicker than average. An-

other third of the group (34 percent) are the “late majority,” and they eventually come around to a new idea. The final group are “laggards” (16 percent), and they reject the new idea in favor of tradition.

It is not hard to see how these categories play out in our local churches in everything from making changes to the worship format to trying a new approach to the summer children’s program, from introducing a new outreach ministry to revamping the church’s committee structure.

When Vincent Donovan, a missionary to the Masai, returned to the U.S. he wrote this about change: “In working with young people, do not try to call them back to where they were and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.”

This quote challenges me to think about the next generation and my role in passing on to them a faith that declares the deeds of the Lord, trusts in him and keeps his commands in a way that takes us both to a new place. (Psalm 78:4-8).

Why are we afraid?

Thinking about a journey to “where neither has been before” can be frightening. But if we are honest, we wrestle with fears and accept innovation in other areas. I expect few of us still have an old-style TV in our homes; it’s likely to be a high definition flat screen. We have high speed internet and not dial-up connections. Cars today have airbags and a back-up camera, and based on a recent commercial, “smart park” is coming soon.

So, why are we nervous about innovation in the church? I think at the core it boils down to fear. Fear is a natural emotion when avoiding change because it feels like losing control. Yet if fear is what drives us, we have a theological issue. When we operate in fear we’re not operating in love (1 John 4:18).

It also implies our view of God is too small. Psalm 78:4 says, “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.” When we stop talking about God’s power and wonders, we fear he’s not big enough to handle change or we live like he’s just as surprised by change as we are. We live as if somehow God is caught unaware by the future, even something as profound as COVID-19.

This is obviously not true. Jesus doesn’t push us from behind; he pulls us into the future where he already stands. In the Gospels, Jesus says, “Follow me” 29 times. Does our fear keep us from following?

Our churches have instigated incredible innovations since the pandemic this spring. Churches have moved Sunday gatherings online, created virtual spaces for small groups, initiated creative porch drop-offs and engaged new technologies in a myriad of ways. But would we have made these radical changes without this pandemic push?

Getting started

I think about innovation in ministry every day. I work with students who are reflecting on their own local context—their church, nonprofit or local community—and are seeking ways

to create something new. The story of how Tabor Ministry Entrepreneurship and Innovation (MEI) graduate David Walstedt’s innovative thinking impacted children in Uganda is one example.

School in Uganda is free for all, with one stipulation: children need uniforms and specific shoes. Many children do not attend school because their families cannot afford shoes. If families can afford shoes, parents purchase one pair and their children rotate these shoes. When the shoes fit, that child goes to school. When the shoes are too small, the next child in line takes them and off to school she goes. It’s a familiar cycle in areas of poverty.

Walstedt saw this cycle firsthand. A veteran of numerous trips to Uganda, he had developed relationships and a heart for the people and country. His heart broke to see children refused school entry because of something so basic as a pair of shoes. But he lived in Dallas, Texas. What could he do about it? Through the MEI program, Walstedt created a nonprofit called Uganda Shoe Trees which addresses this need and impacts hundreds of children and families.

Walstedt tackled a need in Uganda; you may feel called to do something locally. How does a congregation begin thinking entrepreneurially and innovatively?

1. Pray. Ask God to provide open eyes and ears to the needs in your community. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you consider starting something new.
2. Become anthropologists and study your community. What do you see? What could be improved? Could your church leverage something small that would make a big impact?
3. Read a book together. I recommend *Starting Something New* by Beth Booram.
4. Talk about it at your weekly gathering. Get people on board to dream about your local community and your unique opportunities.
5. Experiment. Try things, don’t worry about failure. See what works. Each year I take MEI students on an international trip. One year a missionary in Paris told us, “We do anything and everything we can think of to connect with our neighbors for the Gospel; it’s like we throw ideas against the wall to see what sticks.”
6. Evaluate, assess and try again.

For the sake of the next generation, let’s start thinking in entrepreneurial and innovative ways in our local contexts and around the world. What are we still doing that is past the “sell-by” date? Who knows, maybe we will lose our fear as we travel with our youth to a “place where neither have been before.” Let me know if our team of Tabor MEI graduates can help.

Rick Bartlett is associate professor of ministry and director of theological education at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren school in Hillsboro, Kan. He and his wife, Karen, have two adult children.



who inspires you?

My list includes Tabitha, Priscilla, Claudia, Gina and Maria

By Suzanne Hadley Gosselin

When my family moved from Colorado to Bakersfield, Calif., in early 2016, I knew one person who had grown up there. Rachel had been my housemate during Bible college, and when I reached out to her to find out more about my new community, she mentioned Claudia Moore.

At that time, Claudia and her husband, Gary, had been doing youth ministry in Bakersfield for over 30 years and attended The Bridge Bible Church where my husband would serve as the pastor of family ministries. Rachel told me about the encouragement Claudia had been to her as a teenager—guiding her into a biblical way of thinking and teaching her how to live as a Christian.

Ironically, one of the first events I attended at our new church was a “retirement from youth ministry” party for the Moores. Adults in their 20s, 30s and 40s, including the couple’s two grown children, praised the Moore’s faithfulness and influence on their lives. Mere months after that event, when the junior high director position became unexpectedly vacant, Claudia and Gary once again took the helm. That was four years ago.

In addition to serving in youth ministry in two different Mennonite Brethren congregations, Claudia has also led a women’s inductive Bible study for 21 years.

Shortly after moving to Bakersfield, I joined that Bible study. Not only does Claudia’s engaging teaching style bring God’s Word to life, it also goes deep, challenging students to wrestle with the truths of Scripture. Claudia has been an example to me of a woman who tirelessly uses her gifts to serve the church.

Women in the New Testament

The women of the early church were living during extraordinary times. Women and men stepped up to establish the church, described this way by the apostle Paul: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Many dividing barriers were down, and all believers were called to contribute to God’s work (Romans 12). We meet one such woman in Acts 9:36-39: “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when

they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, 'Please come to us without delay.' So, Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them." (ESV)

You can feel the women's love for Tabitha. I imagine these widows tenderly touching the garments she had made and showing them to Peter—trying to articulate how well Tabitha had loved them. What happens next is amazing. Peter raises Tabitha from the dead and presents her alive to the Christians. When this miracle becomes known throughout her community, many believe (Acts 9:41-42).

Priscilla is another woman mentioned in Acts. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, were Jewish converts who lived in Rome and were tentmakers with Paul. The couple is mentioned six times in the New Testament, and four of those times, Priscilla's name is listed first. Her spiritual gifts seemed to fall in the areas of teaching and wisdom.

When a Jewish evangelist came to town and began preaching publicly about things he didn't fully understand, Priscilla and Aquila stepped in (Acts 18:26). They used their gifts to teach and disciple the "learned man" Apollos. While the norm in Greco-Roman society was for a woman to be her husband's property, Priscilla was Aquila's partner. The couple supported Paul's ministry in a multitude of ways, which earned them his love and admiration.

In a society where women were largely treated as inferior to men, the church offered them the chance to teach, serve, lead and disciple. Along with Tabitha and Priscilla, we also see Phoebe, a revered church deaconess, and Eunice and Lois, the mother and grandmother who raised Paul's protégé, Timothy. These women had the opportunity to spread their wings, discovering the beautiful ways God had gifted them to contribute to his work.

"In some situations, women may feel as if their gifts and contributions are not valued. And yet, I have seen women navigate this tension well, faithfully using their gifts to build the church."

Today, the topic of women serving in the church can be a sensitive one—particularly when you're discussing women in pastoral ministry. In some situations, women may feel as if their gifts and contributions are not valued. And yet, I have seen women navigate this tension well, faithfully using their gifts to build the church. Here are three women from Bakersfield who inspire me.

The encourager

Gina Coleman is the person you want to have coffee with when you're struggling and need wise advice. Behind her soft voice and comforting Southern drawl (she grew up in South Carolina), lie gifts of leadership and administration. She once helped organize an all-church weekend mission trip, where 1,000 church members served in Mexico.

Gina has been serving in the church for over 30 years in a variety of volunteer roles in women's, youth and children's ministry. She has sat on pastoral search teams, mission boards and church building committees. She and her husband, Buttons, have raised three children who love the Lord, including their son, Nathan, who now serves as pastor of discipleship and outreach at The Bridge.

Gina says she has felt valued as a woman in the church. "Men and women bring different gifts and perspectives to the table," she says. "It's unifying to see all of us sitting around a table working together to bring God the most glory in a situation."

The servant

When I first met Maria Salazar, she was surrounded by a hoard of children at her church's "Hope for the Summer" vacation Bible school ministry. Telling kids about Jesus is her sweet spot, but Maria wears many hats. With a con-



Gina Coleman, right, and her daughter-in-law.

gregation of just over 100, Plaza Iglesia, the Bakersfield church Maria and her husband, Cesar, planted in 2010, requires a lot of hands-on work. She has served in children's and youth ministry, worship arts and even on the tech team.

"My very first ministry was the toilet cleaning ministry," she says, laughing. "It's always the first one they put you in. It's how they test if you're really serious about serving."



Last year, Plaza Iglesia, a primarily Hispanic congregation, went through the process of becoming a Mennonite Brethren church. Cesar, the lead pastor, preaches in the Spanish service and Maria

preaches in the English service.

Their teamwork may be one reason God is using the duo to raise up younger couples to serve in a similar way.

"Many Hispanic churches have a lot of women and not a lot of men," Maria says. "Most of the people in our church are couples, and they serve together."

During the stay-at-home season of COVID-19, Maria took on some additional roles, including video editing and leading worship online, but she's truly happy to serve.

"The biggest joy for me is to see God transform lives," she says. "It's always been an honor to be a small part of what God is doing."

The teacher

Last fall, nearly 100 women flooded Claudia Moore's inductive Bible study at The Bridge, a congregation she helped plant 17 years ago.

"Being in ministry for so long has helped me recognize my spiritual gifts," she says. "I love teaching people who are striving to learn, whether that's students or women in my Bible study."

Claudia, and her husband, Gary, began serving together shortly after they married. Gary, a retired police officer, and Claudia, a former NICU nurse, have led junior high and high school ministries and college groups while also raising two children who are now grown. The Moore's long-running ministry to students in Bakersfield has produced impressive fruit. Many of their former students are pastors, missionaries and committed Christians who are now raising their own children.

Serving in one community long enough to minister to the kids of former youth group members is one of Claudia's greatest joys. "We have ministry grandchildren," she says.

This year, Claudia and Gary plan to step into more of an advisory role at The Bridge.

"Then again, there's no retirement in ministry," Claudia says. "Each of us is given a ministry to fulfill, and when we're right where we're supposed to be, there's blessings and fruit that come with that."

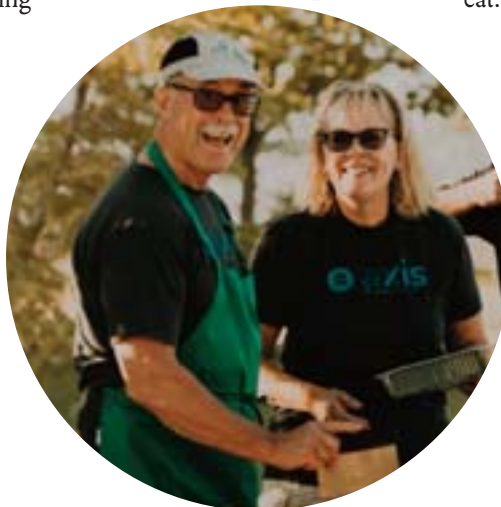
Fulfilling our ministry

Early this year I met Rachel, my former college roommate, for coffee while she was in town. As she reflected on growing up in Bakersfield, she said, "I really should tell Claudia how the things she said impacted me. She told me I could invite God into every aspect of my life, and that really shifted my whole direction."

Rachel is just one of many people who have been impacted by Claudia's ministry. I am another. When I joined Claudia's Bible study as an overwhelmed mom of young children, she told me, "Even if you can't finish the homework, just come. Doing the homework is like preparing the meal, but I want you to just come and eat." And that's exactly what I've done.

Like Tabitha and Priscilla, these three women—full of good works and acts of charity—are using their spiritual gifts to edify the church. And as they faithfully serve, God is using them to transform lives and expand his kingdom.

Suzanne Hadley Gosselin is a freelance writer and co-author of "Grit and Grace: Devotions for Warrior Moms." Her husband, Kevin, is a pastor at The Bridge Bible Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Bakersfield, Calif. They have four young children.



Top: Marie and Cesar Salazar

Bottom: Gary & Claudia Moore

USMB churches serve communities during coronavirus

USMB congregations found creative ways to assist individuals and families in their churches and communities as states issued stay-at-home orders and businesses closed in an effort to minimize the spread of the coronavirus. In some cases, churches revamped existing ministries to meet the abundance of needs and in other situations initiated new programs to minister to those in crisis. The four stories that follow are examples.

► Church promotes small businesses during COVID-19

Online campaign encourages local economy

Weeks of physical restrictions and closures of “nonessential” businesses due to COVID-19 this spring meant great economic difficulty for many, particularly small, locally-owned businesses and their employees.

Deacons at Bethel MB Church in Yale, S.D. began an online campaign called “Bless a Business” in late March to encourage their congregation to support local businesses during the shutdown.

The idea came from deacon chair Jeremy Hamilton, who also serves as the

South Dakota director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

“From a ministry perspective I had to start thinking a lot about online options,” Hamilton says. He recognized that using social media would be a good way for the rural church to have an impact on a greater population in nearby Huron.

Each week, Hamilton invites church members to submit nominations for the next week’s featured business, including a few sentences about why they appreciate that business.

Deacons select a business for the week and ask the congregation to participate in three ways: praying for the business, posting about the business on social media and patronizing the business in whatever way they are able, given social distancing restrictions.

Hamilton says the “Bless a Business” campaign is just one part of a community-wide emphasis on supporting local vendors.

“There’s definitely a ‘shop local’ spirit that has grown and a desire across the board to be encouraging and supportive within our community,” he says.

Ashley Eichstadt is the owner of Boss Boutique, a women’s clothing store that was featured by Bethel in mid-April. She was forced to close the doors for about 40 days and noticed a dramatic decrease in sales, as her store currently has limited online buying options.

Eichstadt says she was grateful when she learned that her business was being featured.

“When I initially read it, I teared up,” Eichstadt says. “That someone, or a whole church even, is stopping to pray for me was huge.”

Rainbow Flower Shop, another featured business, continued offering delivery and pick-up services throughout the shutdown in South Dakota.

Owner Cara Jo Green-Osier says that several people placed orders with her

after seeing her shop featured on Bethel MB’s Facebook page.

“I was taken aback and felt pretty special to be recognized,” Green-Osier says. “Small business is the spine of local economy and the spirit of our town.”

Hamilton says Bethel will have ongoing conversations about how long to continue “Bless a Business.” —*Jessica Vix Allen*

► Free food, no strings attached

Church gives away 140,000 meals, fresh produce

Estelle hadn’t been out of her house in weeks when she got in her car and headed to the nearby drive-thru pharmacy. There the almost 80-year-old picked up her medication but no food, even though she was down to her last can of soup. She was avoiding the market for fear of catching COVID-19.

When Estelle spotted people waving posters advertising “Free food” and “Jesus loves you” by the Mountain View Church (MVC) sign on Fowler Avenue in Fresno, Calif., she decided to turn down the church’s long, flag-lined driveway.

What she encountered that night was one of MVC’s 34 drive-thru food distributions in response to COVID-19. On this weeknight she received a much-needed meal, produce and an expression of Jesus’ love.

MVC’s monthly food giveaway—known locally as Food and Clothing—has been in operation for more than a decade. But as the coronavirus pandemic forced thousands into unemployment and just as many elderly into quarantine, Fred Leonard, MVC’s lead pastor, knew that the church would



Over the course of nine weeks, Mountain View Church gave away 140,000 meals.

Photo by MVC

have to step up its food distributions exponentially.

This decision led to new, regular weekday meal distributions and weekly Saturday grocery distributions. From March 29 to the end of May, the church gave away 140,000 meals.

"It has been an awesome blessing to be able to share a smile and food with people who really need it," Leonard says. "We've watched in awe as God continually provided for these distributions."

When MVC ramped up its food giveaway efforts, Leonard says he didn't know how the food would be paid for or acquired.

"But we knew it's what God wanted, and every week God provided finances and food, like manna from heaven," he says with a smile.

Leonard, who was at almost all of the food distributions, says many people were surprised that there were no requirements to receive the free food.

"So many people tried to show me ID or thought they could only receive food for the people who were physically in their cars during the distribution," he says. "They were shocked to know we just wanted to bless them and meet their needs."

Another way MVC shared the love of Jesus was through its Pound of Love deliveries. Given that so many people were unable to leave their homes because of their health status, MVC staff and volunteers delivered food right to the front doors of many residents across Fresno County.

Why go to the trouble and hard work of 34 food distributions and just as many Pound of Love food deliveries?

"We just want people to know that God loves them," Leonard says.

And Estelle, who found a safe place where she could comfortably find food for her pantry as well as for her soul, felt compelled to reach out to Leonard and express her thanks.

"Everyone was so friendly. I appreciate your kindness," she said. "Thank you from my heart." —Allison Rodriguez

► Lighthouse Church practices generosity during COVID-19

Relief checks help fund program

Leaders of Lighthouse Church in Denver, Colo., have created a program to help meet the financial needs of those in the congregation experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The CARES Program, begun in early April, provides strategic, practical assistance to members and regular attendees. Shayna Laing, pastor of spiritual formation, says the idea for the program came after an individual who had lost their job and were worried about providing for their children contacted church leaders. The staff was able to connect this family with another that had reached out previously after feeling that the Holy Spirit was prompting them to provide for a financial need.

"It originated with that initial need ... and how the Holy Spirit had already provided," Laing says. "We wanted to see how he would amplify that as we made something formal."

The staff recognized that while many families in their church body needed their coronavirus relief check, for others it was a surplus. They specifically encouraged the congregation to consider donating part or all of the payment to the CARES Fund.

Those requesting assistance fill out a detailed application online that is reviewed by staff and elders. If the application is approved, funds are distributed directly to the vendors to which funds

are owed, such as a landlord or utility company. The application also allows staff to assess what other resources may be useful for the individual or family longterm.

Laing says the first family to receive funds was grateful specifically for the immediacy of the support, as it allowed them time to assess their situation.

“It gave them the peace of mind to think critically and make the necessary changes for their family” (after the job loss,) Laing says.

As of mid-May, the Lighthouse congregation had donated \$11,000 to the CARES Program. Laing expects they will continue to maintain and use the fund in its current form for several months even after restrictions in Colorado ease. Then the program will transition to a benevolence fund.

While the pandemic has and will continue to tangibly affect the way congregations gather and operate, Laing says Lighthouse Church’s heart of ministry is unchanged. “The mission that Jesus gives his church can and should operate in any given scenario,” she says. —*Jessica Vix Allen*

►Meeting practical needs opens doors

SART volunteers address challenges magnified by coronavirus

The Social Action Response Team (SART) at North Fresno (Calif.) Church is busier than ever as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, according to pastor of outreach Loren Dubberke.

Formed in 2003 to address needs of under-resourced families living nearby, SART and its volunteers have a heart for

serving, reaching across socioeconomic lines and impacting the neighborhood, Dubberke says.

The coronavirus has only magnified challenges in Fresno, which, according to the Brookings Institute, ranks second in concentrated poverty nationally, meaning neighborhoods in which more than 40 percent of residents live below the federal poverty line.

Even before COVID-19, Fresno experienced a high unemployment rate compared to the state and nation, and the jobless rate is increasing because of the pandemic, Dubberke says.

Leonard Barajas has felt the impact first-hand. Laid off from his job in construction as a result of the coronavirus, Barajas is facing an uphill climb to support his family of seven.

Barajas and his wife live in an apartment with their five children, who range in age from young adult to age 5. After Barajas lost his job, one of his two young adult daughters carried the family as the only member with work.

SART offered Barajas’ family food

vouchers and help with rent, as well as paid for Internet costs so his sons—a college freshman and high school senior—could continue classes online from home. SART also provided a computer, printer and funds for a textbook.

“They made me feel comfortable where I didn’t have to feel like I had my hand out,” Barajas says. “They made me feel like a human being, that I can actually ask and not feel bad about it.”

Barajas has found occasional work and help with resume-building through Fresno Area Community Enterprises (FACE), a 501c3 faith-based neighborhood resource and training center started by NFC, as he continues to seek full-time employment.

“They build me up as a person,” Barajas says. “They’ve ... taught me how to embrace God, to be a Christian and just be a better person for my family, for my kids, for our community.”

During the pandemic, SART continues to help people like Barajas.



Leonard Barajas, who has received help from SART, is also involved in delivering produce and groceries to others in the neighborhood. *Photo by North Fresno Church*

SART has met COVID-19-specific needs by distributing homemade masks and cleaning supplies and working with individuals from NFC's neighborhood released early from the county jail. Beyond immediate needs of phones, bikes, bus tokens and clothes, these individuals need work, housing and legal help, Dubberke says.

SART has also subsidized counseling costs and helped with medication co-pays, and has served elderly families by moving furniture, providing computer help and delivering groceries. Relationships display mutual support and a holistic love.

"SART provides a great starting point to build new relationships and share the gospel," Dubberke says. "When we meet a practical need, it opens the door for connecting with neighbors and pointing them to Christ who motivates us to love and good deeds." —*Janae Rempel*

What's in a name?

Why USMB churches are changing their names

Does it surprise you that of the 219 churches that comprise the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 85 percent (187) do not include "Mennonite Brethren" in their name?

In the past four years, five USMB churches in three districts have changed their names—churches in Dinuba, Calif.; Edmond, Okla.; Henderson, Neb.; Kingsburg, Calif.; and Wichita, Kan. That raises some questions: Why does a congregation change its name? Even if a church maintains "Mennonite Brethren" in its official name, why might it go by something else in the community?

From conversations with the pastors of the USMB churches that most recently changed their names, a number of themes emerged, including a desire to remove potential barriers and to intentionally communicate mission and vision and a continued commitment to the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Conference and theology.

Why change a name?

A common goal for USMB pastors who have guided their churches through a name change is a desire to intentionally communicate to those outside the church.

In each location, pastors speak of the perceptions people associate with denominations in general and the term "Mennonite Brethren," specifically.

Like many pastors, Luke Haidle, of Living Hope Church in Henderson, Neb., believes the church's former name created a barrier for spiritual conversations and welcoming guests.

Haidle says challenges arose in overcoming the stereotype associating "Mennonite" with "Amish," a perception perpetuated because the congregation was not equipped to talk about what it means to be "Mennonite" or "Mennonite Brethren."

"The question would be, 'What's a Mennonite?' and then the answer would be 'Russia and German and verenika' and all these other kinds of things," Haidle says. "What happened in that moment is they killed the gospel, because what they said is that this church is for an ethnic people group and it's not open to you."

Admittedly, most people who attend one of the three churches in Henderson are familiar with the term "Mennonite Brethren," Haidle says, clarifying that the church intends to reach people who do not have a church home—a target audience making up about 25 percent of the Henderson population.



A similar misunderstanding happened in Edmond, Okla., where Jeremy Jordan, lead pastor of Cross Timbers Church, says people made false assumptions about MB beliefs and practices.

In California's Central Valley, Jordan Ringhofer, lead pastor of Hope Kingsburg, agrees, saying Mennonite Brethren have a reputation as a closed-off, ethnic insider community. The former Kingsburg MB Church—officially, The Mennonite Brethren Church of Kingsburg, California—adopted its new name, Hope Kingsburg: A Mennonite Brethren Church, in December 2018. The church usually goes by Hope or Hope Kingsburg, Ringhofer says.

"We want to make sure that we can, in a couple words, communicate the essence of what we have to offer," Ringhofer says. "We want to remove the barriers."

Ten miles from Kingsburg, Hope Kingsburg's parent church—the former Dinuba MB Church (officially, The Mennonite Brethren Church of Dinuba)—also initiated a name change and is doing business as "New Life Community" as of November 2019.

Demographics was a factor behind the name change for the Dinuba congregation, says lead pastor Mark Isaac.

"The average age of our city's population is 27 years old—an extremely young age even in a young state compared to our nation," Isaac says. "Denominational identity is neither relevant to, nor a priority for, people that age. Because they respect authenticity we don't hide our historical roots. We just don't lead with them."

Brent Warkentin, lead pastor of First MB Church in Wichita, Kan.,—which is in the discernment process and has yet to choose a new name—says while research supports both the inclusion and non-

inclusion of a denomination in a church name, recent trends show a growing suspicion of denominations by young people.

"Trends ... generally support the reality that nonchurched, younger adults tend to associate denominationally-named churches with inflexibility, bureaucracy and a closedness," Warkentin says.

Important considerations

A name change signals more than changing a church sign, and pastors describe research, discernment and intentionality in choosing a name. Renaming symbolizes churches' missions or in some cases, new visions for their cities.

In Edmond, the name-change process began with vision planning, Jordan says, and also involved conversations with Southern District and USMB leaders to affirm MB identity.

"We didn't want to change names to be trendy or cool, but only if it would help us transform lives in our community through the ministry of the gospel," Jordan says.

Cross Timbers made its new name official in September 2016. "Cross Timbers" is not only a local term from early explorations of Oklahoma, but prominently includes "Cross" to indicate its centrality to faith, Jordan says.

In walking one of the three oldest MB churches through a name change, Henderson's Haidle says some people initially viewed the idea with skepti-



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cism. The church's rebranding process began in January 2018, and Haidle emphasizes the importance of engaging in discussion in addressing differing points of view. After 22 months, the congregation chose "Living Hope" to convey promise and to provide a segue to talking about Jesus.

In Kingsburg, too, changing the name raised concerns. Some feared losing their identity as a Mennonite Brethren church. Others thought even with a name change, the church would still be known as the Mennonite Brethren church in town. And in their community, if a church doesn't spell out "Mennonite Brethren," people assume it's a Missionary Baptist church, Ringhofer says.

The church's branding initiative is the first step of a three-year "Plan for

Hope," symbolizing both the church's history and vision for the future, Ringhofer says.

Meanwhile, the city of Dinuba has two primary groups of churches—denominational and independent Pentecostal/charismatic. New Life Community (NLC) seeks to fill the space in between, as a church where anyone can feel welcome regardless of church background, Isaac says. The name change coincides with a church vision process begun in November 2018.

Isaac says some voiced concerns that Mennonite Brethren specifically looking for an MB church might not be able to find the church if the church changed its sign, but says the church thought that to be a small number of people.

NLC decided against ubiquitous names that refer to the San Joaquin val-

ley or the Sierra Nevada mountains and also avoided words like "church" or "fellowship."

"We want to be a community of new life for our community," Isaac says.

As First MB Church (FMBC) entertains thoughts of a name change, Warkentin says a few considerations came to mind, including navigating the journey with unity and maintaining transparent communication. Although the change is still in process, the name will signify a new mission, just as some name changes in the Bible signified new God-given missions, Warkentin says, citing Abraham, Sarah, Israel and Paul as examples.

"We are entering a new day, and we want to signify this new chapter to our community and to ourselves," he says.

Committed to the family

In each location, pastors articulate a commitment to the Mennonite Brethren family and theology.

Haidle has taken this opportunity to preach through the MB Confession of Faith in order to equip his congregation to talk about what it means to be Mennonite Brethren.

In Kingsburg, Ringhofer says the congregation has seen a better ability to articulate its mission and purpose since its name change—choosing to live out and demonstrate its MB identity.

Jordan says Cross Timbers has had new people visit and join the church who previously thought they needed to be historically Mennonite Brethren to attend.

Referencing Menno Simons, who found new life in Jesus and led his community to grow as witnesses of that new life, Isaac says that same work of introducing others to new life in Christ continues, with or without a label in a name.

Whether in Kansas or elsewhere, Warkentin expresses a sentiment all share.



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“Ultimately, churches don’t ‘succeed’ or ‘fail’ simply because of their name,” he says. “Their success rests on the one who is building his church. While a church name may be an initial ‘open’ or ‘closed’ door, it is the authenticity and Christlikeness of the people inside the building that leads to growth and changed lives.”
—*Janae Rempel*

Hoops with heart

ACTION Basketball introduces Christ, disciples players

For missionary Ricky Sanchez, faith and basketball have always had a special connection.

“In a way, basketball brought me to Christ,” Sanchez says.

As an incoming college freshman, Sanchez received a full ride basketball scholarship to Fresno Pacific University. That’s where he came to know Christ.

“Lord, I don’t know everything about you, but I need you,” Sanchez remembers saying as he knelt in his dorm room.

Sanchez also met his wife, Karen, at FPU. In 2000, they joined three other families to serve in Thailand with Multiply, the North American Mennonite Brethren mission agency then known as MBMS International.

“There were 16 of us altogether, counting the kids,” he says. “We were like the circus in town. We lived in areas where there were few other foreigners.”

Twenty years later, Sanchez serves as president of the Thailand MB Foundation and works in church planting, leadership training and recruitment. Karen is the founder and director of Abundant Life Home, an



Sierra, center, translates for Zoey, right, as Zoey talks about Jesus during an ACTION Basketball camp in Chonburi, Thailand. By the end of the conversation, eight accepted Christ and Zoey and Sierra and the rest of the team surrounded the girls and prayed for them. *Photo by Ricky Sanchez*

orphanage for HIV-positive children, and works with Standing Strong, a project for women coming out of the sex trade.

Given the impact basketball had on his life, it’s no surprise that Sanchez sees potential for the sport to open doors to ministry. Within a year of arriving in Thailand, Sanchez suggested forming a basketball team that would travel around Thailand and share the gospel. However, the group decided it would be wise to first learn the language and adjust to the culture.

“We don’t even know if they like basketball,” Sanchez remembers one person saying.

“They’re gonna like basketball!” Sanchez replied. And he was right.

In 2009, Sanchez’s dream became a reality and the first Action Basketball team—a men’s team—arrived

from the U.S. The popular, fast-paced game proved to be a great way to attract people to hear about Christ.

After the first year, Action Basketball expanded to have both women’s and men’s teams, which went out every odd-numbered year (2011, 2013, 2015, etc.). The two teams take a total of 40 individuals, which includes 10 players, a chaplain, trainers and coaches. The past two summers, teams have also gone out to the Philippines.

Skill and heart

From the start, one of Sanchez’s goals has been to utilize competitive athletes—many recruited from college basketball programs—whose skills would draw people to hear the message of Christ. Most of the players range in age from 18 to 24, although he also welcomes what he

calls “The Legends” (players who are 40+) to serve as trainers, mentors and coaches.

The program is about much more than great basketball, though. Not only have many national people come to Christ through the program, but those on the team have been discipled and have grown in their faith.

Before going overseas, the teams meet in California for a four-day training. During this time, they practice basketball, get to know one another, have extended devotional time, receive leadership training and learn to share their testimonies. This preparation time allows team members to take a look at their own lives.

“A lot comes out,” Sanchez says. “Hidden sin, past brokenness. We’re teaching these young people how to

share their faith, and it starts with their own lives and believing God is real.”

On the day before they leave California, the team goes to a beautiful spot in Yosemite National Park for sunrise worship.

“We have a great time with the Lord and hike up to one of the falls,” Sanchez says. “It’s always a highlight.”

Once in-country, the teams lead basketball camps and play exhibition games, sharing about Jesus and serving the church whenever they have opportunity.

Making connections

One of Sanchez’s favorite stories involves his daughter Sierra and Zoey, an all-American player for Azusa Pacific University who came on the 2017 trip.

One day the team went to a school in

Chonburi, Thailand, to conduct a basketball camp for junior high and elementary-age children. The school was an unlikely ministry site as it didn’t even have basketball courts. But the team set up five stations to teach basic skills.

Zoey noticed a group of eight girls huddled together and asked if Sierra would interpret so she could talk to them.

For a few minutes, Zoey and the Thai girls shared about their lives, back and forth. Then Zoey asked, “Have you ever heard of Jesus?”

“No, we haven’t,” the girls replied.

Zoey shared the gospel with the girls as Sierra interpreted, and all eight of them accepted Christ. Afterward the whole team surrounded the girls and prayed for them.

“This was an area in our town that we had never reached out to,” Sanchez says. “But we had a pastor from our church there to do follow-up.”

Because Thailand is a Buddhist nation, deciding to follow Christ is difficult.

“You go home and tell your parents, and they’re not happy,” Sanchez says.

Many new converts fall away. But because of the follow-up from the local church, Sanchez knows that some of those girls are still part of the church three years later.

A new day

Last year, the Action Basketball program celebrated 10 years. The trips have made an impact on national people and the local church, as well as the nearly 200 players who have participated. Sanchez has watched these students go deeper in their faith and become spiritual leaders on their campuses and in their cities.

Sanchez was recently named global sports ministry director for Multiply.

“I laugh when I think about it,” he says. “It’s my dream job. It really fits with my giftings and with what God’s called me to.”

In the coming years, he hopes to expand the program by going into some of



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the other 20 countries where Multiply has a presence, including Myanmar and Laos. He has hopes of adding a soccer team.

“It’s a new day,” he says. “COVID-19 has given me a lot of time to pray and plan. I’ve had ample opportunity to reach out to the participants. We’re looking at 2021, hoping to make that something fresh and new. Still keeping Thailand in there, because that’s our heartbeat—that’s where we live.”

—*Suzanne Hadley Gosselin*

Church Relief Fund offers a lifeline

MB Foundation’s fund helps churches pay bills, meet needs

When the Smithfield Foods pork-processing plant in Sioux Falls, S.D., closed April 15, 2020, it was one of the nation’s largest COVID-19 hotspots, with 644 cases. Among those impacted by the layoffs were 11 families from New Jerusalem Temple, a USMB congregation in Sioux Falls composed of immigrants from DR Congo.

Some families struggled to meet their most basic needs of groceries and rent, says Claude Tambatamba, a New Jerusalem Temple leader who came to the U.S. with his family in 2014. When furloughed workers tried to apply for unemployment, the process was challenging because government offices were closed. The application process had moved online, and few immigrants had Internet or computers.

“The church community has been their lifeline,” says Rick Eshbaugh, Central District Conference minister.

To help these families and nine other individuals who had recently arrived in the U.S., New Jerusalem Temple drew on its own cash reserves, which were quickly depleted. So, the church itself needed a lifeline.

For New Jerusalem that support came from the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund established by MB Foundation, the stewardship ministry that serves U.S. Mennonite Brethren.

“Immediately after churches were being told to not gather together in large groups, we knew this would present a financial hardship, for most, if not all, of our churches,” says Jon Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation.

The fund was established through the generosity of a donor and a matched gift by MB Foundation, for a total of \$50,000. A contribution from the Southern District Conference brought the matching fund to \$60,000.

MB Foundation and USMB combined efforts to encourage generosity to the fund on Giving Tuesday Now May 5, a national day of giving. With matched dollars, \$32,426 was added to the fund in one day.

Individuals and churches as well as the Pacific and Central District Conferences also contributed to the fund, and MB Foundation made a second contribution of \$350,000. As of June 5, the total contributed to the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund stood at \$501,628.

As of June 15, 49 churches have applied for grants and all were awarded funds ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000, says Don Morris, USMB national director who, together with the five district ministers, is administering the funds.

New Jerusalem received their grant in two installments. With the first, the church contributed toward three families’ rent and bought groceries for nine more families with the greatest need—48 people in all.

“They were truly hungry,” Tambatamba said. After receiving the unexpected gifts of food, he adds, “some of them were emotional.”

The second installment helped four more families with rent and groceries.

A number of Congolese congregations connected with USMB also received grants.

“The funds we send to these churches from the Church Relief Fund will replenish their depleted accounts so they can continue to support their community,” says Eshbaugh.

Hispanic congregations in the Pacific District Conference also received COVID-19 Church Relief Fund grants. Many from these congregations work in sectors hard hit by COVID-19, and the grants enabled churches to assist families with food, utilities and other immediate needs.

For example, Ramon and Nydia Arguello, pastors of Primera Iglesia Hispana Ebenezer in Portland, Ore., used the grant to meet the needs of families who were diagnosed with COVID-19.

Xavier Pinã, chair of the PDC Hispanic Council, says, “Hispanic churches were also able to reach out into their local communities and utilize the resources to continue with ministry opportunities. Even though the church buildings were closed, the church community remained active with kingdom work.”

When churches could not hold services due to guidelines limiting the size of public gatherings, Hispanic congregations were severely impacted, says Pinã. Churches led by bi-vocational pastors were not eligible for the Payroll Protections Program (PPP) that was part of the coronavirus aid bill. These churches also typically take cash offerings for church expenses and are not inclined or equipped to move ministries online, including church giving, says Pinã.

“The COVID-19 outbreak has created a realization within our Hispanic churches to embrace technology and utilize it as a vehicle to continue to reach out to congregants during the church building closure period,” says Pinã.

Churches continue to apply for grants from the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund, Morris says. The total amount distributed as of June 15 is \$241,228.44—*Connie Faber*

Developing a church planting strategy

Resourcing network to provide catalyst

The future of USMB church planting has been a matter of prayer and discernment following the U.S. Conference's decision last summer to release Multiply as a resource for planting churches in the United States. A task force of 17 people met in Phoenix, Ariz., in October 2019 to discuss the future of USMB church planting.

At this meeting a smaller group was created and given the task of putting together strategic pieces for moving this crucial aspect of our collective ministry forward. Members of this smaller task force chaired by Fred Leonard are Brad Klassen, Paul Robie, Christian Kohs, Josh Shaw, Phil Wiebe and Dave Thiessen.

While COVID-19 realities have delayed processing the details, the task force has developed foundational aspects of Mennonite Brethren church planting in the U.S. The overarching idea is that invested USMB churches and current experienced church planting leaders will form a resourcing "network," providing a catalyst for USMB church planting and working in tandem with district and national leadership.

During a May 19 teleconference meeting with the USMB National Strategy Team (NST), Leonard shared the following essential elements of a "Preferred Model of Church Planting":

- The "who" that guides USMB church planting is Jesus Christ, the head and builder of his church, his bride. Everything will be centered upon Jesus.

- The "why" is that we are called to glorify God by introducing people to Jesus Christ—so the dead come to life, the lost are found and the darkness is overcome by light.

- The "what" is to nurture new, healthy, sustainable and multiplying churches through planting new churches, rebirthing dying churches and multiplying healthy existing churches.

Leonard reported that task force members have various opinions pertaining to the specific details of how this will be accomplished. However, he noted that the Preferred Model of Church Planting must be gospel-focused, Spirit-led, outward-driven and centered on the gospel—all with the expectation of birthing self-sustaining, multiplying churches. He made it clear that new churches will follow the MB Confession of Faith.

"We are Anabaptist," Leonard said. "We will plant MB churches."

The involvement of local MB churches is another significant aspect of how USMB will plant churches. Local churches will be encouraged to call out gifted church planting leaders from among their congregations and to help support these planters with resources when the time comes.

As has been the practice for some time, all potential church planters will undergo a rigorous assessment process which will likely be followed by some type of apprenticeship or onsite training with an

experienced church planter. Although this might delay the process, it increases the success rate tremendously.

"We also find church planters through prayer, training and discipling and visiting colleges and seminaries," Leonard said. "We prefer homegrown. We want planters between their late 20s to mid-40s. We want to be known for deeply caring for our planters and resourcing them with the things they need to be successful."

As the NST discussed the task force update, it became obvious that there is still substantial work to be done to determine how districts, district church planting boards and the national USMB staff fit into the Preferred Model of Church Planting. A unified strategy and plan is deemed critical as the nuts and bolts are assembled.

"We need to all own this together," one NST member said. "If this will be a partnership with districts and have a national identity, we need to all process, own it and move it forward as one."

Local churches will be kept informed as details are clarified, says USMB national director Don Morris. "We want church leaders to weigh in and offer their input," he says. "Church planting is vitally important for our MB family. We need to get this new strategy right." —*USMB news story*

Our season of Jubilee

Living out of faith during COVID-19

I thoroughly enjoyed the May 1, 2020, C-Link photo essay sharing stories of MB churches adapting to the “distance worship” challenge. I was so encouraged to see pastors and volunteers using seldom-needed resources. The collective creativity is amazing.

But a more important test for the church coming out of this coronavirus lockdown will have less to do with Sundays and more to do with how we cared for each other, and others, the other six days. That is why the stories that inspired me most were of churches in parking lots and streets dispensing resources to neighbors. What a joy to see the church in action!

At Hope Kingsburg we began studying James’ letter during the shelter-at-home mandate declared by our now all-too-recognizable governor. James is best known for calling us to put our faith to work, not as a path to salvation but as evidence of salvation.

So, what about the church during this time of “testing”? Brian Stiller, writing in the April 29, 2020 issue of *Christianity Today* says, “Pastors, let us be under no illusion: during this time of global fear and need, we will be tested. We will be seen for our deeds and judged for our generosity. We will be interpreted not by our words but how we move among our community, how the love of Jesus is manifest as we interact with our leaders. There is no hiding today. We may be sequestered, but as we emerge and show our faces in public, the gospel is on trial.”

A vaccine has not been found for COVID-19; our president predicts it by the end of the year. Scientists work

feverishly to discover therapies that can slow the power of the virus. Distancing works to some degree to slow its infectious spread, giving us some confidence.

But quoting Stiller again, “What will be the test for the church of Jesus Christ, both during and following this virus? The test is how our words of faith match our care for people. It is not complicated by our view on pre- or post-millennial theology. We won’t be asked if we are closer to Calvin or Wesley in our theology. I doubt anyone will wonder if glossolalia happens at Spirit baptism or after.”

Matthew records Jesus’ test for every generation and any challenge to the church: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matt. 25:35-36).”

In this COVID-19 outbreak I see signs of the Old Testament Jubilee when debts were canceled, slaves set free and land given rest. Doesn’t it feel like Jesus’ proclamation is being renewed for the whole world to hear—the one he gave when he launched his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth? He opened the scroll of Isaiah and announced his calling, and ours: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). ▮



Dennis Fast has been a lead pastor, serving Hillsboro (Kan.) and Reedley (Calif.) MB Churches, and has served on various denominational boards. He currently serves Hope Kingsburg, Kingsburg, Calif., part-time in pastoral care and is the interim district minister for the Pacific District Conference. He has been married to Connie for nearly 50 years and together they enjoy their 14 grandchildren.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Addie Krapu was baptized and received as a member at **Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D.**, Feb. 9.

Andrew Simonsen and Paul Lei were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah)** campus, Jan. 26.

WORKERS

Ryan Kelly concluded his service as part-time junior high director at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Tony Cannon concluded his service as care and connect pastor at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, June 14.

Roy Burket concluded his service as senior pastor at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, May 31.

Randy Reiswig began serving as pastor at **Shorelife Community Church, Capitola, Calif.**, May 1, following Trevor Lee's conclusion of service as pastor.

Darrell and Patti Nefzger began serving as pastoral couple at **Coal Ridge Mennonite Church, Dagmar, Mont.**, in November 2019.

Alyssa Friesen and Elizabeth Wilson began serving as 2020 Summer Interns at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church**.

DEATHS

Bergen, Vivian Grace, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, August 17, 1921—May 24, 2020. Parents: Zacharias and Ida Bartel. Spouse: Jake F. Bergen (deceased). Children: Gail Loveless, Peggy Harden, Kelly; 10 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

Dickinson, Craig Glen, Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Nov. 17, 1969—Feb. 2, 2020. Parents: Glen and Esther (Heidebrecht) Dickinson. Spouse: Noelle Dick. Children: Wyatt, Nash.

Ediger, Donald James, Lincoln, Neb., Nov. 22, 1944—March 3, 2020. Parents: John J. and Elizabeth (Quiring) Ediger. Spouse: Lois Goertzen. Children: Kristen Webb, Shannon Smith; six grandchildren.

Eitzen, Louis Gene, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Dec. 13, 1928—May 26, 2020. Parents: Abraham and Rubena

Eitzen. Spouse: Stella Jane Wichert. Children: Sandy Denton, Roger; eight grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

Faul, William "Bill", Harvey, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, Sept. 1, 1938—Feb. 24, 2020. Parents: David and Louise (Bader) Faul. Spouse: Rosene (deceased). Children: Lori Yoder, Susan Sieler, Mark; eight grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, five step-great-grandchildren.

Friesen, Alma S., Edmond, Okla., founding member of Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Dec. 24, 1935—May 17, 2020. Parents: John and Sara (Reimer) Doerksen. Spouse: Lou Weaver, Ray Friesen (deceased). Children: Al, James, David, Joyce Barfield; 17 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

Friesen, Walter Dietrich, Beaverton, Ore., former MB pastor, March 18, 1933—March 31, 2020. Parents: Dietrich and Anna (Unger) Friesen. Spouse: Helen E. Children: Cheryl Weinmann, Gerald, Beverly Ecker, Nancy Friesen-Lewis, Rodney; 14 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

Gerbrandt, David "Dave" Franklin, Clinton, Okla., former MB pastor, member of First Mennonite Church, Clinton, Aug. 7, 1941—Feb. 29, 2020. Parents: D.J. and Linda (Wiens) Gerbrandt. Spouse: Marilyn Gossen. Children: Terri Neufeld, Roxanne Cates, Ron, Todd; 12 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Gilmore, Pamela, Palo Alto, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Jan. 24, 1957—May 5, 2020. Parents: Keith and Sandy (Monfort) Nagels. Spouse: James Gilmore. Children: Brennan, McKinley; one grandchild.

Kroeker, Leroy, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, July 26, 1930—April 13, 2020. Parents: Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Kroeker. Spouse: Frances Schmidt (deceased). Children: Janet Costner, Joanne Sorensen, Russell, Kevin; 10 grandchildren.

Odam, Sandra "Sandy," Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, Feb. 2, 1948—Jan. 26, 2020. Parents: Clarence and Doris Jean Seaman. Spouse: Tom Odam. Children: Thomas, Robert; three grandchildren.

Piepglass, Bonita "Bonnie" Ann, Visalia, Calif., member of Shafter (Calif.) MB Church, Sept. 19, 1950—April 10, 2020. Parents: Leo and Alma Wiens. Spouse: Grayson Piepglass (deceased). Children: Seth, Noel; seven grandchildren.

Pitts, Juanita M., Fresno, Calif., member of Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., Jan. 31, 1915—April 17, 2020. Spouse: Travis Earl Pitts (deceased). Children: Travis Jr. (deceased), Vickie Caine; six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Roth, Carolyn, Clovis, Calif., of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Sept. 23, 1937—April 23, 2020. Parents: Marion and Lois (Lindsey) Edmonds. Spouse: James Roth.

Schroeder, Kenneth William, Fresno, Calif., member of Madera (Calif.) Avenue Bible Church, Sept. 29, 1940—Feb. 21, 2020. Parents: William and Alwina Schroeder. Spouse: Marilyn. Children: Brent, Bryan, Lisa Clinton; 17 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

Seibel, Ronald Dean, Wichita, Kan., member of First MB Church, Wichita, April 19, 1939—May 4, 2020. Parents: Herbert and Bertha Seibel. Spouse: Katherine Dockter. Children: Karis Schroeder, Bryan; four grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Vach, Jimmy, Omaha, Neb., Faith Bible Church, Omaha, July 19, 1957—May 30, 2020. Parents: Lumir and Helen (Studnicka) Vach. Children: Christina, Helen Graybill. Step-children: Matthew Ebeling, James Ebeling; four grandchildren.

REACHING IN

DISCIPLESHIP

Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo., introduced a new long-form podcast, called ShapeCast, to help the congregation stay connected to pastoral staff during the coronavirus.

FELLOWSHIP

The 8 Tracks group at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, met April 26 for a drive-in meal and Bingo. Organizers delivered meals, prepared by one of the group's members, to each car. Following the meal, participants tuned in to a radio station, on which organizers broadcast the Bingo calls. A honk signaled successfully achieving Bingo, and each winner received a prize.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., offered free ice cream (one per family) in its parking lot May 14, in accordance with social distancing guidelines.

Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb., facilitated "Connection Dinners" via Zoom

for those seeking to enjoy dinner and conversation.

To foster a sense of connection during the coronavirus, **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, requested families send candid videos saying hello to the Axiom family.

Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo., began a video series on YouTube, "Cooking with the Pastor" hosted by lead pastor Josh Shaw.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church hosted drive-up outdoor Easter photos April 11 with treats for children.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., asked members to submit short videos from their homes of families saying hello or including something the family is thankful for or a way they shone the light of Jesus into a situation. Videos were shared during the church livestream service.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church set up Google Classroom for its NFC KIDS ministry. The classroom included children's church stories, Wednesday Rotate videos, domino challenges, science projects, coloring pages and more. The church met together in online Zoom rooms for sharing and fellowship following Sunday services.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held a Mother's Day Photobooth, adjusted to accommodate social distancing.

Buhler (Kan.) MB Church invited the community to "Journey to the Cross" on the front lawn of the church during Holy Week. The church distributed grocery bags and candy bags on Good Friday. The church held a prayer session on its front lawn May 7 on the National Day of Prayer while being mindful of social distancing.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., held a drive-in Easter service where families celebrated communion individually in each vehicle and took a photo by an outdoor Easter backdrop. The church delivered children's Sunday school material via drive-thru pickup. The packet included crafts, activities and links to songs and stories. Families participated in a photo scavenger hunt April 28.

Greenhouse Community Church, Saratoga Springs, Utah, hosted a "Drive-thru Communion" on Good Friday. Families were encouraged to place flowers on a cross in the parking lot. The Greenhouse team hid Easter eggs in family's yards, leaving notes letting people know the eggs were hidden with "gLOVEs" and not to be surprised upon find-

ing one empty egg as a reminder that "He is Risen."

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., held "Read-aloud at home with Miss Karen" on Facebook. The church distributed popcorn and pop via parking lot pickup April 25.

Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif., delivered Easter bags to children.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., provided coloring sheets, activity pages and music for children, as well as a "Bethel Kids Time" streamed online.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., held a drive-by Wednesday night meal May 13.

First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., held a Family Trivia Game Night online May 6.

Five USMB churches met together online during the coronavirus pandemic: **Coal Ridge Mennonite Church, Dagmar, Mont.; Lake Region Mennonite Church, Detroit Lakes, Minn.; Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church, Ogema, Minn.; Exeland (Wis.) Mennonite Church; and Sand Lake Chapel, Stone Lake, Wis.**

WORSHIP

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., recorded two new songs for Easter, including an original based on Psalm 22 and an Easter hymn.

The three MB churches in **Hillsboro, Kan.—Ebenfeld MB, Hillsboro MB and Parkview MB**—held a joint livestream service on Good Friday, April 10.

CELEBRATIONS

North Fresno (Calif.) Church held a graduation parade for its high school graduates. People were encouraged to decorate their vehicle and leave a card at the curbside of each graduate's home.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

People from **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, were encouraged to leave gifts and notes on neighbors' doorsteps as a way to show encouragement.

As an alternate way to connect with its neighborhood after canceling vacation Bible school because of the coronavirus, **Kingwood Bible School, Salem, Ore.**, will hold a

day of fun Aug. 23 with a free lunch, games, prizes, bounce house, face painting and sharing the Gospel message.

Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., provided a prayer guide for a community-wide prayer walk May 24.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., engaged in 20 Days of Prayer. The church encouraged outreach opportunities, including making masks for neighbors, hospitals, schools and other organizations; donating food for its pantry and the Hope Center; and sending a handwritten note to those who have limited outside contact with others.

Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb., called for corporate fasting March 22 and 29. The church mailed 80 letters to its neighbors, including a gospel tract, April 9. The church encouraged people to walk or drive around their home, neighborhood, city or a hospital to pray, April 10. The church received 100 rotisserie chickens from The Beautiful Gate Ministry and distributed them to families in need in the neighborhood.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., turned its lobby into a food pantry. The church also helped restock shelves at the Hope Women's Center to support women who have been negatively affected by COVID-19. The church distributed Easter bags to children. In May, Axiom delivered gifts to the Peoria Fire Department, Police Station and Iron Key Studios to show love and support in its community. The church is partnering with the City of Peoria and AZ Streetmarket to host Second Saturdays online through the summer. The virtual event, which will include musicians, cooking demonstrations and information about various businesses, is open to all Peoria businesses free of charge and is a way for the city to support small businesses.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church encouraged its congregation to participate in a Toilet Paper Challenge, filming the delivery of a roll of toilet paper to a neighbor in need. The church held a Holy Week prayer drive, encouraging the congregation to drive around town to pray.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., formed an Assistance Team to help people needing items from stores but who could not or should not go out. Church elders delivered 53 letters from Pastor Nathan Ensz, a Bible, coloring sheets and crayons to the church's neighbors. The church held a virtual prayer meeting May 6. The church also helped meet physical needs through a food bank, typically

open once a month, available by phone appointment once or twice a week.

First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., started a temporary food pantry to help its community during a season of isolation and social distancing. People could come to the church to pick up pre-bagged items.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., opened a day camp for children of essential personnel. The church collected food items for Weekend To-Go Bags for a nearby neighborhood. The church filled Easter baskets with treats for families receiving emergency housing through Family Services of Tulare County to help parents give their children a fun, memorable Easter. People were encouraged to use services like Instacart, Amazon or Target Drive Up to fill the baskets. The church baked and delivered 2,160 cookies to

essential workers in its city. The church collected new or gently-used kids' books for school children.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., encouraged members of its congregation to call and check up on five people from church. The church also had access to a small food pantry.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church asked its congregation to encourage and support one other via letter, card, text or phone call. The church held a drive-in Easter service.

People from **Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.,** collected food donations for Together Inc., April 13, leaving donations on the curb in consideration of social distancing suggestions. The church expanded its donation process to extend an invitation to the Stony

Brook family to take food items they or their loved ones needed.

Hesston (Kan.) MB Church received a donation of 180 half gallons of milk from Dillons—because of a nearing expiration date—and the church distributed the milk from the church carport April 12. Pastor Brad Burkholder created a family scavenger hunt for a midweek activity.

The northern campus locations of **South Mountain Community Church, Utah,** partnered with schools to offer weekend "Grab N Go" breakfast and lunch meals for families for three Saturdays starting May 16.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., delivered care packages to Evangel Home, Inc. over Mother's Day weekend.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church

Youth Pastor: North Fresno MB Church, located in a diverse urban neighborhood, is currently seeking a full-time youth pastor to give primary leadership and oversight to all ministries serving youth, from middle school to college age. Will work closely with church staff and volunteers to provide leadership to youth and families in learning what it means to be Christ followers. Please send a resume along with a letter of intent to youthpastorsearch@northfresnochurch.org. A full job description and additional information is available at northfresnochurch.org.

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

Worship Leader: Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., is searching for a worship leader to work closely with the pastors to create worship services and develop worship teams that help lead the congregation in the power of the Spirit to see and savor the greatness of God in Jesus Christ. Fostering dynamic congregational worship and singing the best of the old and the best of the new is a key priority for our church. For additional information and inquiries, email Connie Penner, lorrielee63@yahoo.com

From TESTIMONY, page 9

way to get intubated, he shook my hand and said, "I'll see you on the other side." I shed several tears that day. Later, I learned one of the other nurses had heard me pray for him. I think that prayer touched more people than my patient. When I left NYC, this patient remained intubated. I don't think he's going to make it, but I'm confident I will see him again someday.

The second week helped my overall emotional and mental state as the number of patients decreased, people were being discharged and some patients didn't have COVID-19. By the time I left New York, the number of people who were extubated had

increased a lot. They played, "Here Comes the Sun" whenever someone was successfully extubated. The hospital celebrated its 300th COVID-19 discharge while I was there. However, they didn't advertise the COVID-19 deaths at that point numbered more than 140.

I gratefully returned home, shedding many tears. My experience in New York helped me grow both professionally and spiritually. I talked to people in some of their most desperate days. God brought my coworker Amy with me for a reason. She is also a Christian, and she read devotionals and prayed each morning as I navigated the 10-minute drive from the

hotel to the hospital. God knew I needed her in the midst of the craziness.

I think God is using this virus to help everyone focus on the more important things. We're no longer putting our time and attention on restaurants, salons, money and entertainment. We're staying home with our families. We're being creative again. We're teaching our children life lessons.

This virus humbles us because no one is an exception. It affects young people who have no past medical disease and are healthy and fit. It makes us put our faith in God instead of medicine or science because this virus is such a mystery. ▀

Are we there yet?

Getting back to normal

When our three children were young and we were traveling as a family, Janna and I often heard the words most every parent hears from the back seat: “Are we there yet?” If the trip was long and this question was repeated often enough, steam would rise from my ears. “No, we are NOT there yet!”

There was another familiar exchange I had with the kids while driving. The kids would fuss with one another to the point that I would blurt out, “Okay, if you guys don’t stop it right now I’m going to pull over to the side of the road until you do!” Which, when I think about it now, doesn’t make much sense because that would mean a delay and riding in the car with fussy kids for an even longer stint of pure agony. If you’re wondering if we were just really bad parents, I can tell you that we also played wonderful driving games and my wife often sang cute songs with them. But I can imagine there are plenty of parents reading this that understand the emotional trauma of long trips with young children. Am I right?

This leads to a question about getting past COVID-19 and back to “normal”: Are we there yet? As I write this, there is beginning to be some easing of restrictions in some states. Some places are now allowing limited re-engaging of churches meeting onsite. I’m sure when this is read there will have been innumerable changes and continuing challenges related to decisions about COVID-19 and how we now do life.

Are we there yet? I’m not sure there will ever be a full answer to this question. COVID-19 has changed the world we live in. Who would have thought that a virus could/would impact the entire world all at the same time. It’s been an unprecedented worldwide event.

I’ve read or heard of church leaders saying, “If only we could impact the entire world with the gospel like that.” Yes, if

only. But just as COVID-19 has been about being transmitted via personal contact, so also is the gospel. We pass it along, not to the whole world at the same time but person to person, contact to contact. No, the gospel is obviously not a virus. It’s not something to fear or try to prevent—so those correlations don’t fit.

But the gospel should be contagious. If we have it, why don’t others catch it from us? How is it that we rub shoulders with people and they’re never exposed to what we know as followers of Jesus? Do we even exhibit what should be the obvious symptoms of having the Holy Spirit living inside us?

Many of us have likely read about the new technology now available for administering vaccines—the Quantum Dot. As the vaccine is administered, it leaves a simple invisible tattoo that can be read with a smart phone which provides information about when the person was inoculated and if they are protected from disease. This way, doctors and medical personnel can easily determine the reality of immunity in that person’s system. This technology is so inexpensive that it can be used in even the poorest of countries. An app on a smart phone can read the information in an instant. Pretty cool if you ask me. It may also be very dangerous if this technology gets used in the wrong way with the wrong ideology. But I won’t go there.

Ephesians 1:13 says, “And you also were included with Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” I wonder about myself: Can others read that I have been sealed with the Holy Spirit? Can it be easily determined that I have the truth of the gospel flowing in me? If you shine a light on my life, does the gospel show up clearly? ▀



Don Morris began serving as the USMB national director Aug. 1, 2016.

Prior to accepting this position, Morris served as the USMB interim executive director for two years and as the director of Mission USA beginning in 2004.

He and his wife, Janna, live in Edmond, Okla., where they attend Cross Timbers Church.

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